

Overview of Nahum

Author & Date: Nahum is one of those prophets we know almost nothing about. In verse 1 he is called an Elkoshite and we are not sure if that is a family name or a place. Some have proposed (perhaps rightly) that Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee was the prophet's home town. The reason being that the name "Capernaum" means "village of Nahum." What we do know about Nahum is that his name means "comfort" and his message brings comfort to Judah and Nineveh will find "no comfort" (3:7). Nahum probably wrote the book between 663 B.C. and 612 B.C. The city of Thebes in Egypt, also called No-Amon, was destroyed by the Assyrians (Ninevites) in 663 B.C. Nahum references this event in 3:8 and it seems something that would be fresh in people's mind, so a date near 660 B.C. is preferred. Nineveh itself fell to Babylon in 612 B.C. as predicted by Nahum.

Purpose: The book of Nahum is a dedicated oracle against the city of Nineveh, which is the Assyrians as a whole. Nahum writes this prophecy just over 100 years after Jonah went into the same city and they repented in sack cloth and ashes. Nahum can be described as a dirge, celebrating the fall of Nineveh.¹ The key thought is that God is good (1:7) and will not allow violence and oppression to go unpunished.

Outline for Nahum

- I. The Character of God (chapter 1)
 - A. God's Character 1:1-7
 - B. God's Judgment and Judah's Liberation 1:8-15
- II. Description of God's Judgment on Nineveh (chapter 2)
- III. Woe to Nineveh! (chapter 3) – The results

Key/Interesting Passages:

- 1:3a The Lord is slow to anger and great in power and will not at all acquit *the wicked*.
1:7 The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.

Food for Thought

1. In the first 7 verses of Nahum, we can learn a lot about the character of God.
 - a. Identify several items that describe the character of God.

 - b. Why would Nahum put this at the start of this book?

2. The book of Nahum includes several predictions concerning the fall of Nineveh that have been historically verified. The first is found in 1:8, 2:6, and 8. This prophecy implies destruction by a flood. According to the first century Greek Historian Diodorus Siculus, in the third year of the siege, heavy rains caused a nearby river to overflow its banks and break a portion of the wall of Nineveh. (See summary attached). What benefit do these confirmations provide to us today?

¹ Kohlenberger, John R. III, *Jonah and Nahum*, Everyman's Bible Commentary, Moody Press, 1984 p. 79.

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3. How would you summarize the destruction of Nineveh as described in chapter 2?
4. Nahum provides several descriptions of the atrocities of the Ninevites in chapter 3. D. D. Luckenbill's *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* confirms how wicked Nineveh was, deserving the name "bloody city" (3:1) as seen in the following excerpts:

- Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) says, "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool... The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar... their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire..."
- One leader was said to have been flayed, his sin spread upon the wall
- Ashurbanipal (669-626) tells of piercing the jaw of a captured leader and pulling him around on a leash (compare with 2 Chron 33:11)

How does knowing these claims relate to the judgment brought by God?

5. What "comfort" (if any) would you find in the book of Nahum (consider Rev. 6:10-11)

Fulfillment of Nahum's Prophecies

(Excerpts from Dr. Beall, Capital Bible Seminary as adapted from E. Johnson, "Nahum," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1495)

1. Nineveh would be destroyed by a flood (1:8, 2:6, 8). **Fulfillment:** In the third year of the siege heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood part of the city and break part of the walls (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.26.9; 2.27.13)
2. Nineveh's destruction would be final (1:9, 14). **Fulfillment:** Nineveh has never been rebuilt. Benjamin of Tuleda, a rabbi of the 12th cent. A.D. noted, "Nineveh now lies in utter ruins, but numerous village and small towns occupy its former space" (cited by C. Fritsch, "Niineveh," *ISBE* 3:540)
3. Ninevites would be drunk at the time of the attack (1:10; 3:11). **Fulfillment:** "The Assyrian king... distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions... While the whole army was thus carousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy's camp and made an unexpected attack by night" (Diodorus Siculus [20 B.C.], *Bibliotheca Historica* 2.26.4).
4. Nineveh's gods would be destroyed (1:14). **Fulfillment:** The statue of the goddess Ishtar was found headless in the debris of Nineveh's ruins (R. Thompson and R. Hutchinson, "The British Museum Excavations on the Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh, 1930-1," *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 19, pp. 55-56)
5. There would be much plundering of the city (2:9-10). **Fulfillment:** "Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off" (Bab. Chron.; see Luckenbill *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2:420)
6. Nineveh would be destroyed by fire (2:3; 3:15) **Fulfillment:** Charred wood, charcoal, and ashes, burning of the temple all revealed by archaeology (R. Thompson and R. Hutchinson, *A Century of Exploration at Nineveh*, 45, 77).
7. Many people would be killed (3:3) **Fulfillment:** "So great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance" (Diodorus, 2.26.6-7)
8. Assyrian fortresses would be captured (3:12). **Fulfillment:** Fortified towns began to fall in 614. (Babylonian Chronicle).