



## An Introduction to the Book of Nahum

### Author and Title

The book is named after its author, the prophet Nahum of Elkosh. His name means 'comfort'. The message given to him by God: that Nineveh would be destroyed brings comfort to Judah. The location of Elkosh is uncertain, although the date and the address to Judah make it likely that Nahum was from Judah.

### Date

Nahum refers to the fall of Thebes as a well-known occurrence (3:8-10). The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal took the city in 664 or 663BC. Nahum also predicts the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, as a future event. Nineveh fell to a coalition of Medes and Babylonians in 612BC. The book was composed, therefore, between 664 or 663BC and 612BC.

This range can be further narrowed. The book implies that Nineveh and Assyria was still at or near the height of its power and that Judah was still firmly under Assyrian control, from which the Lord would free them. Assyria remained at the zenith of its might until 640BC, after which it began to weaken, and rapid decline set in after the death of the last great Assyrian emperor Ashurbanipal (669-627BC).

Further, Josiah, king of Judah (640-609BC), began a religious reformation in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (628 or 627BC), as confirmed in 2 Chronicles 34:3, about the time that Ashurbanipal died. The extension of Josiah's reforming efforts beyond Judah's borders (2 Chronicles 34:6-7) probably indicates that Assyrian control over Judah and neighbouring regions had come to an end.

Taking these dates into consideration, the book was likely composed after circa 660BC and before 630BC.

### Theme

Nineveh, the arrogant capital of the Assyrian Empire, would be destroyed.

## Purpose

Nahum was God's messenger to announce the fall of Nineveh and the complete overthrow of Assyria. This coming judgement from the Lord was certain and irrevocable, as was Obadiah's message concerning Edom.

Nahum's book is a sequel to, and a dramatic contrast with, the Book of Jonah. Jonah's mission to Nineveh was probably sometime in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. He was to warn that large city of God's impending judgement because of Nineveh's wickedness. To Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites heeded his message, repented and were spared God's judgement.

This repentance, however, did not last beyond 745BC, when Tiglath-pileser III (745-728 or 727BC) made his people the leading military power in the Near East. The vast Assyrian Empire was established by bloodshed and massacre, cruelty and torture, destruction, plundering and exiling such as has seldom been seen in history. After several campaigns, Tiglath-pileser greatly enlarged the territory paying him homage with annexed land and vassal kingdoms, including the Northern Kingdom of Israel, reduced in size by the Assyrians, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Succeeding rulers maintained and expanded this empire. In 722BC the Assyrians brought to an end the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Sennacherib, who reigned from 704 to 681BC, made Nineveh the capital of his kingdom in circa 700BC. His energetic building program included a splendid palace, water-supply and water-control projects, and a massive wall to surround the expanded city. Nineveh was destroyed in 612BC, never to be restored, marking the end of Assyria. A small remnant of Assyrians did escape the city, fleeing to Haran and making Ashur-uballit II 'king of Assyria'. In 610BC though Haran fell to the Babylonians and their allies. Ashur-uballit retreated, but in 609BC, with Egyptian help, he tried to recapture Haran. That attempt failed, and Ashur-uballit and the Assyrians disappeared from history.

## Key Themes

1. Nahum proclaims that the Lord is slow to anger and long-suffering, a God jealous for his own honour and for his people; wrathful and avenging against his enemies; the one who controls nations and history; just, righteous, the majestic ruler of nature, good, merciful, gracious, loving, faithful; and the deliverer and protector of those who trust in him.
2. God had used Assyria as his scourge on unfaithful Israel, both Northern and Southern Kingdoms, but he in turn brought well-deserved judgement on Assyria, according to his timetable and method.
3. Nineveh fell not because it was a large, wealthy, Gentile commercial city, but because it was a godless and idolatrous city, a city of violence, lust and greed.

- The Lord of history is a stronghold for ‘those who take refuge in him’ (1:7). He can handle any and all problems in their individual lives. He has defeated powers far greater than Assyria. He grants to his own the ultimate deliverance and vindication.

### History of Salvation Summary

Although God had used the Assyrians to chasten the wayward Southern Kingdom, he did not allow Judah to be annihilated. God’s plan, that the Messiah would come from the line of David, would not be thwarted. The religious feasts of Judah, which God encouraged them to keep (1:15), would have reminded them of the future Saviour.

### The Near East at the Time of Nahum (circa 660-614BC)

Nahum likely prophesied sometime between the zenith of Assyria’s power around 664BC and the fall of Nineveh in 612BC. During this time the Assyrian Empire was in decline as Egypt, Judah, and Babylonia with the help of the Medes regained autonomy and eroded the power of Assyria. Nahum foretold of the fall of Nineveh, the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire.



Regional Map

## Literary Features

The prophetic Book of Nahum consists entirely of oracles of judgement, with no oracles of redemption or blessing, although a future restoration of Judah is indicated in passing. The second half of the book includes taunts, pronouncements of woe (sometimes called ‘the woe formula’), and vivid narratives of destruction. In a sense, the whole book is an extended taunt. Since the imagery and motifs are consistently military in reference, with God pictured as a divine warrior, the book can be considered war poetry.

The Book of Nahum is constructed on a simple two-part plan. Chapter 1 is a prelude to battle. Chapters 2-3 move from preview to actual battle, pictured as a series of oracles of judgement against Nineveh and vivid pictures of her destruction, narrated as if by an eyewitness reporter.

## Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. The Consuming Wrath of God (1:2-11)
  - a. The Lord takes Vengeance on his Guilty Adversaries (1:2-3a)
  - b. The Lord Rules Creation in Majesty (1:3b-6)
  - c. The Lord delivers those who take Refuge in Him (1:7)
  - d. The Lord destroys his Adversaries (1:8)
  - e. The Destruction of Nineveh (1:9-11)
- III. Good News for Judah (1:12-15)
  - a. Judah is freed from Assyrian Bondage (1:12-13)
  - b. The Termination of Vile, Idolatrous Nineveh (1:14)
  - c. Peace and Deliverance for Judah (1:15)
- IV. The Destruction of the Wicked City (2:1-13)
  - a. The Beginning of the Attack on Nineveh (2:1)
  - b. Reasons for Judgement (2:2)
  - c. Military Action at Nineveh (2:3-5)
  - d. The Fall and Plundering of Nineveh (2:6-9)
  - e. A Taunting Song Portraying Nineveh’s Destruction (2:10-12)
  - f. The Lord speaks a Word of Judgement (2:13)

- V.    Ruin Imminent and Inevitable (3:1-19)
  - a.    Reasons for Judgement (3:1)
  - b.    The Slaughter of the Assyrians (3:2-3)
  - c.    The Wickedness of Nineveh (3:4)
  - d.    The Lord speaks a Word of Judgement (3:5-7)
  - e.    Comparison with the Conquest of Thebes (3:8-11)
  - f.    A Taunting Song Portraying Nineveh's Inevitable Destruction (3:12-19)