



Nahum - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Nahum warns of judgement, and describes the awesome character and power of God. He then goes on to encourage a hope for the Southern Kingdom of Judah because of the coming judgement upon Nineveh. He provides both comfort for and a challenge to the faithful people of God.

I Nahum 1:1 - Introduction

The double title in this superscription for the book is unique in the OT: oracle, Hebrew *massa'*, denotes a prophetic utterance or proclamation, refer to the comment made on Habakkuk 1:1, and vision, Hebrew *khazon*, indicates how God communicated the contents of the book to Nahum. In Nahum, the name Nineveh occurs again only in 2:8 and 3:7.

¹ An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

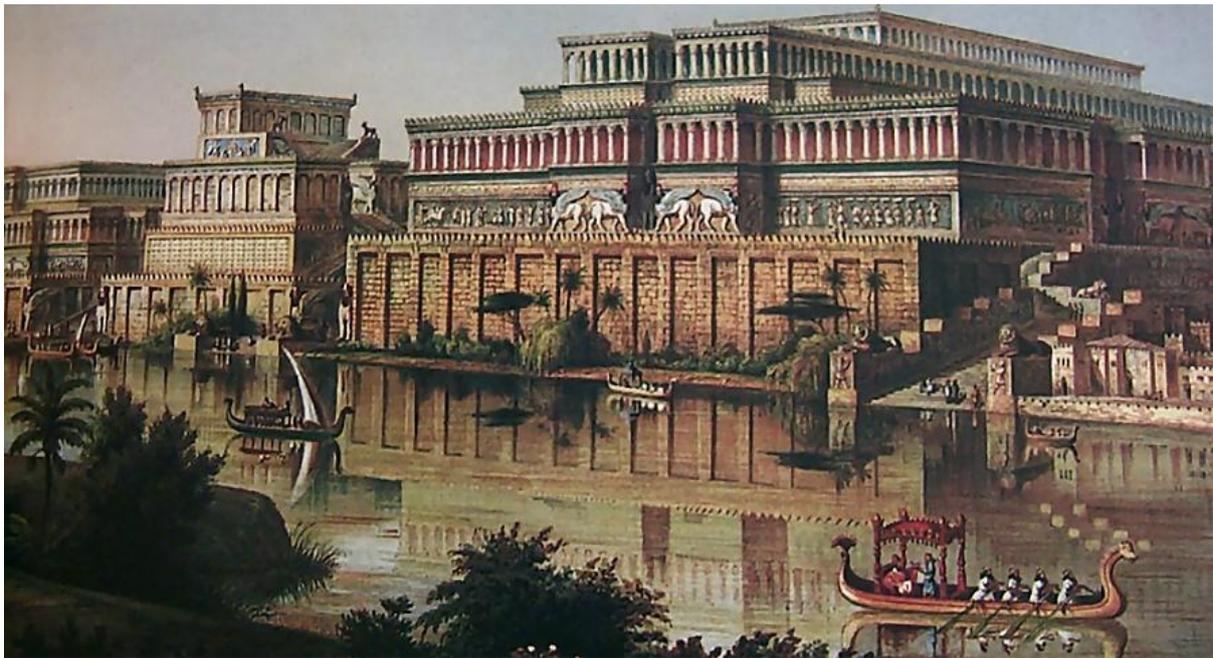
Nahum 1:1

In the prophets, an oracle or burden is a heavy message of weighty importance, heavy in the sense that it produces sorrow or grief. *Massa'* comes from the verb 'to lift up', Hebrew *nasa*, and so it can mean 'to carry' or 'to lift up the voice.' From the first meaning comes the translation burden or load; and from the second meaning comes the translation oracle or utterance. Grammatically, oracle is correct, but since these are heavy oracles, commentators are justified in calling them burdens.

Concerning Nineveh. Nineveh was an ancient, famous city. It was founded by the world's first recorded dictator, Nimrod: <<*From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city*>> (Genesis 10:11-12). The capital of the Assyrian Empire

was Nineveh, the city that heard the preaching of Jonah a hundred years before and had repented. Nahum will address a city that has slipped back into sin, and is again ripe for judgement. Among other things, the prophecy of Nahum reveals that God not only deals with individuals as individuals, he also deals with nations as nations. Nations will be held to account by God.

‘From Nineveh’s walls, temples, palaces, inscriptions, and reliefs, mute yet elaborate witness is given to a city that flourished up to its destruction in 612 BC. Accordingly, the magnificent buildings, artistic designs, and water-supply projects of Nineveh have resulted in its being likened to ancient Versailles.’ (Major Cities of the Biblical World).



An image of ancient Nineveh

The book of the vision. This was more than a message communicated to Nahum in words or phrases from God. Because this is a vision, in some way Nahum saw it. The vivid, descriptive way Nahum writes provides understanding that the book records what he saw in his vision. Another prophet says: <<**The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem**>> (Isaiah 2:1). Isaiah saw a word and, in some sense, Nahum did also.

Nahum of Elkosh. Very little else is known about Nahum or the city of Elkosh. The name Nahum is an abbreviated form of the name Nehemiah, which means ‘Comfort of Yahweh.’ It may be that Elkosh was in the region of Galilee, because the city of Capernaum, mentioned frequently in the NT as being the main Galilæan base of Jesus, e.g. Matthew 4:13, Mark 9:33, and John 2:12, was named after Nahum for in Hebrew it was Kephar-Nahum or ‘City of Nahum’.

The date when Nahum gave this prophecy is not known. He mentions the destruction of the Egyptian city No Amon or Thebes in Nahum 3:8 and Thebes fell

to the Assyrians in 663 BC, so Nahum must have been written after that. Nineveh was destroyed 50 years after No Amon 612 BC. Therefore, most commentators believe the prophecy to have been written between 663-654 BC.

II Nahum 1:2-11 - The Consuming Wrath of God

This praise is general in nature, describing God as he has been and will be throughout world history. Nahum reveals God's just character and judgement, showing that those who remain faithful will be protected, whereas those who remain guilty in their sin will be punished accordingly.

II.a Nahum 1:2-3a - The Lord takes Vengeance on his Guilty Adversaries

The Lord is jealous with regard to his own honour and those in covenant fellowship with him. God's holy anger is righteous and just in defence of his name, his Word and his people.

² A jealous and avenging God is the Lord,
the Lord is avenging and wrathful;
the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries
and rages against his enemies.

^{3a} The Lord is slow to anger but great in power,
and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

Nahum 1:2-3a

A jealous and avenging God is the Lord. Nahum begins his prophecy by considering the character of the God who brings judgement. God had described himself as being a jealous God, jealous for maintaining his good name and character: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me*>> (Exodus 20:5), and: <<*Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name*>> (Ezekiel 39:25).

The Lord is avenging and wrathful. Mankind needs to understand that they cannot fight against God and hope to prevail. Everyone who sets themselves against God will end up receiving his vengeance.

Rages against his enemies. God holds back the venting of his anger until an appropriate time: <<*He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger for ever*>> (Psalm 103:9). Everyone will have a chance to repent but not everyone will choose that path.

The Lord is slow to anger, as he said himself in the presence of Moses: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'*>> (Exodus 34:6). God's patience explains why the wicked often do not immediately receive the judgement they deserve: <<*Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?*>> (Ezekiel 33:11).

But great in power. The delay in deserved judgement is not due to a lack of power or control on God's part. He will withhold his judgement until the time is right and then his wrath will fall on those who are deserving of it: <<*Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'*>> (Genesis 15:13-16)

The Lord will by no means clear the guilty: <<*yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation*>> (Exodus 34:7b). That the wicked seemingly prosper does not mean God regards them as innocent or has forgotten their iniquity. Punishment may not come until after death but it will come: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2), and: <<*Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*>> (John 5:28-29).

II.b Nahum 1:3b-6 - The Lord Rules Creation in Majesty

God's interaction with, and his effect on, nature and the natural world is described in figurative language illustrating God's awesome majesty and omnipotence.

^{3b} His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Nahum 1:3b

His way is in whirlwind and storm is a possible polemic against the storm-god(s) theology of many ancient Near Eastern religions.

4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry,
and he dries up all the rivers;
Bashan and Carmel wither,
and the bloom of Lebanon fades.

5 The mountains quake before him,
and the hills melt;
the earth heaves before him,
the world and all who live in it.

Nahum 1:4-5

He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers. This was something witnessed during the exodus (Exodus Chapter 14) and conquest of the land of Canaan (Joshua Chapters 3-4).

Bashan, a northern Transjordanian region, was famous for its rich pasturelands.

Carmel, a mountain next to the Mediterranean Sea and close to Lower Galilee, was well known for its beauty and luxuriant countryside. See the image.



Lebanon, a mountainous region just to the north of Israel, was noted for its forests. The prophet provides a similar reference to these three regions: <<***The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves***>> (Isaiah 33:9).

Hills and mountains are symbols of permanence and immovability, but even they cannot stand before God: <<***But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place; the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of mortals***>> (Job 14:18-19).

6 Who can stand before his indignation?
Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and by him the rocks are broken in pieces.

Nahum 1:6

Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?

God is known for his grace, mercy, love and compassion. However, those who continually oppose him and refuse to repent for their sins will and do face his all-consuming wrath: <<*But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap*>> (Malachi 3:2), <<*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath*>> (John 3:36), <<*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth*>> (Romans 1:18), and: <<*On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient*>> (Colossians 3:6).

His wrath is poured out like fire. Fire is a frequent image used in the OT to emphasise God's fierce and all-consuming wrath; for example: <<*Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven*>> (Genesis 19:24), <<*On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulphur; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup*>> (Psalm 11:6), and: <<*Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it*>> (Amos 5:6).

By him the rocks are broken in pieces. Rocks represent the hardest objects in nature, easily shattered by the Lord.

II.c Nahum 1:7-8a - The Lord delivers those who take Refuge in Him

In contrast to his anger, God is good to his people, blessing those who trust in him.

- ⁷ The Lord is good,
a stronghold on a day of trouble;
he protects those who take refuge in him,
^{8a} even in a rushing flood.

Nahum 1:7-8a

How important it is to know that the Lord is good:

- God is good in his very being - it is his very nature to be good.
- God is good independently - no one must help him be good.
- God is eternally and unchangeably good.
- God is good in each one of his divine persons.
- God is good in all his acts of grace.
- God is good in all his plans and purposes for life.

A stronghold on a day of trouble. The Lord is the never-failing protector of his people. He will keep them safe and rescue them from human and spiritual enemies, for example: <<*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*>> (Psalm 27:1), <<*The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble*>> (Psalm 37:39), <<*For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge; therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and set out slips of an alien god*>> (Isaiah 17:10), and: <<*O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge on the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit*>> (Jeremiah 16:19). God knows his people with love and affection, which results in his benevolent actions.

II.d Nahum 1:8b - The Lord destroys his Adversaries

Verse 8b provides a striking contrast to v.7. This alternation at the end of the first major section (vv.2-8a) sets the pattern for a similar alternation in the next sections (vv.9-11 and vv.12-15). The description in v.8b of God dealing with his enemies echoes v.2.

^{8b} He will make a full end of his adversaries,
and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Nahum 1:8b

He will make a full end of his adversaries. Like an overflowing flood, God's judgement is overwhelming; Nineveh was to be destroyed seemingly by a flood: <<*The river gates are opened, the palace trembles. It is decreed that the city be exiled, its slave-women led away, moaning like doves and beating their breasts. Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away. 'Halt! Halt!' – but no one turns back*>> (Nahum 2:6-8). In 612 BC the city was destroyed by a flood of Babylonians, Medes and Persians.

Full end, darkness. God's judgement will culminate with removal from this life and everlasting damnation.

II.e Nahum 1:9-11 - The Destruction of Nineveh

God addresses Nineveh saying that, in spite of her plots and might, she will fall.

⁹ Why do you plot against the Lord?
He will make an end;
no adversary will rise up twice.

Nahum 1:9

You is masculine plural in Hebrew, presumably addressing the Assyrians since the superscription in v.1 is: <<**concerning Nineveh**>> the capital of Assyria.

Plots to harm God's people are ultimately against the Lord himself.

He will make an end. Refer back to v.8b; here it is specifically applied to Nineveh. Trouble is what Judah experienced because of their oppressive adversary Assyria led by their king Sennacherib: <<**In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them**>> (2 Kings 18:13).

No adversary will rise up twice. Once God has passed judgement on the enemies of his people there is no coming back for them. The time for repentance has passed: <<**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath**>> (John 3:36).

¹⁰ Like thorns they are entangled,
like drunkards they are drunk;
they are consumed like dry straw.

Nahum 1:10

Entangled thorns can be thrown en masse into the fire, just as the Assyrians as a whole will be wiped out: <<**They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!**>> (Psalm 118:12), and: <<**For wickedness burned like a fire, consuming briars and thorns; it kindled the thickets of the forest, and they swirled upwards in a column of smoke**>> (Isaiah 9:18).

Like drunkards, the Assyrians will be unable to defend themselves successfully against their attackers: <<**they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb**>> (Revelation 14:10).

The image of burning dry straw or stubble, a frequent one in the OT, conveys the sense of quick extermination: <<**As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle**>> (Joel 2:5), and: <<**The house of Jacob shall be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor of the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken**>> (Obadiah 18).

11 From you one has gone out
who plots evil against the Lord,
one who counsels wickedness.

Nahum 1:11

You is feminine singular in Hebrew and thus refers to the city of Nineveh (v.9).

One who counsels wickedness is either a reference to a particular wicked Assyrian king or to the series of evil Assyrian kings who reigned in Nineveh after Sennacherib made that city the capital. Wicked counsellors always brought judgement upon those whom the counselled: <<*Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly*>> (2 Chronicles 22:2-3), and: <<*He said to me, 'Mortal, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city'*>> (Ezekiel 11:2).

III Nahum 1:12-15 - Good News for Judah

Judah was living in fear of the mighty Assyrians because their kindred from the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been taken into captivity. God reassures them that they will not be taken as the other ten tribes were, for the Assyrians have served God's purpose and will soon face judgement themselves.

III.a Nahum 1:12-13 - Judah is freed from Assyrian Bondage

The Assyrian yoke was only temporary, but it served God's purposes.

12 Thus says the Lord,
'Though they are at full strength and many,
they will be cut off and pass away.
Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no more.

Nahum 1:12

Though they are at full strength and many. They refers to the Assyrians. Assyria was likely at the height of its power when Nahum delivered this prophecy.

Many. The Assyrian army was large enough to manage a number of extensive conquests: <<*That very night the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when*

morning dawned, they were all dead bodies>> (2 Kings 19:35), maintaining control of the empire for lengthy periods of time.

Will be cut off and pass away. God would end the military dominance of the Assyrians, and they would pass from the pages of history.

Though I have afflicted you. Suddenly God addresses Judah; refer also to v.15. This dramatic change in the flow of v.12, the direct address, and the initial anonymity of the addressee were attention-getting devices emphasising the announcement of good news that follows. God had used the Assyrians to chasten wayward Judah.

I will afflict you no more. Since God would overthrow Nineveh, the Assyrians would never again be Judah's scourge. God lets the people of Judah know that their troubles had been part of God's judgement on them and not just some twist of fate: <<*The Lord will afflict you with consumption, fever, inflammation, with fiery heat and drought, and with blight and mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish*>> (Deuteronomy 28:22).

¹³ And now I will break off his yoke from you
and snap the bonds that bind you.'

Nahum 1:13

His yoke refers to the burdensome rule of the Assyrian monarchs (v.11) over Judah. About 734/733 BC, during the reign of King Ahaz (2 Kings 16:7-8), the Southern Kingdom had become a vassal state of Assyria. This involved paying heavy tribute to the Assyrians: <<*King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.'* The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria>> (2 Kings 18:14-16) and other oppressive measures. When Judah revolted under King Hezekiah, the Assyrians devastated the land in 701 BC (2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 7:18-25 and Isaiah 8:5-8), and took many of the people away and much plunder with them also.

Break off his yoke, the bonds that bind you. The vassalage of Judah lasted until the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC), when Assyria began to decline rapidly and finally ceased to be a nation.

III.b Nahum 1:14 - The Termination of Vile, Idolatrous Nineveh

The warning goes out to the Assyrians that God's judgement is upon them.

- 14 The Lord has commanded concerning you:
‘Your name shall be perpetuated no longer;
from the house of your gods I will cut off
the carved image and the cast image.
I will make your grave, for you are worthless.’

Nahum 1:14

You is masculine singular in Hebrew. Nahum suddenly switches to directly addressing the Assyrian king(s) (v.11): the Assyrian monarchy would come to a decisive end. This implies the total conquest of Assyria and the irreversible fall of Nineveh, which came to pass in 612 BC.

The house of your gods I will cut off. Complete defeat of the Assyrian ruler would also be marked by the desecration of his temple and the destruction or removal of his idols, which represented the gods who he believed gave him power, wealth, and descendants. This prophecy is similar to: *<<and I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands>>* (Micah 5:13). Archæologists have noted the complete destruction that Nineveh’s temples underwent.



The Fall of Nineveh, by John Martin, 1828

III.c Nahum 1:15 - Peace and Deliverance for Judah

Nahum returns to addressing Judah. What he has foretold with regard to Nineveh, the Assyrian monarchy, and the Assyrians he now considers as good as accomplished.

¹⁵ Look! On the mountains the feet of one
who brings good tidings,
who proclaims peace!
Celebrate your festivals, O Judah,
fulfil your vows,
for never again shall the wicked invade you;
they are utterly cut off.

Nahum 1:15

On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings. The imagery is that of a messenger bearing the good news of the fall and devastation of Nineveh. The people first catch sight of him running along the Judæan mountains: <<*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'*>> (Isaiah 52:7).

Who proclaims peace. Judah does not have to be afraid of any more military action and oppression coming from Assyria; on peace in the OT and NT, refer to the comment made on John 14:27.

Celebrate your festivals, O Judah. These festivals would remind the people of the Lord's past acts of deliverance and the future hope of the coming Messiah. At the festivals they would also, as a nation, worship the Lord and give him proper thanks and praise.

Fulfil your vows. Some in Judah voluntarily made vows to the Lord to give him thank offerings.

For never again shall the wicked invade you is a reference to the Assyrians. Their days as a victorious empire were coming to an end. Of course, it would only be a generation later when God would raise up the Babylonians as judgement against the continued wickedness of Judah.

Verse 15 is Nahum 2:1 in the Hebrew Scriptures.