

Prophecy of Nahum

Ian Gibson April 2017

Subject of the prophecy - *“The burden of Nineveh”* (ch1v1).

A prophetic prediction of divine judgment upon the ancient and mighty city of Nineveh.

“The book of the vision of Nahum (‘comforter / consoler’) *the Elkoshite”* (ch1v1).

His place of origin was from Galilee, similar to Jonah who came from Gath-hepher (2nd Kings 14v25).

Both these prophets had a ministry towards Nineveh & the Gentiles.

The Pharisees were wrong when they said to Nicodemus *“for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet”* (John 7v52); they were blinded by their hatred of the Lord Jesus, the perfect Man of Galilee, who came as a Light to the Gentiles.

Nahum was a prophet who spoke for the LORD (*“Thus saith the LORD ...”*, ch1v12, 2v13, 3v5).

He saw in a vision what the LORD was intending to fulfil, and he delivered that message as a comfort to the people of Judah; ch1v15 *“O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts”*.

His prophecy was given in the days of either king Hezekiah, or king Manasseh of Judah, after the northern kingdom has been taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 BC, and before Judah’s Babylonian captivity.

Nineveh was the capital city of the land of Assyria; a nation God uses much in all His dealings with Israel.

Assyria is 1st mentioned in Gen 2v14, associated with the river Hiddekel (Tigris).

Nineveh is 1st mentioned in Gen 10v11, built by a man called Asshur.

Babylon, linked with the river Euphrates, was built by the mighty hunter Nimrod (Gen 10v10).

God’s dealings with Nineveh, first in grace and then in judgment, are given in the prophecies of Jonah, Nahum and Zephaniah; Zeph 2v13-15 emphasises the pride of Nineveh, *“the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly ...”*.

Nineveh was defeated & destroyed by a coalition of the Medes & Babylonians in 612 BC, over 50 years after Nahum’s prophecy of the destruction was given.

Ch1: The Announcement of Nineveh’s Destruction – Nineveh’s Doom is Declared (*“make an utter end ...”* v8-9)

Ch2: The Description of Nineveh’s Destruction – Nineveh’s Doom is Described (*“empty ... void ... waste”* v10)

Ch3: The Explanation of Nineveh’s Destruction – Nineveh’s Doom is Deserved (*“Because of ...”* v4)

Nahum 1v1: The Introduction to the Prophecy

Nahum speaks immediately of his message of solemn judgment as a *“burden”* (see also Zech 9v1, 12v1).

These OT prophets felt the weight of their mission, it was burdensome to them, and they could only unburden themselves by giving the message God had given them to speak to the people of God.

We too need to be prepared to feel the burden upon our hearts, and to shoulder the weight of bearing testimony for our God in our own day & generation.

We need to share in *“The book of the vision of Nahum”*; hence 4x *“Behold ...”* (ch1v15, 2v13, 3v5, 3v13).

Ch1v15: *“Behold ...”*; a vision of God’s salvation, the glad tidings of a Saviour to proclaim.

Ch2v13, 3v5, 3v13: *“Behold ...”*; a vision of God’s judgment as seen in the way Nineveh was brought to such ruin.

Nahum 1v2-7: The Character of the God of Judgment

Statements detailing the essential character of the LORD Jehovah; here is where we see Christ in principle.

The LORD's wrath (v2,v6):

The reality of God's holy wrath, His burning jealousy & His furious judgment upon sinful humanity.

"God is jealous"; linked with His wrath & judgment, jealous for upholding His holiness & righteousness.

2x **"the LORD revengeth"**; marked by **"vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies"**.

Deut 32v35 **"To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompence"**, quoted by the apostle Paul in Rom 12v19.

Man's wickedness & sin will ultimately unleash a response from God, like a massively erupting volcano, His holy wrath will be poured forth; v6 **"His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him"**.

How good to know that there will be no wrath for believers in the Lord Jesus (see 1st Thess 1v10, 5v9).

The Lord Jesus endured & exhausted the fierceness of God's holy wrath in 3 finite hours of darkness on the cross.

The LORD's longsuffering (v3): "The LORD is slow to anger"

Nahum has in mind the experience of Moses upon mount Sinai (Exodus 34v6-7).

Approx. 150 years before Nahum's prophetic revelation of Nineveh's destruction, God sent His prophet Jonah to that city, to preach a message of repentance towards God (Jonah 3); the people repented, Nineveh was spared.

The successive generations of the Ninevites had returned to their proud, evil & violent ways, they had gone on fitting themselves for destruction, and Nahum is given this vision of a judgment that would not be averted.

Rom 11v22, **"Behold therefore the goodness (Jonah) and severity (Nahum) of God"**.

In the matter of salvation, God is **"slow to anger"**, He **"is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"** (2nd Peter 3v9).

The LORD's righteousness (v3): He "will not at all acquit the wicked (guilty, JND)"

The absolute righteousness of God's judgment demands that sinners be judged.

This principle of God's righteousness applies equally to all people & nations, to believers & unbelievers.

The LORD's power (v3-5):

He is in full control over all aspects of His creation; He uses that creatorial power to fulfill His purpose in righteous judgment. Assyria & Nineveh were going to experience **"His way in the whirlwind and in the storm"**.

The LORD's goodness (v7):

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him".

The wrath of God does not just descend upon all as an indiscriminate wave of judgment.

For our encouragement, in the trials of our faith, we can always find a safe refuge in Him; He will never let us go.

In His goodness, He faithfully upholds & keeps those who by faith have a personal relationship with Him.

Proverbs 18v10 **"The Name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe"**.

Even in the context of the awesome judgment of God, still we can say **"The LORD is good"**, because He has graciously provided a salvation & redemption for wicked sinful humanity who are so deserving of that judgment.

Nahum 1v8-11: Announcement of the Certain Downfall of Nineveh

v8-9: Nineveh will be irreversibly destroyed **“with an overrunning flood”**, i.e. an inundation of the river Tigris. God’s enemies will be brought to the darkness of utter defeat; He **“will make an utter end of the place thereof”**. Nineveh will no more oppress the people of God; **“affliction shall not rise up the second time”**.

In a future judgment, the Lord Jesus will likewise definitively **“prevail against His enemies”** (Isaiah 42v13).

v10: The judgment on self-confident Nineveh will be swift & fierce; **“they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry”**.

v11: An Assyrian **“wicked counsellor”**, by plotting against God’s people, was doing **“evil against the LORD”**

Nahum 1v12-15: The Comfort for Judah

v12-13: The LORD speaks words of comfort to Judah, giving assurance of deliverance from Assyrian oppression.

“Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder”.

Assyria had been used by the sovereign LORD as His instrument of discipline upon His wayward people (see Isaiah 10v5-6), but now that Assyrian yoke of oppression upon Judah would be broken (see Isaiah 10vs12,15,27).

v14: The LORD speaks words of judgment to Nineveh; after the destruction of the city, it would apparently cease to exist, **“no more of thy name be sown”**, ch2v13 **“the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard”**.

For nearly 2500 years, there was no evidence of the ancient city of Nineveh, until archeologists uncovered it in northern Iraq in the mid 1800s.

Nineveh’s vile idolatry was an abomination to the LORD; **“Out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile”**.

v15: The LORD speaks further words of comfort & peace to Judah; the **“good tidings”** of Nineveh’s destruction, and the assurance of future deliverance, was to be published abroad upon the mountains.

This could be enjoyed even before it had been accomplished, because it was the purpose of the LORD.

We can presently enjoy the truth that all our enemies, e.g. death & Satan, are going to be destroyed by God.

Meantime, Judah were to **“keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows”**, and render to the LORD His due.

In light of our certain future deliverance & redemption in Christ, let us be fully engaged in our spiritual exercises.

Nahum 2: The Description of Nineveh’s Destruction – Nineveh’s Doom is Described

Nahum describes the conquest of Nineveh in the present tense, as if he was there witnessing it all happening, and he gives a running commentary of the battle as it unfolded blow by blow.

It would take place in 612 BC, many decades after Nahum’s prediction, but he accurately describes the event.

v1: Nahum is taunting the Ninevites concerning the imminent approach of the enemy.

The invading coalition of the Medes & Babylonians was upon them; they needed to guard the fortress etc.

v2: Further comfort & encouragement for Judah; **“For Jehovah hath brought again the glory of Jacob, as the glory of Israel”** (JND). The destruction of Nineveh would be for the glorious deliverance of God’s people.

The Assyrians had **“emptied them out”**, they had marred & broken the **“vine branches”** of Israel; but God would intervene to take His people back into His favour, and to grant them **“the excellency of Israel”** again.

v3-4: The siege of the city is described in graphic detail, detailing the colours & all the action like a film preview. The red & scarlet uniforms of the **“mighty men”** of the Babylonians & Medes is described. The enemy chariots move at lightning speed, as they traversed the broad streets of the city.

v5: The king of Nineveh **“shall recount his worthies”**, but his fighting men seem to have been ill-prepared to defend the city against this attack.

v6: **“The gates of the rivers shall be opened”**; the adjacent river Tigris & the complex moat system around the city of Nineveh was manipulated & diverted by the enemy, causing the city to be flooded. When Babylon fell, on the night of Belshazzar’s drunken feast (Daniel 5), there was also a diversion of the river Euphrates, allowing the invading forces of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian to enter. The deluge caused the mud and brick foundations of the buildings and city walls to dissolve and crumble, i.e. **“the palace shall be dissolved”**.

v7: Poetic language, apparently personifying the city of Nineveh with this woman’s name **“Huzzab”**. The name means ‘established’, ‘decreed’ or ‘appointed’; Nineveh’s destruction had been decreed by God. The Ninevites would be **“led away captive”**, with cries & expressions of mourning. Nineveh had taken many others captive; i.e. **“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”** (Gal 6v7). Despite all of her power & strength, no matter how stout her walls, how high her battlements etc, when God decrees the city’s destruction, it is as good as accomplished. The final judgment upon this wicked world has likewise been decreed by God (see Acts 17v30-31).

v8: The Ninevites **“shall flee away”** in panic, like the emptying of a cistern of water. The rulers of the city call upon the people to stand and defend the city, **“but none shall look back”**. They had no great allegiance to the city, and so they readily fled away, without even a final backward look.

v9-10: Nahum describes the subsequent spoiling of the city, as it would be emptied of its vast store of treasures. As a result of the plunder **“She is empty, and void, and waste”**. The Ninevites are gripped with tremendous fear, with hearts melting, knees smiting together, pained in their loins, their faces reflecting the pallor of death, and they are fleeing in abject fear & panic.

v11-13: The Assyrian national symbol of power was the lion; they likened themselves to proud & majestic lions. Nineveh had been like the lion’s den, where the raging lions fed ravenously upon their prey, showing tremendous cruelty, and with utterly no pity or mercy for the lives & dignity of their captives. But Nahum taunts them **“Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions ...”**. Now that the judgment of God has fallen upon them, the once fearless young lions of Nineveh have been devoured by the sword, and the lion’s den was left desolate & destroyed.

The accuracy of Nahum’s predictions confirms the prophetic accuracy of Scripture (see Isaiah 46v9-10). It was all going to come to pass, because it was the sovereign purpose & counsel of God; v13 2x **“I will ...”**.

Nahum 3: The Explanation of Nineveh's Destruction – Nineveh's Doom is Deserved

We learn now the reasons why Nineveh thoroughly merited the judgment of God, and why we read 2x **"Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts"** (ch2v13, ch3v5).

It was because of her cruelty, her sorcery, and her defiling influence upon the people of God.

v1: The pronouncement of a great woe upon Nineveh, **"Woe to the city of bloods** (Newberry)"; the city was responsible for the shedding of much innocent blood, and they were deceitful liars; **"full of lies and robbery"**.

v2-3: A typical Assyrian siege, with chariots & horsemen in action, and the result would be a solemn scene of essentially mass murder, **"a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses ..."**.

These will be reasons for humanity to ultimately come under the eternal judgment of God (see Rev 21v8).

The very opposite character should mark believers in the Lord Jesus (see Eph 4v25,32).

v4: Nineveh had a bewitching & seducing effect upon the surrounding nations & cities **"through her witchcrafts"**.

The northern kingdom of Israel had been so seduced & defiled before the holy God (see Ezek 23v5-7).

The nation had been very expressly forbidden from any such involvement in the 'black arts' (see Deut 18v9-13).

We must not let ourselves become allured & defiled by such associations with this world (see 2nd Cor 6v14-17).

v5-6: God brought the proud city of Nineveh to such a public shame & disgrace, made **"a gazingstock"**.

The Assyrians had shamefully humiliated many other nations around them, but they themselves would be brought to such a public humiliation, i.e. the scriptural principle of sowing & reaping (see Gal 6v7).

v7: **"who will bemoan her?"**; none of the nations around were sorry about what happened to Nineveh.

Nahum ('**comforter**') brings his name into his message, **"whence shall I seek comforters (Nahums) for thee?"**

Cruel Nineveh & the Assyrians were left friendless & alone in their defeat, reaping what they had sowed.

At Calvary, the meek & gentle Lord Jesus Christ found no comforters; **"I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters (Nahums), but I found none"** (Ps 69v29).

v8-10: The solemn lesson of history given to Nineveh; **"Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it ..."**, i.e. the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes, destroyed in 663 BC by the mighty Assyrians ironically, and brutally carried away to captivity & slavery.

Nahum's prophecy is telling the proud Ninevites that exactly the same fate awaited their city, which they themselves had cruelly inflicted upon Thebes; i.e. again the principle of sowing & reaping.

We learn that no-one is impregnable, or beyond the possibility of failure (see Gal 6v1).

v11: The past example of Thebes is applied directly to Nineveh, **"Thou also ... Thou ... Thou also"** 3x.

1st Cor 10v12 **"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"**.

v12-19: Different analogies & pictures all depict the reality of the abject weakness & helplessness of Nineveh compared with the LORD who is **“great in power”** (ch1v3).

v12 **“All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater”**; they would be easily picked off by the enemy.

v13: Nineveh would be like a city defended only by the woman folk; **“Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women”**, and so were left **“wide open unto thine enemies”**.

v14: They would need plenty of water for the siege; **“Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln”**.

God knew well that their city’s foundations would crumble & be dissolved by the overflowing flood of water.

v15: After the flood would come a devouring & destroying fire; **“There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm”**.

v15-17: The Ninevites were **“many”** in absolute number; v15 **“make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts”**, v16 **“Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven”**, v17 **“Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are”**.

Their large number gave them a false sense of security, because it offered them no particular protection.

For assemblies of God’s people today, numerical strength is not the equivalent of spiritual strength, and large numbers can quickly be dispersed.

v18: The failure, negligence & inactivity in the rulers of the Ninevites; **“Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust (lie still, JND): thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them”**.

The displaced & dispersed people of Nineveh were scattered abroad, and no more to be gathered back again.

V19: Nineveh’s overthrow is irreversible; the city is not going to be healed & rebuilt again, **“There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous”**.

All who had suffered for so long under the cruelty & wickedness of Nineveh would be brought to rejoice & celebrate the fall of that city; **“all that hear the bruit (report) of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?”**

God’s Future Purpose for Assyria:

In the tribulation period, God will use the Assyrian again as a rod of chastisement, in judgment against a rebellious apostate nation of Israel (see Daniel 11).

An ultimate glorious future for Assyria, in a future millennial day when the Lord Jesus is reigning in righteousness.

Isaiah 19v23-25: Egypt & Assyria will be at peace with God’s people, united in the service of Jehovah.

Truly our God is the gracious God of recovery & restoration, and He will recover Egypt & Assyria for Himself.

Nahum’s prophecy shows us how God is overruling and in full control over all the nations of this world.