

# NAHUM

Nahum means “comfort or consolation” even though his prophecy was neither for Nineveh—its recipient (it was however for the nations that Assyria oppressed). The only biographical information we have about Nahum is the statement in 1:1 that he was from Elkosh and the location of that town is a mystery since it is nowhere else referred to in Scripture. (Some speculate it was the predecessor of Capernaum because that city’s Hebrew name means “village of Nahum.”)

The date of the book likely falls between 663 and 613 B.C. The reason for this date is because Nahum mentioned the destruction of Thebes in Egypt which happened in 663 and obviously delivered his prophecy before Assyria was destroyed which occurred in 613.

Jonah had prophesied to Nineveh approximately 150 years prior to Nahum. It is interesting to compare their prophecies.

### Jonah: God’s Mercy

Emphasis on the prophet  
Disobedient prophet  
Deliverance from water  
Repentance of Nineveh

### Nahum: God’s Judgment

Emphasis on the prophecy  
Obedient prophet  
Destruction by water (likely)  
Rebellion of Nineveh

## Historical Background

Nineveh was a huge city (recall Jonah’s statement of taking three days to walk across it- Jonah 3:3) and was the capital of the powerful Assyrian empire. They had an earned reputation as a brutal people (which explained Jonah’s reticence to go there). They completely destroyed the nation of Israel in 722 B.C and rampaged right up to the gates of Jerusalem (during the prophet Micah’s life time) before being repelled by angels of the Lord as a result of Hezekiah’s intercessory prayer for Judah as urged by Isaiah (2 kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 23; Isaiah 36-37).

By 612 all of this was history as Nineveh and the Assyrian empire was overrun and destroyed by Babylon and her allies, the Medes and Scythians. According to the ancient historian, Diodorus Siculus, the armies laid siege to Nineveh and during that time the Khosr River, which ran throughout the city flooded, which tore down part of the city wall allowing the invaders to enter. This then fulfilled part of Nahum’s prophecy in 1:8; 2:6; and 3:13. The city was so completely destroyed it was thought to be myth by many skeptics until being discovered by archeologists in 1850.

## The Book

It is a prophetic message to Nineveh and the Assyria people. While once they had been open to the message of the Lord (Jonah) and used by God as an instrument of judgment (“the rod of my anger- Isaiah 10:5) now it was soon to be their turn to feel God’s wrath in a judgment of their own. Isaiah even foretold this before Nahum:

*When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem he will say, “I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.” – Isaiah 10:12*

Isaiah's commentary in 10:13-19 clearly connects to Nahum's message. Pride, arrogance, failure to acknowledge God, oppression, etc. were among the reasons for Assyria's downfall. Not too much unlike Israel before them and Judah after them.

In the first chapter, Nahum tells of God's coming wrath to Nineveh and vividly demonstrates God's power to bring about such a judgment. If the "earth trembles at his presence" (1:5) bringing down Nineveh will be no problem. Indeed he will come upon them like "an overwhelming flood" (1:8), which he in fact, did. But, just as found in all of the prophet's message, even in the midst of judgment there is hope for those who trust in God (1:7).

Nahum next makes it clear that Nineveh is reaping only what it had sown. God's judgment was coming because of Nineveh's sins (1:11-12). While bad news for Assyria this was good news for Judah. In this section (1:11-15) Nahum alternates between the destruction of Nineveh and the deliverance of Judah.

Chapter two brings more bad news for Nineveh. Nahum predicts the coming of their enemies by depicting destruction and bloodshed ("red" shields; "scarlet" soldiers). Assyria may arm up and be ready for a fight (2:5) but they will not be able to withstand the judgment of God. Nineveh will be plundered (2:8-10) and the "lion's lair" will be destroyed. (The Assyrians had a fascination with lions and several artifacts have been uncovered from the ancient city that shows kings hunting lions and offering those lions to their gods.) But when God says, "I am against you" (2:15) no lion—regardless of how powerful—can continue to stand.

In chapter Nahum details exactly why this judgment is coming to Nineveh (3:1-7). It is coming because of their brutality and lust for conquest. God will bring them to shame and there will be no one to mourn. Nahum compares them to Thebes- whom Assyria had conquered (3:8-10). Just as Thebes thought themselves unable to be defeated- so does Nineveh. But just as Nineveh proved Thebes wrong, God will prove Nineveh wrong. For anyone listening to Nahum in Assyria this was a foreboding statement indeed. Nineveh's destruction was inevitable- no way out at this point. They would be hidden (3:11) meaning completely eradicated (which they were- not found until 1850). Against God's wrath their warriors were "women" and they would flee like locusts. (3:13-18). They would receive help from no one (3:19).

The picture Nahum paints is not pretty. It contains all of the ugliness of the rampant injustice, oppression, violence, arrogance, and neglect of God that defined Nineveh. Even though they were not a covenant nation, God held them accountable. He had put his word in their midst and expected them to honor it and honor him. They had not and now judgment was coming.

### **Contemporary Nahum**

Just like the within the context of the other Minor Prophets, we see God holding a people accountable for their failure to (as Micah put it in 6:8) to act in justice, hold to mercy, and live in humility—recognizing the sovereignty of the one true God. If there is any takeaway for us in these prophecies, it must be that we grasp the importance of honoring the justice, mercy, and love of God in all we do.

As for the nations now, we also must realize that God still reigns over them, works through them, and yes, judges them—while looking to those of us in his kingdom to be salt and light to them; just as he wanted Israel and Judah to be.