

Nahum

Chapter 1

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

Assyria (represented by Nineveh, 1:1) had already destroyed Samaria (722–721 B.C.), resulting in the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel, and posed a present threat to Judah. The Assyrians were brutally cruel, their kings often being depicted as gloating over the gruesome punishments inflicted on conquered peoples. They conducted their wars with shocking ferocity, uprooted whole populations as state policy and deported them to other parts of their empire. The leaders of conquered cities were tortured and horribly mutilated before being executed. No wonder the dread of Assyria fell on all her neighbors!

About 700 B.C. King Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of the Assyrian empire, and it remained the capital until it was destroyed in 612. Jonah had announced its destruction earlier (Jnh 3:4), but the people repented and the destruction was temporarily averted. Not long after that, however, Nineveh reverted to its extreme wickedness, brutality and pride. The brutality reached its peak under Ashurbanipal (669–627), the last great ruler of the Assyrian empire. After his death, Assyria's influence and power waned rapidly until 612, when Nineveh was overthrown.

1:1 *oracle.* Hbr *massa'*, “burden.” A divinely inspired message uttered by a prophet sent by God. God laid a heavy burden on Nahum's shoulders by calling him to speak a terrifying word of judgment against Nineveh. Oracles were most often spoken against a foreign power. (TLSB)

Nineveh. Here the capital city stands for the entire Assyrian empire. (CSB)

Established by Sennacherib (704–681 BC) as the capital of the Assyrian Empire, it was located on the east bank of the Tigris River. Excavation of its ruins near Mosul (in modern-day Iraq) revealed palaces with stone reliefs of the invasion and ruination of Judah in 701 BC.

book. Lit, “scroll.” Books of bound pages were not made until the first century. Nahum is committed to writing the entire message God revealed to him. No mention is made of the material on which Nahum is to write his Book, in contrast to Habakkuk, whom God commands to “write the vision” on tablets (Hab 2:2). (TLSB)

vision. Hbr *chazon.* Occurs elsewhere in the titles of prophetic writings as a technical term for divine revelation (Is 1:1; Hab 1:1). (TLSB)

Nahum. Little is known about the prophet. His name means “comforter.” This suggests that his prophecy, a word of judgment against Nineveh, brought comfort to the people of Judah. (TLSB)

of Elkosh. Location unknown, though most likely somewhere in Judah. (TLSB)

God's Wrath Against Nineveh

2 The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. 3 The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. 4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. 5 The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. 6 Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. 7 The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. 8 But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness. 9 What do you plot against the LORD? He will make a complete end; trouble will not rise up a second time. 10 For they are like entangled thorns, like drunkards as they drink; they are consumed like stubble fully dried. 11 From you came one who plotted evil against the LORD, a worthless counselor. 12 Thus says the LORD, “Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. 13 And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart.” 14 The LORD has given commandment about you: “No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.” 15 Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.

1:2–3 The covenant name Yahweh (“the LORD”) is emphasized. (CSB)

Nahum unmistakably parallels the language of Ex 34:6–7 (cf Nu 14:18), where God reestablishes His covenant after He punishes Israel’s idolatrous worship of the golden calf. But Nahum makes one significant change. In Ex 34:6, “slow to anger” is followed by “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” In Na 1:3, “slow to anger” is followed by “great in power.” All that awaits wicked Nineveh is the raw power of God’s judgment. (TLSB)

1:2 *jealous*. God’s jealousy means that He will tolerate no rivals; no one may steal His honor. He demands exclusive devotion (Ex 34:14; Dt 4:24). (TLSB)

avenging ... avenging ... vengeance. God acts justly in judgment toward all who oppose him and his kingdom. The repetition is for emphasis. (CSB)

Because He is a jealous God, He aggressively executes vengeance against all wickedness and reveals His wrath and fury against His enemies. He is so possessive of His people that their enemies are His enemies. (TLSB)

1:3 *slow to anger* – This is a Hebrew idiom (literally, “long of face”) and is aptly captured by the LXX translation, “long suffering.” It pictures divine restraint. (TLSB)

the guilty. Such as Nineveh. (CSB)

whirlwind ... storm ... clouds. Ominously depicts God’s vigorous movement, as He is preparing to take action in an outbreak of fury. (TLSB)

1:4 *rebukes the sea and makes it*. As at the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14). (CSB)

dries up all the rivers. As at the crossing of the Jordan (Jos 3). (CSB)

Bashan ... Carmel ... Lebanon. These three places were noted for their fertility, vineyards and trees, but at the Lord's word they wither. (CSB)

Bashan. Transjordanian plateau, east of the Sea of Chinnereth. *Carmel.* Mountain jutting into the Great Sea south of Phoenicia. *Lebanon.* Mountainous range north of Phoenicia. These three locales in Israel's northern territory are known for their fruitfulness, with well-watered pastures and forested hills (cf Is 60:13; Jer 50:19). (TLSB)

1:5 *mountains ... hills ... earth ... world.* Emblems of stability and permanence. (CSB)

The violent convulsions and upheavals of nature picture how the physical world bows before God, who approaches in wrath and judgment against sin (Ps. 29:3-9; Mi 1:45; Hab 3:6, 10). (TLSB)

1:6 *Who can stand ... ? Who can endure ... ?* Rhetorical questions. If mountains quake before the Lord (v. 5), what human being can think that he is not vulnerable? Cf. Ro 2:3-5. (CSB)

God consumes and utterly devastates those who rebel against Him, so hot is the fire of His wrath (Dt 32:22; Jer 7:20). Nahum uses four different Hebrew words for "wrath" or "anger" in this verse. God's judgment is no mere slap on the wrist. (TLSB)

1:7 *The LORD is good.* In striking contrast to the portrayal of God's anger is this assurance of His goodness to those who take refuge in Him. (TLSB)

stronghold in the day of trouble – The Hebrew word *ma'oz* here is a place of safety and protection. It is used often to describe God's powerful and gracious protection of those who place their trust in Him (Ps 27:1; Jer 16:19; Jl 3:16). (TLSB)

who take refuge in him. Such as Judah. (CSB)

1:8 *overwhelming flood.* Symbolic of an invading army (see Isa 8:7-8). (CSB)

end ... darkness. In 612 B.C. that end came for Nineveh, and the darkness enveloped her. Through the ministry of Jonah, Nineveh had formerly experienced the light of God. But she later rejected it, and the result was the darkness of judgment. (CSB)

Darkness is used figuratively in the OT to characterize distress (Is 5:3), terror (Am 5:18, 20), mourning (Is 47:5), and perplexity (Jb 5:14). Nineveh will experience the terror of being pursued by God into the realm where the light of hope nowhere flickers. (TLSB)

1:9 *trouble will not rise up a second time.* God never permitted the Assyrians a second victory over the Judahites; the first was the fall of Samaria (722-721 B.C.) and of the northern kingdom (Sennacherib's invasion in 701 was not a complete victory; see 2Ki 18:13-19:37; Isa 36-37). (CSB)

Assyrians are reminded of the finality of their destruction. No second destructive blow will be necessary. (TLSB)

1:10 *drunkards as they drink.* Perhaps the line here should read: "and drenched as with their wine. (CSB)

God's enemies, the Assyrians, are defenseless in their sinful preoccupations and drunken stupor. They will be burned out of existence (Is 5:24). (TLSB)

1:11 *one who plotted evil.* Possibly the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.), the last great Assyrian emperor, whose western expeditions succeeded in subduing Egypt and to whom King Manasseh had to submit as a vassal (see 2Ch 33:11–13). (CSB)

Probably a reference to the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who invaded Judah during Hezekiah's reign (Is. 36). The "worthless counselor" plotted against the Lord, setting himself up for destruction. (TLSB)

1:12 *they.* The Assyrians, whose military power was massive. (TLSB)

I have afflicted you. God had used Assyria as the rod of his anger against his covenant-breaking people in the days of Ahaz (Isa 10:5) and again in the time of Manasseh. (CSB)

The Lord had allowed the Assyrian army to inflict suffering on Judah, but now Nahum reveals that this operation is over. (TLSB)

1:13 *I will break his yoke.* Judah was Assyria's vassal; that yoke would be broken. (CSB)

The yoke was a wooden crosspiece that fastened two animals together; figurative for oppression. (TLSB)

1:14 *you* – This is singular meaning the Assyrian king. (TLSB)

no more shall your name be perpetuated – The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) expressly requested in his annals that his name be perpetuated through inscriptions. Such self-glorification will come to a shattering end. (TLSB)

carved image...metal image – Likely the images of deities such as Ishtar, the fertility goddess worshiped in Nineveh's temples. (TLSB)

I will make your grave. God used the Babylonians, the Medes and the Scythians to dig Nineveh's grave in 612 B.C. For the fulfillment of this prophecy see Eze 32:22–23. (CSB)

you are vile – This means of little account (the Hebrew is "you are trifling"). (TLSB)

1:15 *mountains.* Of Jerusalem and Judah. (CSB)

feet of him who brings good news. This verse sets forth a principle that is applicable in several contexts of deliverance. Here the reference is to the good news of deliverance from the Assyrian threat; in Isa 52:7, deliverance from Babylonian exile; in Ro 10:15, deliverance from sin through the gospel ("good news") of Christ. (CSB)

The swift messenger who witnessed Nineveh's fall brings the good news that Judah's oppressor will no longer tyrannize or torment her. (TLSB)

who publishes peace – In its fullest OT sense of well-being under God's blessings, which shall become a reality for God's people. With minor variations, Nahum's text reads like Isa 52:7, which is later quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15. (TLSB)

keep your feasts. In the joy of your deliverance. (CSB)

Probably the three annual feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Booths (Dt 16:1-17). Athanasius says, “With alacrity (cheerful willingness, eagerness) and zeal we should come to it, so that having begun joyfully here, we may also receive an earnest of the heavenly feasts.” (TLSB)

fulfill your vows. Those you uttered in the time of distress. (CSB)

Never again shall the worthless pass through you. The Assyrian invasion in the days of Manasseh was the last. (CSB)

worthless. The same Hebrew word is also used, e.g., in 1Sa 10:27; 30:22 (“troublemakers”); 1Ki 21:10, 13 (“scoundrels”); Pr 6:12 (“scoundrel”). Later, this word (*Belial* in Hebrew) was used as a name for Satan (2Co 6:15), who is the personification of wickedness and lawlessness. (CSB)

utterly cut off. Fulfilled in 612 when Nineveh fell. (CSB)

1:2–15 Nahum foretells God’s swift and final destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. With mighty power, God executes His avenging wrath against His adversaries, who plot evil against Him and His people. As God mercifully delivered ancient Judah from Assyrian oppression, so He rescued us from sin, death, and the devil through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. • Gracious Lord, my stronghold in the day of trouble, fill me with confidence in Your power to save. Amen. (TLSB)