

Nahum's Final Warning to Nineveh

Nahum 1:1 – 3:19

Nahum the Elkoshite

Nahum 1:1

Nahum 1:¹ The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.¹

By the time Nahum presented this prophecy, the Northern Kingdom had been in exile for many years. In fact, Nahum could have been born in exile after the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722 BC because the Scripture says he was an Elkoshite. Elkosh was a village in Assyria located on the Tigris River. Nahum, an Israelite, lived in exile there and his prophecy took place before Nineveh's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 612 BC. Jonah had prophesied to Nineveh some time before 763 BC and, because his warning was heeded by the people, including the king, God did not bring judgment on the city at that time. Nahum's warning was not heard and the capital city was totally destroyed after his delivery of the Lord's message.

Nineveh had been around since the days of Nimrod, the great grandson of Noah. Within 100 years after the flood, Nimrod became the leader of Noah's family even though Noah was still alive. Nimrod led the family down the Tigris River from their original village established at the foothills of the mountains of Ararat to establish the city of Nineveh and seven other villages as recorded in Genesis 10:8-13. The flood occurred in 2507 BC and Nineveh was founded before 2406 BC. It was during that time that Nimrod made an attempt to build a tower to heaven in Babel, another of his cities. Nineveh survived for 1743 years before its destruction which was foretold in Nahum's message. One hundred and sixty two years later, Zephaniah prophesied that it would be rebuilt and so it has been. The city of Mosul, Iraq, with its suburbs, virtually encompasses the ruins of Nineveh now. Although it is not called Nineveh by name, the mere fact that the area has once again been populated fulfills the prophecy. Zephaniah also prophesied that it would be a great capital city once again, but that prophecy is still to be fulfilled.

Nahum's speech to Nineveh was the result of a vision given to him by the Lord, but when he delivered it, it was not heeded by the people. Nineveh had forgotten the Lord and His compassion shown to them when Jonah was there. Several generations had passed since Jonah's visit and the Ninevites were once again as wicked and brutal as their predecessors. The Lord God had had enough of their mistreatment of His people and her end was near if she did not change. She did not change.

Nahum's message contains three distinct sections. The first details a promise from God to rescue Judah and Israel from all their enemies. The second warns of Nineveh's overthrow and the third covers her destruction. Each of these sections can be broken down into specific parts.

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God's Vengeance against Enemies

Nahum 1:2-8

Nahum 1:² A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the *guilty* unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet. ⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon wither. ⁵ Mountains quake because of Him and the hills dissolve; indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, the world and all the inhabitants in it. ⁶ Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him. ⁷ The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.

Jealous, avenging and wrathful are the words used to describe the nature of the Lord's vengeance on His enemies. They are reserved exclusively for His enemies. However, His own people often become weary because He can be slow to bring vengeance on His enemies. So it was with Jonah who ran from the presence of the Lord because he knew that He would relent and have compassion on His enemies when they repented. Because His enemies became His own, they would not experience his vengeance. That is why even though He has the great power to consume them all, He is slow to anger. He may be slow to avenge according to our concept of time, but we can be assured that He will ultimately deliver His jealous, avenging wrath upon all His enemies.

When the Lord has had enough, He comes quickly. Ezekiel saw Him coming like a whirlwind in his vision and so He will someday come with the dust storm stirring at His feet with complete power over the seas and rivers. Everything from the cedars of Lebanon near the Mediterranean Sea to Bashan, miles past the eastern edge of the Sea of Galilee, down to Carmel in Southern Israel will wither at His coming.² The mountains will crumble and the hills dissolve while the earth upheaves at His presence. When His wrath pours out like fire, all the enemy inhabitants of the world will be destroyed. Yet, through it all, the Lord remains good. His vengeance will bring goodness for His people when He totally destroys His enemies who are also the enemies of His people. When will all this take place? Not with Nineveh. She is more than 600 miles away from Lebanon, Bashan and Carmel. This vision must be speaking of the Day of the Lord when He will destroy His enemies at Armageddon.

A Complete End

Nahum 1:9-15

Nahum 1:⁹ Whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it. Distress will not rise up twice. ¹⁰ Like tangled thorns, and like those who are drunken with their drink, They are consumed As stubble completely withered. ¹¹ From you has gone forth one who plotted evil against the Lord, A wicked counselor. ¹² Thus says the Lord, "Though they are at full *strength* and likewise many, Even so, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer. ¹³ "So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you, and I will tear off your shackles." ¹⁴

² Carmel in Southern Israel, not Mt. Carmel in Northern Israel where Elijah battled the 850 prophets that ate at the table of Jezebel every meal.

The Lord has issued a command concerning you: "Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible."¹⁵ Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely.

Those who plot against the Lord will not survive his vengeance against them. Try as they might to prepare to fight against Him and do harm to His people, they will not succeed. The Jewish people who belong to the Lord will be redeemed on the Day of the Lord and the wicked will be cut off completely. The names of all the evil ones will never again be remembered once the feet of the Lord touch the Mount of Olives and the peace of Jerusalem spreads to the entire world.

Judah Scattered

Nahum 2:1-2

Nahum 2:¹ The one who scatters has come up against you. Man the fortress, watch the road; strengthen your back, summon all *your* strength. ² For the Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob Like the splendor of Israel, Even though devastators have devastated them and destroyed their vine branches.

Israel had already been scattered by Assyria back in 722 BC. The Northern Kingdom was in exile and the Assyrian people had inhabited the land to intermarry with those left behind. But Nineveh was destroyed by a new empire which, at the time of Nahum's vision, had set its sights on conquering Judah. It occurred in 606 BC when the Southern Kingdom was taken into exile. Still, Nahum's prophecy gives hope to the nation of Israel that God will restore her splendor. However, she will have to wait for the fulfillment of that part of the vision until the last days after Armageddon occur.

The Coming Army

Nahum 2:3-13

Nahum 2:³ The shields of his mighty men are *colored* red, the warriors are dressed in scarlet, the chariots are *enveloped* in flashing steel when he is prepared to *march*, and the cypress *spears* are brandished. ⁴ The chariots race madly in the streets, they rush wildly in the squares, their appearance is like torches, they dash to and fro like lightning flashes. ⁵ He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their march, they hurry to her wall, and the mantelet is set up. ⁶ The gates of the rivers are opened and the palace is dissolved. ⁷ It is fixed: She is stripped, she is carried away, and her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves, beating on their breasts. ⁸ Though Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days, Now they are fleeing; "Stop, stop," But no one turns back. ⁹ Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! For there is no limit to the treasure— wealth from every kind of desirable object. ¹⁰ She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste! Hearts are melting and knees knocking! Also anguish is in the whole body and all their faces are grown pale! ¹¹ Where is the den of the lions And the feeding place of the young lions, Where the lion, lioness and lion's cub prowled, with nothing to disturb *them*? ¹² The lion tore enough for his cubs, killed enough for his lionesses, and filled his lairs with prey and his dens with torn flesh. ¹³ "Behold, I am against you," declares the Lord of hosts. "I will burn up her chariots in smoke, a sword will devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the land, and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard."

In his vision, Nahum saw the army of Nebuchadnezzar that would destroy Nineveh before it turned on Judah. Red shields, scarlet uniforms, steel chariots and cypress spears arm the warriors for battle. When they rush on the city, it is destroyed while the women moan and beat their breasts in dismay. Nineveh may have been a great city, but no longer will that be the case. The great Assyrian Empire, whose mascot was the lion with wings, was destroyed just as predicted in Nahum's vision. Old and young were destroyed as well as its voice in the world and its destruction had been designed by the Lord.

The Coming Ruin

Nahum 3:1-7

Nahum 3:¹ Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; *her* prey never departs. ² The noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of the wheel, Galloping horses and bounding chariots! ³ Horsemen charging, Swords flashing, spears gleaming, Many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies— They stumble over the dead bodies! ⁴ All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, the charming one, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations by her harlotries and families by her sorceries. ⁵ "Behold, I am against you," declares the Lord of hosts; "And I will lift up your skirts over your face, and show to the nations your nakedness and to the kingdoms your disgrace. ⁶ "I will throw filth on you and make you vile, And set you up as a spectacle. ⁷ "And it will come about that all who see you Will shrink from you and say, 'Nineveh is devastated! Who will grieve for her?' Where will I seek comforters for you?"

By the time of Nineveh's destruction, she had committed many hideous crimes against God and His creation. Nahum saw her destruction and described it in detail. Yes, she was a bloody and brutal city; therefore, her end was bloody and brutal. Yes, she had battled against many nations with her whips, chariots and horses; thus, her end was accomplished with the same instruments of war. Yes, she seduced other nations, causing them to play the harlot with her, so Nineveh was stripped naked before the world. The vile nation was covered with vile filth. She would lie in ruins for hundreds of years.

Thebes no Better

Nahum 3:8-15^a

Nahum 3:⁸ Are you better than No-amon, which was situated by the waters of the Nile, with water surrounding her, whose rampart was the sea, whose wall consisted of the sea? ⁹ Ethiopia was *her* might, And Egypt too, without limits. Put and Lubim were among her helpers. ¹⁰ Yet she became an exile, she went into captivity; also her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street; they cast lots for her honorable men, And all her great men were bound with fetters. ¹¹ You too will become drunk, you will be hidden. You too will search for a refuge from the enemy. ¹² All your fortifications are fig trees with ripe fruit— when shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth. ¹³ Behold, your people are women in your midst! The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies; Fire consumes your gate bars. ¹⁴ Draw for yourself water for the siege! Strengthen your fortifications! Go into the clay and tread the mortar! Take hold of the brick mold! ^{15a} There fire will consume you, the sword will cut you down; It will consume you as the locust does.

The city of No-Amon, later called Thebes, was situated on the delta of the Nile River. It had been destroyed by the Assyrians 51 years earlier the same way Nineveh was destroyed by

the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC.³ Although Egypt supported Thebes as well as Ethiopia, Put (Cyrene) and Lubim (Libya), it could not save her in her day of destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. So too, Nineveh could not be saved. As prophesied, it was consumed just as locusts and grasshoppers consume everything in their paths.

Nineveh is Ready

Nahum 3:15^b-19

Nahum 3:^{15b} Multiply yourself like the creeping locust, multiply yourself like the swarming locust. ¹⁶ You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven—the creeping locust strips and flies away. ¹⁷ Your guardsmen are like the swarming locust. Your marshals are like hordes of grasshoppers settling in the stone walls on a cold day. The sun rises and they flee, and the place where they are is not known. ¹⁸ Your shepherds are sleeping, O king of Assyria; your nobles are lying down. Your people are scattered on the mountains and there is no one to regather *them*. ¹⁹ There is no relief for your breakdown, your wound is incurable. All who hear about you will clap *their* hands over you, for on whom has not your evil passed continually?

The end of Nahum's vision sees Nineveh armed and ready to protect herself from all opponents. When she repented over 110 years before with Jonah's message, the city contained 120,000 people. By the time of Nahum, they had multiplied like creeping and swarming locust as numerous as the stars of the heavens. All the soldiers were lazy and all the nobles were virtually asleep in their leadership positions. Nineveh's people were scattered about the countryside with no fear of any enemy. They were a bloody brutal people and they had a false sense of superiority. She was so big that no one could rally her together in the coming time of destruction. She had mistreated everyone she knew with evil, but that was about to come to an end. How could an army defeat her? How big would the army have to be to destroy her? She loosely controlled the Medes and the Babylonians, failing to realize their combined size more than tripled her size. They were big enough to destroy Nineveh however large she was in 612 BC. By 609 BC, the entire Assyrian Empire belonged to the new Babylonian Empire headed by Nebuchadnezzar. By 605 BC, the Southern Kingdom was under his control as well as Egypt and most of the African continent. Why was Nineveh destroyed? It was because she had become God's enemy and she would not repent.

³ Thebes was destroyed several times. The Assyrians destroyed it in 663 BC.