

Outline of Nahum

This overview and outline of Nahum is intended to assist you as you study the Bible — God's letter to you.

Nahum joins Jonah in being concerned primarily with the city of Nineveh. Where Jonah prophesied around 760 B.C. that Nineveh would be destroyed, only to see it marvelously converted, Nahum prophesied 100 years later of its destruction in some detail. The background for Nahum's prophesy probably is based upon the role Assyria played in this area of the world. From Assyrian records, it appears that Judah, during the time of Manasseh, was little more than a vassal state. We know from 2 Chronicles 33:11 that the LORD brought the Assyrians to Jerusalem to capture Manasseh. They put a hook in his nose, bound him with chains, and carried him off to Babylon. Perhaps during this time, or immediately after Manasseh's return, Nahum prophesied against Nineveh.

Nineveh was evil. Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) stated:

I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. . . . The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire . . .

(Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, 1:148)

One leader was said to have been flayed, his skin spread upon the wall of the city. Shalmaneser II (859-824) said:

A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames.

(ibid., 1:213)

Sennacherib (705-681) wrote:

I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives as one cuts a string. Like the many waters of a storm I made the contents of their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth.

(ibid., 2:127)

Ashurbanipal (669-626) tells of piercing the jaw of a captured leader with his dagger and passing a rope through the opening and putting a dog chain upon him, making him occupy a kennel. Against Egypt, Ashurbanipal hung Egyptian corpses on stakes and stripped off their skins and covered the city walls. Esharhadon (681-669) stated:

I am powerful, I am all powerful, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal, I am honored, I am magnified, I am without equal among all kings.

(ibid., 2:226)

At the time of Nahum's prophecy, Nineveh ruled the world, from Lybia and Ethiopia to Babylon and beyond.

Nineveh was a huge place. Sennacherib's southern palace covered five acres, with 71 rooms. There were some 9,880 feet of sculptured reliefs in the rooms, depicting victories, including the capture of Lachish, a Judean city. Eight miles of walls enclosed the city, with 15 gates. A thirty-mile long aqueduct watered the city. Ashurbanipal built a huge northern palace, with a library of more than 20,000 tablets. There were parks, a botanical garden and a zoo. It was well fortified. The inner wall was 100 feet tall and 50 feet thick. The towers on the wall were 200 feet tall. It had a 150 foot wide moat. On its most vulnerable side, an enemy would face first a huge wall strengthened by detached forts, then two deep ditches and two more walls. The distance from the inside of the inner wall to the inside of the outer wall was 2,007 feet. For all purposes, it was impenetrable.

Cruel, powerful, protected, Nineveh was the strength of the world. But God does not look at strength. In fact, God taunted Nineveh.

Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks!

2:1

Draw your water for the siege! Fortify your strongholds! Go into the clay and tread the mortar! Make strong the brick kiln!

3:14

It's like God was saying, "Make yourself as strong as possible, because it makes absolutely no difference to me. I will destroy you and that's that."

Within 50 years of Nahum's prophecy, it was all fulfilled. The city fell to the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians in August 612 B.C. This was less than three years after the siege of Nineveh began, an incredibly short time for the siege of such a major city. In the third year, heavy rains brought a flood which broke down part of the walls. This allowed the Babylonians to enter the city and destroy it. According to some reports, the king of Nineveh, in seeing that walls were breached, ordered the city burned.

So total was the destruction that 200 years later, when Xenophon led the 10,000 Greek mercenaries on a 1,500 mile journey home from hostile Persia, he thought that the place was the ruin of a Parthian city. Less than 300 years after its fall, Alexander the Great fought a battle near there and never knew a city had been there. The city was lost to everyone and became something of a fairy tale until it was rediscovered in 1846. It's extensive library has been a treasure to archaeologists.

Date:

663 and 654 B.C. The prophecy was after the fall of Thebes (No Amon in 3:8) in 663 B.C. and before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Most likely, the prophecy occurred before the rebuilding of Thebes in 654 B.C. This would place Nahum as a prophet most likely during the repentant period of king Manasseh's reign (697-642 B.C.).

The book is divided into three chapters, although the precise chapter breaks may vary. We may outline it as follows:

I. The Person of God and Nineveh (this section teaches us much about God) chapter 1:1-14

- A. God is jealous 1:2
- B. God avenges 1:2
- C. The LORD is slow to anger 1:3
- D. The LORD is great in power 1:3
- E. The LORD will not let the wicked off 1:3
- F. The LORD controls nature 1:3-6
- G. The LORD is good 1:7
- H. The LORD protects those who trust in Him 1:7
- I. The LORD will utterly destroy His enemies 1:8
- J. It is futile to conspire against the LORD 1:9
- K. The LORD has commanded that Nineveh shall be no more 1:14

II. The Peace of God and Nineveh 1:15-2:12

- A. This section is based upon Judah's peace (a quote from Isaiah 52:7). God will restore Jacob 2:2
- B. The desperate actions of one who is besieged. But it is no good 2:3-6
- C. It will happen – God states that Nineveh will be destroyed 7
- D. the defeated city 2:8-12

III. The Purpose of God and Nineveh 2:13-3:19

- A. A bloody city 3:1
 - B. A lying city 3:1 (When Sennacherib came against Judah, Hezekiah paid a tribute of 22,500 pounds of silver and 2,250 pounds of gold to get Sennacherib to leave. But Sennacherib did not honor his word but rather sent Rabshakeh against Jerusalem to take the city)
 - C. A robbing city 3:1
 - D. A ruthless city 3:1-2
 - E. A sexually immoral city 3:4
 - F. A city given to sorceries 3:4
 - G. God's consequences
 - 1. Expose her 3:5
 - 2. Cast filth on her 3:6
 - 3. Make her vile 3:6
 - H. Her destruction is terrible
 - 1. Fire will devour her 3:15
 - 2. Swords will cut her off 3:15
 - 3. She will be eaten as a locust 3:15-17
 - 4. She will be scattered 3:18
 - 5. There is no healing of her wound 3:19
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Key Idea: Violence and oppression will not go unpunished

Key Passage: 1:7

Key Lesson: Don't live under God's wrath.