

# Nahum

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power,  
And will not at all acquit the wicked (Nahum 1:3)

What benefit is there in hearing about the judgment of the wicked? Apparently there is some, for the Holy Spirit saw fit to include Nahum, a book about the judgment of wicked Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. God had shown compassion on this Gentile power when He had sent Jonah to them one hundred years earlier, ca. 750 B.C., with a message of judgment with a view to their repentance. Though they responded, the positive effects were short lived. Now there was no more compassion, only the expectation of righteous retribution. However, that also was to have positive meaning for the surrounding nations, especially Judah, since it demonstrated that there was a just and holy God ruling over the nations and that He would not let wickedness go unpunished in the end. In this there was comfort and so Nahum (“Comfort”) delivered the oracle of his vision against Nineveh.

## Authorship

Little can be determined about the man named as author of this oracle. Nahum means “comfort” or “consolation.” His hometown was Elkosh but the location is uncertain.

## Date

Since Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was destroyed in 612 B.C. Nahum’s vision and oracle had to be earlier than that. The mention of the destruction of Thebes in 3:8-10 places the book after 663 B.C. Assyria’s power began to wane ca. 626 B.C. and since the depiction here is one of strength a date before then is logical. A mid-seventh century B.C. date is reasonable, ca. 650-640 B.C.<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Setting

Assyria had a long history of Middle-Eastern dominance and had been God’s agent of judgment against Samaria in 722 B.C. Judah experienced Assyrian destruction in incursions that ended just outside the gates of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. The Assyrians would dominate for another eighty years and then grasp at power until decisively defeated in 605 B.C. by the Babylonians. However, its capital, Niniveh, was destroyed in 612 B.C. in fulfillment of Nahum’s prediction.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 795-6.

### Original Readers / Occasion

Though the message is directed to the Ninevites throughout the book, it was probably intended as an encouragement to Judah. She had witnessed the destruction of her “sister” Israel by the Assyrians and had herself experienced affliction by this cruel empire. Nineveh’s demise would demonstrate God’s sovereignty and power over the nations if it were known that He had long before predicted their overthrow.

### Theme Statement

Consolation is to be taken when the wicked are judged because it shows that a holy and just God is ruling over all the nations of the earth and that He will eventually work righteous retribution to those deserving it.

### Outline

- I. Introduction: Nahum’s oracle against Nineveh which he saw. ....1:1
- II. Nineveh’s destruction is declared by Yahweh as an act of righteous vengeance.....1:2-15
  - A. Yahweh’s character demands Nineveh’s destruction. ....1:2-8
    - 1. He is just to exact vengeance upon His enemies. ....1:2
    - 2. He is slow to anger yet powerful in His wrath. ....1:3-6
    - 3. He is good to those who trust Him but will destroy His enemies. .1:7-8
  - B. Nineveh’s performance warrants its destruction.....1:9-14
    - 1. It had conspired against Yahweh. ....1:9-11
    - 2. It had put others under a yoke. ....1:12-13
    - 3. It was full of vile idolatry. ....1:14
  - C. Yahweh’s compassion for Judah motivated Nineveh’s judgment. ....1:15
- III. Nineveh’s destruction is described in its striking finality.....2:1-13
  - A. The purpose of judgment involved the restoration of Israel. ....2:1-2
  - B. The depiction of judgment anticipates the city’s fall. ....2:3-12
  - C. The destruction from Yahweh will be final. ....2:13
- IV. Nineveh’s destruction is justified by Assyria’s record in history. ....3:1-19
  - A. It had become prosperous by means of bloodshed.....3:1-7
  - B. It had brutalized conquered peoples.....3:8-11
  - C. It had inflicted wickedness on others continually. ....3:12-19

### Theme Development

Nahum divides naturally into three movements. First, Nineveh’s coming judgment is anchored in God’s character as well as the nation’s performance (1:2-15); second, Nineveh’s destruction is described (2:1-13); and finally its destruction is justified (3:1-19).

I. Introduction: Nahum’s oracle against Nineveh which he saw (1:1).

Nahum, whose name means “comfort” or “consolation” delivers his oracle against the capital of the Assyrian empire, a cruel, vicious people who had dominated the world for a century. There is consolation to be had in knowing that eventually God does punish the wicked.

II. Nineveh’s destruction is declared by Yahweh as an act of righteous vengeance (1:2-15).

The first section is as much a discourse on the character of God who judges as on Nineveh’s deserved end. He is a just and holy God who takes vengeance on His enemies (1:2) though not hastily nor capriciously (1:3). To those who trust Him he is a “stronghold in the day of trouble;” but to the wicked he sends forth the fire of His indignation (1:6-7). The character of God sets the objective standard for judgment, whom Nineveh had grievously offended (1:9-14). At the heart of Assyria’s sin is their rebellion against Yahweh (1:9-11). On the other hand Judah had been the object of Yahweh’s grace and was thereby encouraged to maintain that perspective by worship and remembrance (1:15). God will always avenge His covenant people; however, they remain responsible to live in faithfulness to that covenant ideal.

III. Nineveh’s destruction is described in its striking finality (2:1-13).

The actual description of Nineveh’s impending fall is again related to God’s ultimate purpose for and promised restoration of the covenant nation (1:1-2). There is a plan to history and Israel is at its center. Next, in extremely vivid and picturesque language the prophet depicts the fall from beginning to end (2:3-12). This poetic description accurately portrays the actual events surrounding Nineveh’s demise in 612 B.C. Nineveh’s destruction will be final (1:13); once again history confirms the striking finality of their demise.

IV. Nineveh’s destruction is justified by Assyria’s record in history (3:1-19).

The final section reviews the justification for such treatment of this people, lest someone think it too harsh. Nineveh’s material prosperity and the greatness of her influence had come through continual bloodshed (3:1-7) and had been accompanied by regular and planned brutality (3:8-11). Assyria’s brutal destruction of the Egyptian city of Thebes (“No Amon”—3:8) would be returned in kind. Nineveh’s destruction would be complete and final because of her continual and pervasive wickedness to conquered peoples (3:12-19). Nothing that they did would in any way forestall what the Lord had purposed in His righteous judgment.

## Conclusion

Judgment is never a pleasant thing, even to hear about; and Nineveh's destruction was to be an awful thing to behold. However, Assyria had been blessed with the ministry of another prophet earlier in her history (Jonah) and had squandered the grace and compassion extended to them by Yahweh. For this reason comfort was to be taken from the assurance that God the Judge was ruling the nations in His holiness and would mete out just recompense when the situation was warranted. Nineveh's certainly was.

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