

Nahum:1
December 13, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are beginning a new study, Nahum. Nahum is a prophet whose target audience is the Ninevites. Nineveh was the capital and the largest city of Assyria. It became one of the mightiest cities on earth with walls 100' high. Outside of the walls were easily 200 towers that stood 100' higher than the top of the wall that went around the city. Nineveh also had a moat that was 150' wide and 60' deep. They were formidable. Any outsider looking in would say that it was impenetrable. They were known to be violent, brutal, idolatrous, and oppressive to others.

The first encounter the Ninevites had with God was through Jonah, approximately 100 years earlier than Nahum's time. Think of Nahum like a sequel to Jonah, separated by 100 years. In Jonah's day (c. 760 BC), the Assyrian cruelty was legendary. There are graphic accounts of their cruel treatment of captives found in ancient Assyrian records. They had a terrible reputation as ruthless warriors, burning and destroying, raping and pillaging, killing the children and sparing no one. Israel feared them. God asked Jonah to preach to these Ninevites, and as you know, he didn't want to because he didn't think the Ninevites deserved God's mercy. Preaching a message of repentance and giving them a chance to get right with God was like assisting Israel's enemy! He couldn't handle the idea that God would extend to these cruel Assyrians would be spared by a compassionate God of Israel. Jonah didn't want any part of that and expressed that through his disobedience! Of course, God wasn't putting up with Jonah's disobedience, so He "helped" Jonah realize that God meant business. So Jonah ends up preaching words of the judgment to come to the Ninevites, and they take it to heart and repent and fast. God, in His mercy, "relented from the disaster that was headed their way."

Transition: Now fast forward 100 years (c. 660 BC). Since the Ninevites remarkable revival in Jonah's day, the people of Nineveh had gravitated back to their defiant, immoral ways. They returned to their habits of violence, idolatry, and arrogance. Nahum's job was to prophecy God's retribution upon the Nineveh because of its wickedness. God will delay no longer, and Assyria will be destroyed for its cruelty toward the nations and its arrogance toward God. Let's begin and learn about God's character and general principles of divine judgment.

BOOK:

1 An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

The Lord's Anger Against Nineveh

- 2** The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.
The LORD takes vengeance on his foes
and maintains his wrath against his enemies.
- 3** The LORD is slow to anger and great in power;
the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.
His way is in the whirlwind and the storm,

- and clouds are the dust of his feet.
4 He rebukes the sea and dries it up;
he makes all the rivers run dry.
Bashan and Carmel wither
and the blossoms of Lebanon fade.
5 The mountains quake before him
and the hills melt away.
The earth trembles at his presence,
the world and all who live in it.
6 Who can withstand his indignation?
Who can endure his fierce anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire;
the rocks are shattered before him.
- 7 The LORD is good,
a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him,
8 but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh;
he will pursue his foes into darkness.
- 9 Whatever they plot against the LORD
He will bring to an end;
trouble will not come a second time.
10 They will be entangled among thorns
and drunk from their wine;
they will be consumed like dry stubble.
11 From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth
who plots evil against the LORD
and counsels wickedness.
- 12 This is what the LORD says:
“Although they have allies and are numerous,
they will be cut off and pass away.
Although I have afflicted you, O Judah,
I will afflict you no more.
13 Now I will break their yoke from your neck
and tear your shackles away.”
- 14 The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh:
“You will have no descendants to bear your name.
I will destroy the carved images and cast idols
that are in the temple of your gods.
I will prepare your grave,
for you are vile.”
- 15 Look, there on the mountains,
the feet of one who brings good news,

who proclaims peace!
Celebrate your festivals, O Judah,
and fulfill your vows.
No more will the wicked invade you;
they will be completely destroyed.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage] Q: Why do you think people tend to minimize or underestimate God's wrath as part of His character?

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about God in this passage? [Let people engage]

There are two sides to the character of God, two sides which are perfectly consistent and harmonious. At times He shows Himself most gentle and compassionate, ready to pardon wrongdoing, willing to restore the sinner to His own fellowship and favor. At other times He is stern in His justice, inflicting punishment upon evil, visiting the crimes of men with the tribulation and anguish which are their due. There is no contradiction between these perfections of God. He is stable, consistent, and immutable.

LOOK:

God makes two wonderful promises to His people in this chapter. In 1:7, He assures them of His goodness and tells them they will be safe so long as they trust in Him. In 1:12, He assures them that He will not afflict them again with the Assyrian armies the way Israel had been afflicted before. No matter what the difficulties may be, we can trust God to care for us and see us through.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Na)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Imagine how happy the people of Judah were when they heard: “Nineveh has fallen! The Assyrian empire is no more!” (cf. 1:15) Assyria was a ruthless enemy that practiced brutality on men, women, and children. Their armies destroyed and looted; they buried their enemies alive and even skinned them alive; they impaled people on sharp poles and left them to burn in the sun. Assyria had been used of God to chasten the Northern Kingdom of Israel; that happened in 721 B.C. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians tried to conquer Judah, but God intervened and destroyed their army (Isa. 36–37). Still, Assyria was always the scourge of the nations; every nation feared her and tried to win her approval. Finally, in 612 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed by the Medes and the Babylonians; and so complete was their conquest that the ruins of the city remained undiscovered until 1842.

It was concerning this future destruction of Nineveh that Nahum wrote. He wrote this little book at a time when Assyria was at the very peak of her power. Nobody would have dreamed that mighty Nineveh would fall, but God knows the future and He gave His message to Nahum to deliver to the frightened people of Judah. This was not a message of warning to Nineveh; they had heard God's warning from Jonah a century and a half before. No, there was no hope for Nineveh; God's patience had run out and His judgment would fall. Rather, this was a message of hope for Judah, to encourage them to trust God at an hour of great danger. Each of the three chapters tells us something about God and also about the fall of the city.

I. God Is Jealous: Nineveh Will Fall (1)

The word “jealous” when applied to God does not suggest envy or selfishness. It carries the idea of being zealous for His glory and for His holiness. He burns with hatred against sin even though He loves the sinner. Just as a husband is jealous over his wife and therefore protects her, so God is jealous over His people and His law, and therefore must act in holiness and justice. He is slow to anger; in fact, He gave Nineveh 150 years of mercy. But they had gone too far in their brutality and violence, and God had to judge them.

Does God have the power to judge? Of course He does. Look at His power in nature (vv. 3–6), in winds and storms, in rains and droughts, on land and sea. Who can stand before His power? Nations today seem to forget the power of Almighty God. They act as though there is no God. But you can be sure that the day of judgment will come, and in that day no nation will be able to escape.

In vv. 8–13, Nahum describes the fall of the city with two pictures: a great flood of waters that sweeps everything away; and a fire of dry thorns that burns like stubble. It is interesting to note that Nineveh did fall because of a flood of waters. The Medes and Babylonians besieged the city for many months and made little headway. Then the rainy season came and the two rivers next to Nineveh began to rise. One historian says that the Medes broke one of the dams on the river. But in any case, the swelling waters beat against the thick walls of Nineveh and broke them down. The city was literally destroyed by the flood; see also Nahum 2:6. God does not need armies; He can use tiny raindrops!

God makes two wonderful promises to His people in this chapter. In 1:7, He assures them of His goodness and tells them they will be safe so long as they trust in Him. In 1:12, He assures

them that He will not afflict them again with the Assyrian armies the way Israel had been afflicted before. No matter what the difficulties may be, we can trust God to care for us and see us through.

Johnson, E. E. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1497-1499) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. The Title (1:1)

1:1. The book was **an oracle** against **Nineveh**. As an oracle it was a burden (*maśśā'*; see comments on Isa. 13:1 and those prior to Zech. 9:1), a threatening message about Nineveh's doom. It was a **vision** (*hāzōn*), that is, a message which the prophet "saw" mentally and spiritually (cf. Isa. 1:1; Obad. 1; Micah 1:1; Zech. 1:8). On **Nahum the Elkoshite** see "The Prophet Nahum" in the *Introduction*.

II. The Certainty of God's Judgment on Nineveh (1:2–15)

Nahum wrote that Nineveh's end would certainly come. Because Nineveh had plotted against the Lord (vv. 9–11) she would receive His wrath (vv. 2–6, 8). Yet God remains a refuge for those who trust Him (v. 7). Nineveh's destruction would comfort Judah who had been afflicted by the Assyrian threat (vv. 12–15).

A. *God's wrath to be extended to Nineveh and His goodness to His own (1:2–8)*

1:2. **The LORD** is righteous in relation to His covenant people and in relation to her wicked oppressors. As a righteous God, He is **jealous**, that is, zealous to protect what belongs to Him (see comments on Deut. 6:15; cf. Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 32:16, 21), namely, Judah. He will allow no rivals. He is also an **avenging God**. This fact is strongly emphasized, for the word *nōqēm* ("avenging") occurs three times in this verse (twice trans. **takes vengeance**). God said, "It is Mine to avenge" and "I will take vengeance on My adversaries and repay those who hate Me" (Deut. 32:35, 41). God avenges His people in the sense that He champions their cause against their enemies. He does so because He is jealous or protective of His people. While God is avenging *for* or on behalf of His people, He is avenging **against** His adversaries. Judah's enemies were **His enemies**. He **is filled with wrath** (lit., "He is baal [i.e., master] of fury"). *Hēmâh*, related to the verb meaning "to be hot," speaks of God's burning rage or intense fury against sin.

1:3a. Though God takes vengeance on His enemies, He **is slow to anger** (lit., "long of anger"), that is, He withholds His judgment for a long time (cf. Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). Such "length of anger" accounts for the apparent delay, from Judah's perspective, which allowed Assyria to act in such lustful freedom. But this does not suggest that God is weak. He is long-suffering and patient (2 Peter 3:9) because of His desire that people repent. This was exhibited in His sending Jonah to Nineveh, about 100 years before Nahum prophesied.

Also **the LORD** is **great in power**. Though He may prolong His mercy, His omnipotence remains. The word for power is *kōah*, which suggests the ability to endure or the capacity to produce, and from there comes the idea of the ability to cope with situations (e.g., Deut. 8:17–

18). That ability is seen in God's acts of judgment. For, the prophet added, **He will not leave the guilty unpunished** (cf. Num. 14:18). He would serve as the Ninevites' Judge because of their guilt. He would not treat them as if they were innocent. Though the Ninevites had repented under Jonah's preaching, the city had gone into iniquity again, and therefore would not escape His wrath.

1:3b–5. The greatness of God's power (v. 3a) is evident in His control over nature. Because He is powerful over inanimate nature, He certainly would be able to cope with and judge Nineveh. He causes **the whirlwind and the threatening storm** (cf. Job 9:17a), two awesome and often destructive forces of nature. In His dealings with Nineveh, He would be as destructive as a devastating whirlwind and storm. He is so great that the **clouds are like dust under His feet** (cf. 2 Sam. 22:10; Ps. 18:9). "His strides cover the vast areas of extenuated clouds. His movements are marked by the darkening of the heavens as the whirlwind sweeps and the tempest howls" (Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary*, pp. 158–9).

In His power He merely speaks (**rebukes**) **the sea, and the rivers ... dry up**. This refers to His delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage (cf. Ex. 14:21; Pss. 66:6; 106:9; Isa. 50:2; 51:10; also note Ps. 18:15). Since He could defeat Egypt in that way, certainly He is powerful enough to destroy Nineveh. **Bashan**, a region east of the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee), **Carmel**, a mountain range near present-day Haifa, and **Lebanon**, north of Israel, were fertile areas (cf. Isa. 33:9; also note Carmel in Amos 1:2 and Bashan in Micah 7:14). God's ability to dry up verdant areas shows He could judge Nineveh. Even **the mountains**, symbolic of stability, shake under His power, as did Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18) and **the hills melt** (cf. Micah 1:4). Even the entire **earth** and its people, including the Ninevites, will tremble before His awesome power.

1:6. The two rhetorical questions (**Who can withstand ...? Who can endure ...?**) forcefully affirm that no one can stand before the Lord, angered by man's wickedness. Sennacherib's field commander (2 Kings 18:17) had challenged Hezekiah with the questions, "Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" (2 Kings 18:35) Assyria was soon to learn that *God*, not Assyria, has the last word! **Indignation** translates *za'am*, which means to be enraged like foam on water. Two synonyms of indignation were already used (**anger** in Nahum 1:3 and **wrath**, *hēmâh*, in v. 2). God's wrath is destructive and devastating **like fire**. When He comes in judgment even **the rocks shatter before Him** (cf. 1 Kings 19:11).

1:7–8. Though **the LORD** is wrathful and powerful against those who oppose Him, **He is good** (cf. Ex. 34:6; Pss. 106:1; 107:1; 136:1; Jer. 33:11) to **those who trust in Him**. He is good in the sense that He is faithful and merciful, protecting (**a refuge in times of trouble**), helpful, and caring. The Hebrew word for "refuge" is *mā'ôz*. Translated "stronghold" in Psalms 27:1; 37:39; 43:2; 52:7, it means a strong, fortified place. The people of Nineveh thought they were safe in their fortifications, but their security was short-lived compared with the comfort and safety God provides for His people.

On the other hand, God's enemies will experience His judgment. By **an overwhelming flood** God would **make an end** (cf. Nahum 1:9) **of Nineveh**. "Nineveh" is literally, "its site" (cf. "the place," KJV), but Nineveh is clearly intended. ("Nineveh" is also supplied in vv. 11, 14; 2:1.) This reference to a flood could suggest figuratively an unrestrained army invasion (cf. Isa. 8:7–8; Jer. 47:2; Dan. 9:26; 11:40). Or it may refer to a literal destruction by water, the Tigris and Khosr rivers overflowing and destroying part of the city walls (cf. Nahum 2:6, 8; see the chart "Fulfillments of Nahum's Prophecies," in the *Introduction*).

Nahum added that God **will pursue His foes into darkness**. Darkness symbolizes the spiritual condition of persons without God, their defeat, and ultimately eternal judgment (Job 17:13; Pss. 82:5; 88:12; Prov. 4:19; 20:20; Isa. 8:22; 42:7; Jer. 23:12; Matt. 4:16; 8:12; John 3:19; Col. 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9; Jude 6; Rev. 16:10).

B. Nineveh's plotting against the Lord to come to an end (1:9–11)

In affirming Nineveh's end, Nahum made a forthright prediction about Nineveh (vv. 9–10), a promise to Judah (vv. 12–13), a command and prediction to Nineveh (v. 14), and a call to Judah (v. 15).

1:9. Though Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had failed in his attempt to destroy Jerusalem, the Ninevites continued to **plot** ways to overcome the city. In plotting evil or calamity against His people they were actually plotting **against the LORD** (cf. v. 11). But their schemes would fail for God would keep those plans from being carried out (cf. **end** in v. 8). Assyria in fact never got a second chance to attack Jerusalem; just as God said, **trouble** to the holy city did **not come** from Assyria **a second time**. Any challenge to the Lord's declaration about Nineveh's end (cf. v. 8) would be thwarted.

1:10–11. Nineveh's being **entangled among thorns** has been interpreted in various ways: (a) the thorns symbolize wicked enemies, as in Ezekiel 2:6, but this does not fit; (b) the thorns (i.e., thornbushes) refer to the habitat of lions, but nothing in the text suggests this; (c) the entanglement of thorns refers to the confusion of the Ninevites when they were attacked in 612 B.C. This third view is preferable. This confusion, because of their drunkenness, resulted in complete disaster: the people were **consumed** quickly and fully **like** the burning of **dry stubble** (cf. Isa. 10:12, 17). A wordplay is suggested by the similarity in sound between the Hebrew words for "entangled" (*sebūkîm*) and "drunk" (*sebû'im*). The **one** who was plotting **evil** (i.e., calamity) **against the LORD** (Nahum 1:11; cf. v. 9) was an Assyrian king (Sennacherib or someone after him). **Wickedness** translates *beliyya'al*, "worthlessness" (trans. "wicked" in v. 15). His plans were both worthless and wicked (cf. Job 34:18). In 2 Samuel 16:7 and Proverbs 16:27 the word is rendered "scoundrel."

C. Judah's affliction to end because of Nineveh's destruction (1:12–15)

1:12–13. The promise to Judah in these two verses is introduced by the statement **This is what the LORD says**. This clause, occurring in Nahum only here, guarantees that what He predicted would indeed be fulfilled. For centuries Nineveh had gone **unscathed**; no enemy had penetrated her walls. And her inhabitants were many, presumably well able to defend the city. Yet God promised that Nineveh would be **cut down** (defeated) **and** would **pass away** (vanish). God had used Assyria to afflict **Judah** in several ways: by Sennacherib's attack in 701 B.C., by Judah's having to pay tribute to Assyria during much of Manasseh's reign, and by Judah's King Manasseh being taken captive (2 Chron. 33:11). But that Assyrian oppression, like a **yoke** on an animal's **neck**, would be broken when Nineveh fell.

1:14–15. Whereas Nineveh would have no heirs or places of worship (v. 14), Judah was called on to worship **the LORD** in view of her coming deliverance (v. 15). The Lord's **command** (*šawâh*) to **Nineveh** indicates that she was subject to God's decrees. The Lord's judgment on the city would touch her prosperity and her false worship. **No** one would be left to worship and no idols would be left to be worshiped. Many times Nineveh had desecrated the altars and temples of her defeated foes and carried off their **images** and **idols**. Assyria thought this meant her gods

were superior. But now Nineveh would experience the same fate it had placed on others. **The temple of her gods** was either the temple of Ishtar or of Nabu.

God would see that Nineveh was buried (**I will prepare your grave**; cf. Ezek. 32:22–23) because she was **vile** (*qālal*, “to be of no account, to be unworthy”; cf. Job 40:4).

In contrast with Nineveh’s fall (Nahum 1:14), **Judah** would experience freedom (v. 15). The prophet spoke as if the fall of Nineveh had already occurred and as if a messenger were arriving **on the mountains** around Jerusalem to bring the **good news**. And the fall of the capital of Assyria, the ruthless nation, would indeed be a message of **peace**. Therefore Judah could resume her worship, keeping her festivals (the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost, and the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles, Ex. 23:14–17) to express her gratitude to God and to keep her vows (cf. Lev. 22:21; 27:2, 8). **The wicked** one (*beliyya ‘al*; see comments on Nahum 1:11) would **no longer invade** Judah (cf. v. 9) because he would be **completely destroyed** (cf. v. 10). Nineveh was never rebuilt. So complete was its destruction that when Xenophon passed by the site about 200 years later, he thought the mounds were the ruins of some other city. And Alexander the Great, fighting in a battle nearby, did not realize that he was near the ruins of Nineveh.

Clendenen, E. R. (1998). The Minor Prophets. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman concise Bible commentary (pp. 369–371). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The name Nahum means “comforted” (compare Nehemiah, “the Lord comforts”). The theme of his prophecy is the destruction of Nineveh, chief city of the Assyrians, one of Israel’s perennial enemies. Nineveh’s demise would have brought comfort to Judah and to all victims of Assyria’s ruthless imperialism (see introduction to Jonah).

Nahum’s association with the village Elkosh (1:1) tells us little about him because its location is uncertain. Although the name Capernaum may come from the Hebrew for “village of Nahum,” 1:15 may imply the prophet was from Judah, a likelihood supported by tradition. Some have suggested Nahum was a northern Israelite exile living in Assyria who sent his prophecy to Judah. The prophecy seems to have been delivered in writing rather than orally (the word “book” in 1:1 and the partial acrostic in 1:2–8), perhaps the reason we do not hear of his suffering for his anti-Assyrian ideas. One tradition even locates Elkosh in Assyria (modern Al Qosh, near ancient Nineveh in Iraq).

The prophecy may be dated with assurance before Nineveh fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C., since the book is a prophecy of its destruction. Since Nahum assumes an apparently strong Assyrian empire that had Judah firmly in its grip (see 1:12–13), the time of writing was before that empire began to erode, as it did during the last decade of Ashurbanipal’s reign (668–626 B.C.) and especially after his death. Perhaps signs could have been seen even earlier, because Ashurbanipal exhausted Assyrian resources quelling a long bloody revolt in Babylon that began in 652.

Nahum’s prophecy must also be dated after the almost impregnable city of Thebes (i.e., Luxor, which had stood unviolated for one thousand years) was sacked by the Assyrians in 663 B.C., furnishing Nahum with an object lesson of Nineveh’s own vulnerability (3:8–10). The effect of that illustration would have lessened over time, especially as Thebes began to be reestablished as a cultural center in Egypt (see Jer. 46:25; Ezek. 30:15–16). Manasseh, who ruled Judah from 687 to 642 B.C. (see 2 Kgs. 21:1–18), probably submitted to Assyrian sovereignty on the occasion of that Egyptian campaign. After a long career as one of Israel’s most wicked and

idolatrous rulers, he rebelled against Assyria, probably during the Babylonian revolt, and was taken captive to Babylon (likely just after the revolt was ended about 648 B.C.). There he repented of his rebelliousness, not only against Ashurbanipal but also against God, and was allowed to return to Jerusalem (2 Chr. 33:10–17). His son Amon (642–640) remained a faithful vassal of Assyria but not of the Lord (2 Kgs. 21:19–26). Following Amon’s assassination his son Josiah became king at age eight, and at age twenty (about the time Ashurbanipal died) he began an extensive spiritual reformation of the land (2 Kgs. 22:1–23:30; 2 Chr. 34–35). He died in 609 B.C. trying to stop an Egyptian army from reinforcing what was left of the Assyrian army. It is reasonable to presume that Nahum wrote between 663 and 640 B.C., during Judah’s fearful subjugation to Assyrian might.

Message and Purpose. Nahum expresses judgment against God’s enemies, specifically Nineveh. As such it may be contrasted usefully with Jonah, which also concerned a message to Nineveh. Jonah teaches that God’s compassion was not to be limited to His covenant people but was available to all who would humble themselves before Him. Nahum, on the other hand, adds that any who oppose Him, whoever they are, will receive His wrath.

On the surface Nahum is a message to Nineveh of approaching wrath (as Obadiah is to Edom), frequently addressing them rhetorically. But it also speaks at several points to Judah, the actual audience, making it clear that, like Obadiah, the book is in fact a message of hope for Judah (see 1:12–13, 15; 2:2). In judging His enemies God will deliver His people. Most Hebrews probably thought of Assyria as a limitless and invincible evil power. Nahum’s book, like Daniel’s, debunks the idea that any evil kingdom could stand before God or that any human institution is anything but transitory.

Like Micah, Nahum seems to lack a message of instruction. The “So what?” question is not explicitly answered. Yet it may be inferred from 1:12 and 1:15. God had been afflicting Judah for their sins (described in other prophetic books), often using Assyria to deter them from their wicked path (see Isa. 10:5–34). Nahum’s message implies that God could remove His affliction if they would repent and that those who fear Him should persist in faithful obedience while awaiting that deliverance. Josiah may have been influenced by Nahum’s prophecy. It was during the years of Josiah’s reformation that Assyria began to deteriorate and eventually fell. But Nahum’s message was even more that when Judah was delivered from Assyrian slavery, they should celebrate with genuine acts of thanksgiving and worship to the Lord (1:15). Although on the surface 1:15 instructs Judah to “celebrate your festivals ... and fulfill your vows,” the context leads us to interpret this primarily as a way of stressing Nahum’s message of salvation for Judah. But even though the main point is that Judah would again have reason to celebrate, there may be also an implied warning about how they should respond to the deliverance when it came. We know, however, that after Nineveh’s fall in 612 and Josiah’s death in 609, Judah returned to their wicked ways (2 Kgs. 23:30–37). Then God raised Babylon to afflict and eventually destroy Judah as a nation (2 Kgs. 24:1ff.). Although the Lord “cares for those who trust in him” (1:7), He “will not leave the guilty unpunished” (1:3).

The reason Assyria would receive the Lord’s wrath was that they were His enemies (1:2, 8), who plotted against Him (1:9, 11) in that they opposed and cruelly oppressed the Lord’s people (1:13, 15; 2:2), just as they preyed on all the nations (2:12–3:1, 4, 10, 19). Like prostitutes and sorceresses they took pride in their beauty and peddled corruption out of lust for money, power, and pleasure (3:4; Ezek. 16:15; 23:1–21; Rev. 17:3–6). Neither was their idolatry overlooked in their judgment (1:14).

Structure. Most agree that the Book of Nahum has a basic twofold structure, the first part concluding either with 1:11, 1:14, 1:15, or 2:2. The first part emphasizes the character of God and the deliverance of His people. The second part, which also has a twofold structure, vividly portrays the fall of Nineveh.

- I. God's Vengeance and Refuge (1:1–15)
- II. Nineveh's Fall (2:1–3:19)

GOD'S VENGEANCE AND REFUGE (1:1–15)

Nahum's designation as "vision" prohibits its being dated near the time of Nineveh's fall as if the message were based on Nahum's political savvy and observation of current events. Despite the reference to Nineveh in 1:1, the book uses general references to God's enemies until Nineveh is specified in 2:8 (though NIV supplies it in 1:11, 14; 2:1). Neither is God's people specified until Judah is addressed in 1:15 (again NIV adds it in v. 12). This suggests a general and even end-times application for this section. Such application is supported by references to God's sovereign control of nature in the battle song of verses 2–8. The Lord is portrayed as divine Warrior vanquishing the wicked. Emphasis is placed on God's character as His vengeance displays His jealousy and power, and His protection of the faithful displays His goodness and compassion. The Lord is like a husband defending his wife from those who would steal her affections.

Following the battle song, the prophet addresses God's enemies (plural "you" in Hebrew), who plot evil against the Lord (see Ps. 2:1). He addresses Judah in verses 12–13, underlining it by the introductory "This is what the LORD says." Then he addresses the contemptible enemy leader (i.e., the king of Assyria, singular "you") in verse 14. In contrast to the perpetual name promised King David in 2 Samuel 7, Nahum assures the enemy leader of a nameless destiny. This first section concludes in verse 15 with another message addressed to Judah, again emphasized by an initial "Look!" (see Isa. 52:7). It envisions a messenger appearing on the hill bringing news of victory over the enemy and resultant peace. The appropriate response would be jubilant thanksgiving and renewed devotion to the Lord. The assurance given Judah in verse 12 of being afflicted "no more" and in verse 15 of being invaded "no more" either assumed the appropriate response on Judah's part or refers in context only to Assyrian invasion. It also may be interpreted more literally if understood to have end-times implications.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Na 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.