

Nahum

Explained & Applied 34

Ger de Koning



Retribution

The Book of Nahum

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of General Format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Book of Nahum

Introduction

In the book of Nahum we see how the wrath of God forever puts an end to the power and dominion of the world and the pride of man. But as He judges, He also thinks of those who trust in Him.

Nothing is known about Nahum other than what he says about himself in his book. That is not much. He mentions his name and the place where he comes from. The task he has is to tell Nineveh about the judgment of the LORD.

Not much is known about the dating of his prophecy either. A few data in his prophecy indicate the boundary of time within which it will have been. Nahum mentions in his prophecy the place No-amon and what happened to that place as an example for Nineveh that such will undergo a similar fate (Nah 3:8-10). The conquest of No-amon took place in ca. 663 BC. Another event is the fall of Nineveh herself, about which Nahum prophesied. That fall took place in 612 BC. So the message of Nahum dates from somewhere between 663 and 612 BC.

Nahum is the second prophet of whom we have a message from the LORD for Nineveh. About a century and a half earlier the prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh, in the time of Jeroboam II – ca. 825-785 BC (2Kgs 14:25). Like Nahum, Jonah had to bring a message of judgment. The response was the massive conversion of the city. But over time, the fire of conversion was extinguished and the city began to live in sin again, in rebellion against God.

There is no room for conversion in the message Nahum has for Nineveh. The city has sunk so much into sin that there is no hope of a new conversion, so that nothing remains but the final judgment. The fact that God spared the city after the preaching of Jonah only increases Sennacherib's guilt when he acts against the people and the city of the God who so graciously spared Nineveh.

Although the actual subject of the book is the judgment of Nineveh, we also hear words of consolation for God's people. Nahum means 'conso-

lation'. The judgment of Nineveh means consolation for God's people. As they suffer under the domination of this wicked people, they may comfort themselves with the thought that God will not forget them and will break the yoke bar of this enemy.

For us, the encouragement is that we may know that suffering that befalls us, for whatever reason, is in the hand of the Lord. We may also know that He will finally take the suffering away from us in order to do good for us in the end. In the life of the believer it is not evil or suffering that has the last word, but the Lord.

The message of Nahum may be about Nineveh and be for Nineveh, but it is proclaimed in Judah. It is therefore also a message for Judah. Nahum means, as has already been said, 'consolation'. His message is a message of consolation for God's people. Nahum's prophecy of judgment on Nineveh, is for God's people the consolation of redemption from an oppressive yoke. In this respect, Nahum is a forerunner of Simeon in Jerusalem who looked for the "consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25), which came in the coming of the Messiah.

Nahum shows how the wrath of God forever puts an end to the power and dominion of the world and the pride of man. But in the midst of the judgment we also find here the testimony of the faithfulness of God (Nah 1:7). As God exercises vengeance, He thinks of those who trust in Him and wait for Him. This prophecy is about

1. the destruction of Assyria, that will never rise again, and
2. the deliverance of Judah, who will finally be redeemed (Nah 1:15).

So the book of the prophet Nahum has as a principal subject, the destruction of Nineveh. Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, the great enemy of God's people and of God. Assyria has been used by God as an instrument to punish His people who have deviated from Him. Assyria has only focused on and pursued its own interests, and are people have also boasted of their own power and have slandered God. God will recompense Nineveh as the representative of Assyria for all the evil they have done (Isa 10:5-19).

The destruction of Nineveh is a good example of how the kingdoms of men seem impregnable, but nevertheless perish through the judgment of

God. In the judgment of Nineveh we see the judgment of Assyria and of all the hostile nations. Nineveh represents Assyria and Assyria represents all the hostile nations.

Division of the book

The book can be divided into three parts, corresponding to the three chapters it contains:

A. The Judgement of Nineveh (or Assyria) and the Restoration of Israel (Nahum 1).

1. Introduction (Nahum 1:1)
2. The features of the LORD (Nahum 1:2-7)
3. The final verdict on Assyria (Nahum 1:8-14)
4. The good news (Nahum 1:15)

B. Detailed report on the imminent destruction of Nineveh (Nahum 2).

1. Siege and capture of the city (Nahum 2:1-7)
2. The plunder (Nahum 2:8-10)
3. The mess (Nahum 2:11-13)

C. The causes of the judgment (Nahum 3).

1. Greed and abominations (Nahum 3:1-3)
2. Depravity and idolatry (Nahum 3:4-7)
3. Comparison with Egypt; example of No-Amon (Nahum 3:8-10)
4. The irreparable mess (Nahum 3:11-10)

Nahum 1

Nah 1:1 | The Burden of Nineveh

| 1 *The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*

The subject of this book, its contents, is “the oracle (better: burden) of Nineveh”, that is, a word from God imposed on the prophet as a burden. The word ‘burden’ comes from ‘lifting’, ‘carrying’. The burden is the threatening saying about Nineveh. The name of the city is mentioned in this verse and also in Nahum 2 and Nahum 3 (Nah 2:8; 3:7). Assyria, of which it is the capital and representative, is mentioned in Nahum 3 (Nah 3:18).

Nineveh means ‘residence’. That meaning tells us that there are people living there who have their place of residence on earth. They have built up their entire existence on earth, with no place for God. We see them in the people who in the book of Revelation are always referred to as people “who dwell on the earth”. They are people who have their home on earth and for whom no other life exists. This is in contrast to the believers, who know that their home is not on earth, but in heaven (Phil 3:20). They are aliens and strangers on earth (1Pet 2:11).

Then it is said how this burden is communicated and by whom. The burden is communicated in a book. What is written down in the book is the vision in which the burden is communicated. Nahum is the man to whom the vision of what is going to happen to Nineveh has been given by the LORD and who has written it down. It seems that Nahum did not reveal his prophecy orally. “The book of the vision” is, in other words, a ‘prophetic writing’.

Finally, the name of the prophet and the name of the place where he comes from follow as a conclusion of the introduction. The prophet is called Nahum, which, as said, means consolation. It is not known where Elkosh, the place where Nahum comes from, was located.

Nah 1:2 | The LORD Is an Avenger

| 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.*

Against the devastating power of Assyria that oppresses God's people so much, Nahum first places the majesty and omnipotence of God. He does this to encourage God's people. This is also always the way for us when we face insurmountable difficulties. We should not compare our difficulties with our strength but with our omnipotent God. Nahum does not call for armed rebellion, guerrilla warfare or political efforts, but to look up to God, the LORD. In the light of Who God is, Nahum sees what will happen to Nineveh, to evil.

God is in the first place jealous, in which the thought of a burning zeal is present. It's about a feeling of hurt right and a strong desire to fulfill justice. God has an exclusive right to the obedience of His people (Deu 4:24; 5:9). This right is established in the covenant He made with His people. With this He also commits Himself to His people. Whoever, therefore, disadvantages His people, will also have to deal with Him in His jealousy. He then avenges Himself in wrath.

God is jealous of His people. He is like a jealous man who will protect his wife from any intrusion from strangers. This jealousy is not related to the aspect of her unfaithfulness, but about what others threaten to do to her. He cannot bear strangers chastising his people. To the enemies of His people He is an Avenger.

He is the LORD. Thus He is mentioned three times in this verse. That name reminds us that God has a relationship with His people. He will stand up for His people against "His adversaries" and "His enemies", which are the Assyrians. We see here how the opponents and enemies of His people are His opponents and His enemies. Nahum has in mind the devastation that the Assyrians caused in 722 BC, when they took away the ten tribes, while he now sees their invasion in Judah.

The source of God's envy is His great love for His people. Three times Nahum speaks about the fact that the LORD is an Avenger. This emphasizes a certain aspect of God, that in His divine power He will avenge the evil that is done to His people. Vengeance belongs to God (2Thes 1:6-7; Rom 12:19).

It is the starting point for this whole prophecy. Everything that follows is rooted in this revelation of righteousness and burning zeal of the LORD for the benefit of His people.

Because the enemies of His people are His enemies, He makes it His own matter to deal with the enemies. Among the nations there is not the thought that God will avenge all the injustice done to His people, all their mistreatment. For them, the God of Israel does not exist, or they see Him as a local god. But they will have to deal with Him in a way that they will have to acknowledge His majesty.

Nah 1:3 | The Guilty Is Punished

*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.*

The fact that the LORD is an Avenger does not mean that He is quick to wrath, for He is “slow to anger” (cf. Num 14:18). He admonishes us in His Word that we must be “slow to anger” (Jam 1:19; cf. Ecc 7:9). Would He then be quick to anger? He demonstrated that He is patient over a century ago, when He sent His prophet Jonah to this city of Nineveh to judge the city (Jn 3:10; 4:2). He gives people time to repent. In the days of Jonah this was a period of forty days. If the next generations of Nineveh forget God and become more and more wicked, God will have patience for more than a century.

His patience is not a weak indulgence, but results from the power of His love and mercy (2Pet 3:9). He never loses His patience. That is a happy knowledge for those who know Him. But His patience does come to an end. That is a serious thought for those who mock Him. His reluctance to wrath does not mean that He lacks strength and therefore He must let the guilty one go unpunished. He is powerful in His goodness. He is also of great power in judgment. He always uses His power at the right time, in the right way and in the right form (Num 14:17).

In His power He will not let the guilty party go unpunished, but will judge him. We see a revelation of His power “in whirlwind and storm”. In it we

see not only His power but also the suddenness of His action. In His performance He is accompanied by whirlwind and storm. They serve Him in the exercise of His judgment (cf. Isa 29:6). “He bruises ... with a tempest” (Job 9:17a; Isa 29:6; Psa 83:15).

Nahum adds another aspect to His majesty and that is that the clouds are “the dust beneath His feet”. Just as man walks on the dust and the dust blows up where he walks, so the LORD walks on the clouds that guide Him where He goes. Thus God’s majesty and exaltation are drawn here. This happens in a way that we are reminded of the revelation of God at Sinai when He gave the law.

At the same time, this illustration of God’s majesty and exaltation offers consolation to anyone in whose life clouds cover the sun. God is above the clouds of sorrow. He walks on them, He moves on them to accomplish His work, although the clouds sometimes hide how His way is and that it is His way. His footsteps are sometimes not perceivable or discernable by man. Nevertheless, faith may trust that His footsteps go in the direction of blessing.

When we see clouds in our lives, He is not far away. A cloud is great and elevated for us, but to God it is nothing more than a dusty substance. Our difficulties and fears are not great for Him. With a movement of the hand He could remove them. We can trust in Him that He controls them, even if He doesn’t immediately wipe them away.

Nah 1:4 | Drought and Withering

*4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
He dries up all the rivers.
Bashan and Carmel wither;
The blossoms of Lebanon wither.*

The description of the power of the LORD is extended with the picture of the desperation of nature. His command, “He rebukes”, is sufficient to change the course of nature (cf. Isa 50:2). We see drought, causing sources of water to disappear, resulting in the withering of fertile areas. In the past He dried up the Red Sea and Jordan (Isa 51:10; Psa 106:9; 114:3-5; Isa 42:15) and so He can do similar with any sea and river. That is how vulnerable

everything is for Him. The Lord Jesus – He is Yahweh – also showed His power over the sea (Mt 8:26).

The LORD can take away the lush growth and wealth of areas known for it such as Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon (Isa 33:9). If the glory of nature shrinks for Him, how much more than the pride of man.

Nah 1:5 | Mountains, Hills, Earth, People

*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.*

Even the fixed, powerful parts of creation, “the mountains”, do not remain unmoved, but “quake because of Him” when He touches them with a finger. “The hills” dissolve, indicating an intense heat caused by the LORD, possibly by volcanic eruptions (Psa 97:3-5; Mic 1:3-4). These are the accompanying phenomena when He comes to earth (Zec 14:3-5,10). There will be geographical changes, not through evolution, but suddenly, at the coming of Christ.

When Christ comes, the earth will upheave by His presence and tremble (Rev 16:17-19a). The majesty of God will fill the world and all people, all that lives, with awe. No part of the world is outside the sphere in which He works, here in judgment. All people are under His control.

Nah 1:6 | No One Can Resist the LORD

*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.*

Nahum uses different expressions to describe the impressiveness of God’s performance in judgment. He speaks of “indignation”, “anger”, “wrath”. After the description of the power of God, the questions can be asked: “Who can stand before His indignation” and: “Who can endure His burning anger” when it rages. The answer is: no one, not even the mighty Nineveh.

If God can thus impress all nature and all people with Who He is, then it is also clear that no man can resist the wrath of the LORD (Joel 2:11; Jer 10:10; Mal 3:2; Rev 6:17). Even less will one be able to rise up when the wrath of the LORD has gone over him like fire. Nothing can withstand His power (Deu 4:24; 1Kgs 19:11; Jer 23:29). He exalts Himself here against the opponents of His people and in favor of His people.

That the rocks are broken up by Him is reminiscent of what happened when God judged His Son for the sins of all who believe in Him. When Christ died, it happened that “the earth shook and the rocks were split” (Mt 27:51b). Whoever rejects Christ’s sacrifice will face this mighty God himself.

Nah 1:7 | The LORD Is Good

*7 The LORD is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble,
And He knows those who take refuge in Him.*

The detailed description of the power of judgment of the LORD is intended to ensure Israel’s safety with Him when the Assyrians invade the land. After the description of the majesty of God in the face of the enemies of His people, Nahum here suddenly speaks of the goodness of the LORD for His people. That He is good will sound as a song of praise in the realm of peace (Psa 107:1).

His goodness – which is as real as His power to judge – shows that He is for His own “a stronghold in the day of trouble”. This is a general truth, which is not limited to a certain time in history. Hezekiah has experienced this and countless before and after him.

You can know about a stronghold, but you must also take refuge there (Psa 46:1b; Jer 16:19). Only those who trust Him do so. He is their refuge where they feel safe and secure against danger. He knows those who do. Knowing His own means that He cares about their fate and helps them because of the intimate relationship that exists (cf. Exo 2:25; Gen 18:19; Amos 3:2; Jn 10:14).

Nah 1:8 | The Portion of the Enemies

8 But with an overflowing flood

*He will make a complete end of its site,
And will pursue His enemies into darkness.*

Again Nahum suddenly changes his subject. The portion of His enemies is totally different from His goodness to His own in the previous verse. These two sides of God's actions are called by Paul "the kindness and severity of God" (Rom 11:22).

God also proves His goodness in the revelation of His wrath. The criminal court works the extermination of the evil ones in favor of those who fear Him, who trust in Him. The result for them is liberation from the anguish into which they have fallen through the evil of the world.

Nineveh will literally come to an end by a flood of the Tigris. Through this flood, the LORD will overwhelm the city and open it to the armies of the Medes and the Babylonians, whom He uses as a "flood" to bring judgment on Nineveh (cf. Isa 8:7-8). They represent the "darkness" that haunts the Assyrians and will overtake and overwhelm them. They cannot escape the darkness. The end of God's enemies is the darkness of hell, eternal being without God.

Nah 1:9 | The Judgment Is Final

*9 Whatever you devise against the LORD,
He will make a complete end of it.
Distress will not rise up twice.*

The prophet speaks these words to the Assyrians, but they are meant to reassure the God-fearing part of God's people, who fear a new invasion by the Assyrians. Nahum reassures them with the statement that the LORD knows not only their hostile manifestations, but also their sinful deliberations preceding them. What the nations conceive is judged by the LORD as "a vain thing" (Psa 2:1; Acts 4:25-26).

What they devise is in their opinions directed against Judah, but in fact it is directed against the LORD. Therefore they will not be able to carry out anything of all their inventions, for the LORD himself will make a destructive end to this enemy (Pro 21:30). As additional encouragement He tells His people that they will not get into trouble again. The first distress is

mentioned in verse 7. His judgment of Nineveh is final, with no possibility of this hostile power coming upon them again (cf. Isa 37:23-29).

“The distress” is an expression that connects the events of the days of the judgment of Nineveh with the time of the great tribulation in the end time (Mt 24:21) which is called “a time of distress for Jacob” (Jer 30:7). Here the gaze is shifted from the historical destruction of Nineveh to the days immediately preceding the appearance of Christ. Christ will then personally exterminate the Assyrians or the king of the north on His return to earth (Dan 11:45). There will be no second distress for Israel after the first attack and destruction by the Assyrians.

Nah 1:10 | Nineveh Will Be Fully Consumed

*10 Like tangled thorns,
And like those who are drunken with their drink,
They are consumed
As stubble completely withered.*

The Assyrians are represented as intertwined or tangled thorns (2Sam 23:6). This indicates both their worthless character that only inflicts harm and suffering on others (Mic 7:4) and their deserved destruction. The same picture of worthlessness is that of the drunkard who has no awareness of what he is doing.

The picture of the intertwined thorns says that even though they protect themselves so well that they look like an impenetrable thorn bush, they are not a problem for the fire of judgment, but rather food for it. The picture of the drunkard says that, even though they are still so wet through excessive alcohol consumption, they are to the judgment of God like dry stubble which is completely consumed by His judgment.

Both pictures also depict their helplessness. He who is stuck in interwoven thorns, is unable to defend himself. He who goes his way like a drunkard is an easy prey because he has surrendered himself to revelry and drunkenness. The LORD will throw them into the fire, against Whom they have no strength to resist. They are completely consumed, nothing is left of them.

Nah 1:11 | A Wicked Counselor

*11 From you has gone forth
One who plotted evil against the LORD,
A wicked counselor.*

“From you”, that is from Nineveh, an evil individual has emerged. It is someone from whom rebellion emanates, someone “who plotted evil against the LORD”. This enemy is further characterized as “a wicked counselor”, literally a man of Belial or a worthless one. Thus he is a clear picture of satan (2Cor 6:15a).

The person who is meant is “the king of Assyria” (Nah 3:18). It seems that this is Sennacherib, the mighty, cruel attacker who came from Nineveh to attack Judah. The devastations he inflicts are cruel and extensive (2Kgs 18:13; 19:8). He is the one who plots evil plans against the LORD. In the speech recorded from him, he exposes the mind that this world power has always had against what is God’s (2Kgs 18:19-22; Isa 36:14-20). The enemy behind this enemy, Satan, always wants to destroy everything that belongs to God, be it Israel or the church.

This ruler who “has gone forth” from the mighty Nineveh does form a great contrast with Him from Whom it is prophesied that He will “go forth” from the humble Bethlehem-Ephrathah, which is the Messiah (Mic 5:2a). “His goings forth are from long ago,

From the days of eternity” (Mic 5:2b). Nineveh will fall through Him and He will establish His throne for eternity (Lk 1:33). He who has gone forth from Nineveh will be humiliated. He Who has gone forth from Bethlehem-Ephrathah will be exalted. He will have a Name that is above all name. To Him every knee will bow.

Nah 1:12 | Humiliation of the Assyrians

*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.*

This verse begins with “thus saith the LORD”, words used by the messenger as an introduction to a message from the LORD. Assyria is at the moment when Nahum prophesies at the height of his power. But even though they have prosperity and their number is impressive (2Chr 32:7), they will not succeed in overcoming the people of God. Just as Assyria is a razor for others (Isa 7:20), even so it will be cut off itself. In one night an angel kills 185,000 soldiers (2Kgs 19:35-36; Isa 37:37-39).

In the end time, the Assyrians will appear once more on the world stage and then as a disciplinary rod for the great mass of the apostate Jews under the Antichrist. They will succeed in conquering and destroying Jerusalem. That means the end of the government of the antichrist. After that the Assyrians will move on to Egypt. When they hear rumors from the north and the east, they will return to Jerusalem. They will have a large army and think they are prosperous, but suddenly they will be “cut off and pass away” by the appearance of the LORD (Dan 11:40-45).

Then suddenly Nahum changes the subject again. The statement “I have afflicted you” refers to Israel and looks back on the long and painful oppression of Israel by Assyria. God comforts them with the promise that after defeating the Assyrians He will afflict them no longer. Here again we see God’s judgment of the enemy and blessing for His people who will both find their full fulfillment in the end time.

Nah 1:13 | The Yoke Bar Will Be Broken

13 *“So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you,
And I will tear off your shackles.”*

The LORD further says to Judah that he will break the yoke bar of Assyria, under which they have sighed, from upon them (cf. Lev 26:13; Jer 27:2; 28:10; Eze 34:27). The yoke bar is the tax to be paid (2Kgs 18:14; cf. Isa 10:27). God wants to free us from every yoke bar by which we are held in bondage and are not free to serve Him.

Nah 1:14 | The End of Nineveh

14 *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."*

After the word about breaking the yoke bar for Judah, Nahum addresses the king of Assyria again. The LORD has not only spoken to him, but "issued a command". By His command the name of the king of Assyria will not be perpetuated. That means that his dynasty will come to an end. He will have no descendants, no successors (cf. Isa 14:4,20-23).

His religion will also be destroyed. Assyrian kings claim to rule by the favor and authority of their gods. Because their authority is based on that, God will put an end to all this false homage. He will wipe out the idols completely. He will do so in "the house of your god" which proves once again the utter worthlessness of an idol. A god who allows himself to be exterminated from his own house is a worthless god.

God even prepares the grave of the king of Assyria because he is despicable, completely contrary to what he thinks of himself (cf. 1Sam 2:30b). Here the LORD predicts the national extermination of Assyria. The temple of his idols where he bowed down to his idols becomes the place of his death. There he is murdered by his sons (2Kgs 19:37; Isa 37:38).

"You are contemptible" can also be represented with: "You are too light. In God's scales he has been found too light (cf. Dan 5:27). This is the end of Nineveh. It looks forward to the end of the world, above which God also writes: 'Found too light.' We should be well aware of that. Thus we have the prophetic word like a lamp. If we 'eat' this word so that it runs through our whole lives, we will go through the world like pilgrims and strangers.

Nah 1:15 | The Good News for Judah

*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.*

Nahum turns to Judah again. While the king of Assyria and his gods are buried (verse 14), the religion of Judah revives. The decline and the end of the enemy are a fact. The fall of Nineveh takes place a few decades after the prophecy of Nahum. Beyond that, this fall reflects the extermination of the Assyrians in the future. The good that is proclaimed has to do with the coming of the Messiah Who exterminated the enemy. His coming is a good message, a message that peace has come (cf. Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15).

In response to the good news, the call to celebration sounds. The people will be able to go to the temple again to celebrate the feasts. The promises that were undoubtedly made during the occupation for liberation can be fulfilled. There need be no fear of disturbing the peace and joy. The reason is that Sennacherib, that “wicked one”, will not come back. This is impossible, because “he is cut off completely”, there is nothing left of him.

As has already been said, its full fulfillment will take place in the end time. When the Messiah appears in power and glory, He will destroy the Assyrian army on the mountains of Israel (Dan 11:45). That news will be brought to Jerusalem by messengers. It is at the same time the announcement of the realm of peace in which the feasts of the LORD will be celebrated again.

God announces joy, while the immediate cause for the joy is not yet there. It happens more often in Scripture that the full results of God’s actions are celebrated from the moment He begins those actions and therefore they are not (yet) completed (Lk 2:13-14; Rev 11:15-17; 12:10).

Nahum 2

Introduction

In this chapter we see that the LORD is sending a great army to Nineveh to avenge the reproach inflicted upon Judah and restore his glory (verses 1-4). The city is conquered, its inhabitants flee or are captured and its treasures robbed (verses 5-10). The great city with all its glory perishes without leaving a trace (verses 11-13).

Nah 2:1 | The Enemy Comes

*1 The one who scatters has come up against you.
Man the fortress, watch the road;
Strengthen your back, summon all [your] strength.*

Nineveh is informed that the “one who scatters”, that is, the Medes with the Babylonians, has come up. The enemy is not called “attacker” here, but “one who scatters”. The Assyrians were experts in uprooting and scattering conquered peoples, so that there was no longer cohesion in those peoples. As a result, it was not possible for conquered peoples to regroup and resist. They themselves will now be scattered and experience what they have done to others (cf. Psa 68:1; Isa 24:1).

The city is ironically encouraged to strengthen itself to resist the approaching army. The words of Nahum are ironic because God has decided to destroy the city. Therefore, any defense will prove to be futile. Strengthening the back means making oneself strong, behave as a man.

Nah 2:2 | Restoration of Israel

*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.*

Just as the destruction of Nineveh is determined, so is the restoration of Jacob, that is Israel, the twelve tribes. Jacob and Israel are the same person,

but with a different accent. “Glory” indicates exaltation or elevation. It foresees the time when Israel will reign over the nations in strength and blessing. Then Jacob, i.e. the people, will regain his own glory that was lost through his own fault.

The name Jacob – meaning ‘heels holder’ – reminds us of weakness and unfaithfulness. Jacob is the name for the people in their deviation from the LORD, through which they have lost all the glory they once possessed. They regain that glory when they are restored in their relationship with the LORD. The glory that returns is the glory of Israel. Israel – meaning ‘prince of God’ – is the name of the people in their privileges that they have received from God as His people.

“The devastators” are the Assyrians who have devastated Judah. They have also “destroyed their vine branches”. “Vine branches” is a reference to Israel as the vineyard, the vine (Psa 80:8-16), where we can see in the vine the families and in the branches the members. Vine branches are a picture of the joy that the LORD seeks for Himself with His people. In the time of Israel’s unfaithfulness, that joy was not there (Isa 5:1-7). Here the Assyrians are blamed for it, which is one more reason to judge them.

Nah 2:3-4 | The Hostile Army

*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.*

Here the army of the Medes and the Babylonians is described which is announced in verse 1. By “his mighty men” are meant the heroes of the army of the Medes and the Babylonians. It is also possible to see them as the mighty men of the LORD, because He deploys that army against Nineveh (cf. Isa 5:26-30; 10:5-6; 13:3).

The red color dominates in that army (cf. Eze 23:14), possibly because of the use of red paint or because the weapons are covered with bronze. It is the color of aggression (green is a soothing color). The military outfit is also red, due to the use of crimson. The brandishing of the spears is a use to impress the enemy, to show how skilled they are in their use.

At breakneck speed the enemy overtakes Nineveh. In the glow of the sun, the steel chariots resemble burning torches. Because of their great speed they are reminiscent of lightning flashes. The battle takes place in the streets and in the squares. The Ninevites can't get a grip on it. They are consumed by it as if by the fire of torches. Everything happens at the speed of lightning.

Nah 2:5 | Progress in the Battle

*5 He remembers his nobles;
They stumble in their march,
They hurry to her wall,
And the mantelet is set up.*

Here we are told what the king of Assyria thinks. God knows the thoughts of the hearts of all people. The king of Assyria thinks he can repel the attack and counts on "his nobles", the military leaders. They rush to the wall. The protection of the wall is of the utmost importance during a siege. But at the hour of truth, they stumble in their haste to climb the wall. The nobles come too late, because the attackers have already set up the mantelet to storm the wall.

Nah 2:6 | Water Flood as a Weapon

*6 The gates of the rivers are opened
And the palace is dissolved.*

The fall is unstoppable. In a few words the fall of Nineveh is described. For this, God uses a flood of "the rivers" which brings down the wall and destroys the palace. At Nineveh three rivers come together. The Tigris flows close to the walls, the Khosr and the Tebiltu flow through the city. The "gates" of the rivers can refer to sluices or dams that control the water flows. By opening the sluices and breaking through the dams, an enor-

mous flood of water is given free rein. The inhabitants of the palace dissolve from fear of the unstoppable water flow.

Nah 2:7 | The Misery of Nineveh

*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.*

Here we see the result of the final overrun in verse 6. “Stripped” means stripped of all her luster. The inhabitants of the city are seen as handmaids. They mourn their fate, which can be heard in their sound similar to doves and can be seen beating on their breasts.

Nah 2:8 | On the Run

*8 Though Nineveh [was] like a pool of water throughout her days,
Now they are fleeing;
“Stop, stop,”
But no one turns back.*

Nineveh has been arrogant and proud since her birth. Now that her end has come, there is nothing left of it. What offered a natural protection, has become her downfall. Here again irony can be heard. What she first enjoyed in selfishness as the content of her origin and life, is the cause of her death.

Orders to soldiers to stay at their posts are ignored by them. They have all fled in panic.

Nah 2:9 | Call to Plunder Nineveh

*9 Plunder the silver!
Plunder the gold!
For there is no limit to the treasure—
Wealth from every kind of desirable object.*

Once the defensive walls have fallen and the defenders have fled, the enormous treasures piled up in the city can be plundered. The call to do so

comes from God through the prophet. Nineveh always made this call himself when the Assyrians went to war to conquer territories. As a result, she became the richest city in the near east. Now she suffers the same fate. The rich stock of all kinds of precious objects seems endless. The enemies can take their course.

Nah 2:10 | All Wealth and Hope Are Gone

*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!*

The victory over the city is powerfully summed up in the three words of the first line of this verse – emptied, desolate, waste – that sound like a rhyme in Hebrew (buqah umebuqah umebullaqah). In synonyms the devastation is described, as if there are no words enough to indicate how great and thorough it is. A city that was once rich and influential is now a wretched mess, without treasures and without life. That is what remains of power used against God.

The inhabitants of the city who flee are no better off. All courage has been lost to them, all power has disappeared. Wherever there should be strength, “hearts and knees”, all strength is gone. There is anguish in the whole body. Powerlessness is already hopeless and when anguish is added, the situation is completely hopeless. And not only is there no view of outcome, the view that is there makes all faces grow pale, that is to say, all color is draining from the faces, they become white as a sheet. There is only a view of horror and an abundance of misery.

Nah 2:11 | A Mockery Question

*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]?*

Opposite the pruning “where?” that comes from the mouth of the king of Assyria (2Kgs 18:34), here the challenging “where?” sounds from the

mouth of the LORD. The picture of the lion shows the robbing greed of the leaders and the people of Nineveh. The lion is an animal often found in Assyrian inscriptions. Kings of Nineveh compared themselves to it. Like lions they tore up the inhabitants of conquered cities.

In spirit, Nahum sees the city as wiped out. He looks at the place where she once stood, but no longer sees her. It was a city full of predatory rulers who, like lions, tore peoples apart, plundered their treasures and filled Nineveh with them. Nothing is left of all those horrors.

To make the picture even more impressive, Nahum uses different names and different ages of the lions. Eight times in verses 11-13 he uses a word for lion, in different compositions. He talks about the male lion, the female, the young lion who already hunts and the cub, who is not yet able to do so. Everything was under her control, nobody frightened her, she was so sure of her power.

Nah 2:12 | The Tearing Nature of Nineveh

*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.*

In verse 11 it is about the city, in this verse it is about the inhabitants. Nineveh has killed in a cruel, ruthless way and thus provided the city with booty. The city has enjoyed this abundantly and greedily.

Nah 2:13 | The LORD Will Judge Nineveh

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."

With the opening words "behold, I am against you" the LORD announces the judgment on the boundless tyranny of Nineveh. He speaks here in His majesty as "the LORD of hosts". All powers in heaven and earth are subject to Him. The chariots are burned up. That is the end of her military power. This is what the Assyrians trusted in above all.

Also the whole radiance of power, seen in the young lions, is devoured. This is done by the sword of the enemy. When the lion is defeated, his prey, everything he had in his power, is also exterminated. The messengers who delivered and carried out royal orders (1Kgs 19:2; 2Kgs 19:23; Isa 37:9,14,24) will not be heard again (cf. Eze 19:9).

Nahum 3

Introduction

Nahum again mentions the reason for the verdict on Nineveh. The verdict comes because of the many sins of the city (verses 1-7). She cannot avert that judgment any more than No-amon could have done (verses 8-13). The judgment will strike her full of horror in spite of all the resources (verses 14-19).

Nah 3:1 | Woe to the Bloody City

*1 Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies [and] pillage;
[Her] prey never departs.*

The city is full of violence and lies. Violence and lies are the two manifestations of sin that include all sins (cf. Gen 6:11). They are, as it were, a summary of it. Nineveh seems to have been hatched by the spirit of her founder Nimrod, who was a mighty hunter before the LORD and who built his kingdom on blood (Gen 10:8-9).

Nineveh is “the bloody city” and “completely full of lies” because all the spoils in the city were obtained through bloodshed and deceit. None of it is destined for others. It serves everything to satisfy one’s own desires. And the looting is still going on because the greed is insatiable. It is never enough. It is thus a description of the unbridled greed that characterizes mankind today.

Nah 3:2-3 | The Battlefield

*2 The noise of the whip,
The noise of the rattling of the wheel,
Gallop 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!*

The situation of the previous verse comes to a dramatic end. The prophet vividly describes, as if he were an eye- and ear witness, the attack on and storming of the city of Nineveh (cf. Nah 2:3-5). It begins with “the noise of the whip”, indicating that the horses are being driven to ever greater speed. The “rattling of the wheel” audibly announce the arrival of the enemy. The “galloping horses” are unstoppable in their run to Nineveh. They run so fast that the wagons they pull are bouncing and bumping up and down over the bumpy ground.

Besides manned chariots with horses before them, there are also ridden horses. The riders are also ready for battle. They ride their horses, they strike with their flaming swords and throw their spears at the speed of lightning.

How great the slaughter is, is said in verse 3. Four times the corpses – for which three different words are used in Hebrew – are mentioned that are left as a trail by the invaded army. There are so many corpses that the victors stumble over them in their advance. Just as it has been said of the wealth that there is no end to it (Nah 2:9), so it is said here of the dead bodies that they are countless.

Nah 3:4 | The Reason for the Judgment

*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.*

Nahum mentions the reason for the judgment, “because”. Nineveh is compared to a seductive, handsome harlot, who has caught many peoples in her nets. In this she resembles “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” (Rev 17:1-6). Nineveh is handsome, she has great attraction to other peoples who also want that opulence. The judgment comes on her because she has attracted people like a harlot by what she has to offer. She has offered occult practices, sexual depravity, false religion, political favors, impudent prosperity and immeasurable pleasure in a poor sinking

world. With these temptations, she has even approached God's people to persuade them to surrender to her (2Kgs 18:31-32).

Three times in this verse her harlotry is mentioned, which clearly marks her disgusting activities. Harlotry means betrayal, unfaithfulness, depravity, and lustful lust. She dresses herself in the garment of love and, under the appearance of it, she satisfies her lust for power and wealth.

In her harlotry she makes use of sorcery. She is a harlot and a witch. Her harlotry is not idolatry as with Israel, which is connected to the living God. She applies herself to sorcery. It is her way of doing politics, making a deceptive friendship and suspicious politics, with which she has embraced other states and got them in her power. Sorcery is the enchantment of someone in order to bind him to herself. Both sorcery and harlotry presuppose a control exercised by hidden, secret means that are lethal in their effect. Jezebel was a woman of harlotry and sorcery (2Kgs 9:22; cf. Rev 21:8; 22:15).

'Selling nations' means depriving them of their freedom and enslaving them through harlotry. Families represent smaller tribes.

Nah 3:5-6 | The Appropriate Punishment

*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.*

The treatment she gets suits a harlot. In the area where she sins, there is also her punishment (Isa 47:3; Eze 16:37-41; Jer 13:26). The LORD Himself will work so that the admiration of all those who have meddled with her will turn into abhorrence. It is the picture of a disgraced harlot who has become old and unattractive. Her nakedness, her true form, will be revealed. She is now treated with disgust and contempt. If we tempt people to commit sin, in the end they will not thank us for it, but rather they will despise us.

It does not mean that those who have meddled with her are better. They are just as bad. But this is about the judgment on Nineveh. She will bear the hallmark of the greatest contempt. Throwing dirt on someone is a picture of the most defamatory treatment and contempt. She will be set up as a spectacle, which means that she will be an object of public defamation.

Nah 3:7 | Nineveh Is Without Someone Who Comforts

*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?"*

Nations will look at Nineveh with amazement. But there will not be a nation that feels sorry for her because she has deserved her downfall. She who has not been the friend of anyone, has no one who will grieve for her. He who rejects God has no comforter (cf. Lam 1:2,9). There is no hope for Nineveh.

The expression "grieve for her" is literally "to shake the head". Shaking the head is an expression of compassion when someone is in great sorrow, saying, as it were: 'I can't understand why this sorrow has affected you.'

Nah 3:8-10 | Nineveh No Better Than No-amon

*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.*

Nineveh will not be able to save herself from destruction by her power. The prophet deprives her of this vain hope by pointing out the fall of the mighty No-amon in Egypt in these verses (Jer 46:25; Eze 30:14-16). No-amon or Thebes was the capital of Upper Egypt. The city was taken and plundered by the Assyrians in 663 BC, about fifty years before the downfall of Nineveh. Despite the size of the city, protected by water, strong walls and a powerful army, the Assyrians managed to conquer it.

In addition to its natural location, which offered protection, it had, to its strength the armies of various peoples under its command (verse 9). But also the strong allies, from which the city derived extra strength and help, were powerless to save the city from destruction. In spite of all its advantages, the city had fallen and was horribly, without pity, dealt with by the Assyrians (verse 10).

Nineveh could have learned from No-amon. What she had done to No-amon will be done to her. Why would she be different? With God there is no respect for persons. As she has treated others, she will now be treated herself.

Nah 3:11 | Nineveh Becomes Equal to No-amon.

*11 You too will become drunk,
You will be hidden.
You too will search for a refuge from the enemy.*

Now that the fall of No-amon has been described, Nineveh's own fate can be seen even more emphatically in what she herself has done with No-amon. Being drunk refers here to the consequence of God's actions, to the cup of God's wrath she has to drink. The great city of Nineveh will become hidden and untraceable. That has happened to Nineveh. She is hidden under the desert sand. Later she is excavated again. The Ninevites will not be able to find the hiding place they will seek against the enemy and no one will offer it to them.

Nah 3:12-13 | Nineveh, an Illustration of Weakness

*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.*

Nahum uses two pictures to indicate the ease with which the enemy will overcome her. The fortifications are fig trees that are shaken with ease so that the figs fall off and are eaten immediately. This is how easily the fortifications fall into the hands of the enemy.

Their soldiers are women, so weak is the resistance that is given (cf. Isa 19:16; Jer 50:37; 51:30). There is nothing left of their 'lion appearance' (Nah 2:11-12). There is no resistance when entering the city that is burned by them with fire. All this happens to the once strong city. It has become a city without strength and without a future.

Nah 3:14 | Ironic Call to Defense

*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!*

Finally, the prophet deprives the guilty city of the last support for its hope: the confidence in its fortifications and its numerous population. The following description is again intended to be ironic. In view of the long siege, the prophet advises them to take every precaution to keep the enemy out of the gate. The first need is water. Furthermore, she must strengthen the city wherever possible. To this end she has to work with clay and turn it into stones. A supply has to be made to close the gaps that the enemy makes.

Nah 3:15 | Nineveh Completely Destroyed

*15 There fire will consume you,
The sword will cut you down;
It will consume you as the locust [does].*

*Multiply yourself like the creeping locust,
Multiply yourself like the swarming locust.*

Despite all measures, the enemy will burn the city with fire. Also the sword of the enemy will do its devastating work. The result will be that it will look as if a plague of locusts has hit the city. Where locusts have been rooting around, everything has been eaten away and there is nothing green left.

The call to multiply like the locusts is again ironic. The Assyrians have constantly expanded. Now that this expansion has come to a definitive end, this call sounds like a mockery.

Nah 3:16 | All Trade Is Gone

*16 You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven—
The creeping locust strips and flies away.*

The increase in the number of traders is like the multiplication of the locusts of the previous verse. Nineveh is famous for its economic growth. She has even compared it with the stars in the sky. Because of the Tigris, Nineveh has a connection with the sea and therefore a great trading opportunity. Also because of this, the city has come to great prosperity. But everything the traders have gathered will be robbed. Those same locusts that serve as a symbol of their multiplication will disappear as soon as their prosperity is over. They will turn out to be ‘good-weather friends’.

Nah 3:17 | Nineveh Disappeared From the Face of the Earth

*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.*

Princes and the whole civil service, as numerous as the traders (verse 16), will disappear without leaving a trace.

The way in which Nahum describes the judgment on Nineveh in verses 15-17 shows that he is a word artist. The Assyrians built their empire by

multiplying power, wealth and people in crowds like locusts, all for their own satisfaction. Now their empire is sinking as a victim of the self-interest they have pursued. Nothing is left of it, there is not even a trace of it. It is definitively lost.

Wealth is relative. It can just get wings and fly away (Pro 23:4-5). That is why we must look at it in the right way and deal with it in the right way. We use our earthly possessions in the right way if we use them with an eye to the future. What we give away for God's kingdom is not lost, but is an investment that will pay off when Christ comes to establish His kingdom.

Nah 3:18 | The Leaders Killed, the People Scattered

*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].*

Verses 18-19 are addressed directly to the "king of Assyria". He is the soul of the evil of Nineveh. In him all evil is concentrated and he is the executor of it. It is said to him that also the cohesion of the noble class – the "shepherds" or rulers and the "nobles" – collapses. Their fate is described with ironic ambiguity by Nahum. "Lying down" has the meaning of lying down dead (cf. Psa 76:6; Isa 56:10; Jer 51:39).

The shepherds of the king of Assyria only pastured themselves. They led the flock, the Assyrian people, into evil and scattered them. The mountains of northern Assyria will be filled with scattered inhabitants (cf. Num 27:17; 1Kgs 22:17; Zec 13:7). "He will come to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan 11:45).

Nah 3:19 | Nineveh Is Irreparably Destroyed

*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 book ends (cf. Nah 1:15) with the reaction of those who hear of these events. About half a century after Nahum's prophecy his prophecy was fulfilled. The city fell in 612 BC and was destroyed by the alliance of Medes and Babylonians. There will be joy over the destruction of Nineveh among all those who have suffered from her. And who did not suffer from her? But it will never happen again, because the "evil" that has "continually" passed on everyone has come to an end.

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