

Nahum • God's Judgment of Nineveh

Introduction

Nahum is devoted to neither Israel (the Northern Kingdom) or Judah (the Southern Kingdom) but Assyria. As recounted in 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37, having conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Assyria attempts to conquer Judah, advancing all the way to the very walls of Jerusalem. Through his messenger, the king of Assyria attempted to persuade Hezekiah and Jerusalem to surrender with a series of arguments wherein the king and Assyria falsely represented God. Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter to the temple, spread it out before the Lord and prayed. The Lord answered through Isaiah and the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians who returned to Assyria, never to return. Nahum might be thought of as God's own letter back to the Assyrians, who were so proud and boastful claiming not just military and political, but spiritual superiority to Israel and all nations, and that their accomplishments came through their false gods, not the One True God. It wasn't a political agenda that brought God's judgment, but spiritual unfaithfulness and rejection of God.

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

²A 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.

³The 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.

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

[Read 1:1-3]

Q: Why is God's tone so serious? What is probably the source of His anger?

A: That the Assyrians refused to recognize **HE** was the source of their rise to power. They placed their trust and praise in false gods instead of Him.

Q: Why should the Assyrians have known better? Did God ever make Himself known to them?

A: Nineveh—the Assyrian capital—is where Jonah was sent about 100 years earlier. At that time the Assyrians repented at Jonah's message.

Q: What can we learn from the fact that God did not immediately wipe out the entire Assyrian empire for their sins but sent messages through the likes of Jonah and Nahum?

- God always relents to allow time for repentance.
- The Assyrians should have learned the lessons of the Northern Kingdom of Israel given over to judgment by God at the hands of Assyria.
- They were given time to change their behavior when the 185,000 were killed outside Jerusalem for taunting God, but did not.
- God's justice comes at **HIS** own time, but **ALWAYS** comes.

Q: What might we infer about God's plan of salvation in the way He has dealt with Assyria?

A: As evidenced by sending Jonah and others, **ALL** nations are included in His plan.

[Read 1:4]

Q: In speaking to Assyria here, what is the significance of the references to Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon?

A: Bashan and Carmel are cities Assyria took when conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Lebanon the country just to the north in Assyria's path on the way to Israel. It's a reminder from God that it was **HE** Who empowered the Assyrians to conquer and enslave.

⁵Mountains quake because of Him
And the hills dissolve;
Indeed the earth is upheaved by His
presence,
The world and all the inhabitants in it.
⁶Who 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.
⁷The LORD is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble,
And He knows those who take refuge in
Him.
⁸But with an overflowing flood
He will make a complete end of its site,
And will pursue His enemies into
darkness.

[Read 1:5-8]

[Interesting Trivia: Verses 2-8 are in Hebrew alphabetical order making them more dramatic from a literary standpoint and easier for a native speaker to memorize.]

Q: What is the meaning of the contrast of v.7 about the positive characteristics of the Lord, in comparison with the other verses around it describing horrific judgment? What does it mean within the context of God's message to Assyria?

A: It's a very emphatic statement that it's the Assyrians who have rejected God and therefore will not experience the blessings He bestows on those who choose Him, but will rather experience the consequences of their choice. They could have made the right choice but did not.

Q: Note in v.5 the phrase "the hills dissolve" and the phrase in v.8 "with an overflowing flood". How was Nineveh itself ultimately conquered resulting in the complete destruction of the Assyrian Empire?

A: Although this was predicted at the time for the future, it is now historical fact that the conquest of Nineveh would be accomplished when its rivers around Nineveh were redirected into a flood against it and its brick structures literally dissolved in a flood.

Point: God's judgments are always directly connected to complete rejection of Him upon people who have been given numerous and repeated messages and even signs to repent. When His judgment finally arrives, it always comes in such a way as to testify not only to His power, glory and authority to those experiencing it, but in witness to those in the vicinity. Just as Assyria should have learned the right lesson from the countries it conquered who themselves rejected God as well as the signs from God, so should the rest (especially Judah) learn from the example made of Assyria.

¹⁵Behold, 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.

[Read 1:15]

Q: What is the good news for Judah?

A: Assyria will never return to their land, will never be a threat to them again.

Q: What lesson should Judah have learned from this? What is the sign from God?

A: God is showing a sign to Judah that He is doing this work. The lesson they should have learned is to repent and acknowledge God, running **to** Him in order to avoid the same fate as demonstrated on Assyria.

Application: Do we learn from others' mistakes, others' sins? Share a lesson you've learned and implemented in your own life based on observing what God did in someone else's life.

⁶The gates of the rivers are opened
And the palace is dissolved.
⁷It is fixed:
She is stripped, she is carried away,
And her handmaids are moaning like
the sound of doves,
Beating on their breasts.

[Read 2:6-7]

Q: What is the bad news for Assyria?

A: Assyria will be completely destroyed. Here we have another reference to the final annihilation of Nineveh when the rivers are diverted and it literally melts before the enemy's forces.

Point: Chapter 2 is a detailed account of God's thoughts, role and working in exacting judgment on Assyria.

⁴All 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.

[Read 3:4]

Q: This is a specific charge against Assyria by God. Is the issue that they've merely "sinned" or temporarily back-slidden from Him?

A: They have become totally and completely unfaithful to him—hence they are called a harlot—but even more like a prostitute they have enticed others into a lifestyle of sin with them. Assyria entices whole nations and families into unfaithfulness, into turning their back on the Lord. Not just a sinner in need of repentance, they are actively engaged in leading people away from God.

⁸Are 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?
⁹Ethiopia was her might,
And Egypt too, without limits.
Put and Lubim were among her helpers.

[Read 3:8-9]

Q: What is God's purpose in naming these other countries in His discourse to Assyria?

A: These are all countries who experienced God's judgment from which Assyria should have learned the right lesson, to embrace God instead of rejecting Him for the same false gods/worship that led to these countries' downfall. Therefore, Assyria is without excuse.

Multiply yourself like the swarming locust.
¹⁶You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven—
The creeping locust strips and flies away.
¹⁷Your 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.
¹⁸Your 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.
¹⁹There 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?

[Read 3:15b-19]

Q: List the 6 types of Assyrians mentioned in this passage and what they represent.

- (v.16) **Traders.** In spite of the great economy Assyria has built, money will not save them.
- (v.17) **Guardsmen and Marshals.** These are the Assyrian military who will disappear in battle like a swarm of locusts taking off for parts unknown.
- (v.18) **Shepherds.** Often representing spiritual leadership, the Assyrian shepherds are asleep and therefore ineffectual.
- (v.19) **Nobles.** The societal leaders, rather than taking a stand, are lying down and therefore of no use.
- (v.19) **The People.** With no one military, spiritual, or civilian leadership they are completely ineffectual, scattered on the worst type of terrain one could find themselves in combat and therefore impossible to effectually organize on.

Q: What is God describing as the situation pertaining to Assyria's final demise?

A: Complete breakdown from top to bottom in every sense. In v.19 He describes it as "Your wound is incurable." There is no hope of healing or recovery.

Q: According to v.19, what is their core problem?

A: "For on whom has not your evil passed continually?" Treatment of others.

Application: What's the lesson for us when God has given someone over to our care, authority, or power? How should we take to personal heart the lessons we've observed as the result of God working in their life?

Epilogue:

The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that for hundreds of years leading up to its initial discovery in 1845, even many Christian and church scholars did not think it actually existed. They believed it was probably symbolic of those who reject God and not an actual place or people. However, no other site has been archeologically excavated more nor yielded more independent confirmation of Old Testament events than Nineveh. Even today it is a witness to us that we need to learn the proper lessons from God's judgment against it.