

BOUNDARIES OF MERCY
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: NAHUM
Nahum 1:1-8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

In the mid-eighth century (about 760 BC), God used Jonah to warn Nineveh of His coming judgment of their wickedness. Jonah preached a five-word sermon, Nineveh repented, a great revival broke out, and God spared the city. Now, one hundred years later (about 660 BC), Nineveh has returned to its corrupt and godless ways of cruelty, idolatry and arrogance. God uses Nahum to proclaim God's judgment on the city and its future downfall. God will use the Babylonians to defeat the Assyrians and to destroy Nineveh so that no trace of it remains.

B. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- **Nahum** = 'comfort'—'consolation'
- Shortened form of—**Nehemiah**—'comfort of Yahweh'

2. SEPTUAGINT

- **Ναουμ**

3. LATIN

- **Nahum**

C. PLACE IN HEBREW BIBLE

1. PART OF LATTER PROPHETS—THE TRULY 'PROPHETIC' BOOKS OF THE OT
2. SEVENTH OF THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS

D. AUTHOR

1. AUTHORSHIP

- Attributed to **Nahum**—in **1:1**
- Not disputed by modern scholars

2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- a. He is the only 'Nahum' in the Old Testament
- b. **an Elkoshite**—**1:1**—the only biographical information in Scripture
 - From the town **Elkosh**—meaning 'God give!'
 - Probably a **Judean**—[see below for possible locations of Elkosh]

3. POSSIBLE LOCATIONS OF ELKOSH

a. In southern **Judah**—two possible locations

1. **Elcese**

- In Simeonite territory between Jerusalem and Gaza

2. **Beth-garin**

- According to *The Lives of the Prophets*—copied by Epiphanius (4th century)
- Ancient Eleutheropolis—now Beit Jibrin
- 32 miles southwest of Jerusalem

3. If Nahum was Judean—might be why he spoke of **Judah** celebrating feasts—**1:15**

b. In **Galilee**—two possible locations

1. **Capernaum**

- Capernaum—means ‘City of Nahum’—*Kephars Nahum*
- Possibly—Elkosh was renamed Capernaum

2. **Hilkeese**

- According to Jerome—5th century
- Near ancient Ramah—in Galilee
- Today—the village of el-Kauzeh

3. Galilean location unlikely—because Northern Israel had already fallen

c. In northern **Iraq**

1. **Al-Qush**—31 miles north of Mosul/Nineveh—on the Tigris River

2. But this is a very late tradition—16th century

E. DATE

1. BROAD RANGE OF DATES—663 TO 612

a. AFTER 663 BC

- Nahum refers to the recent defeat of ‘No-amon’—**3:8-10**
- This was the Egyptian city of Thebes—on the upper Nile River
- Assyrian King Ashurbanipal defeated Thebes in 663

b. BEFORE 612 BC

- Nahum **predicted** the fall of Nineveh
- Babylonians destroyed Nineveh in 612 BC

2. NARROW RANGE OF DATES—663 TO 654

- a. Thebes was defeated in 663
- b. Thebes was rebuilt in 654—but Nahum speaks of it in the past tense
- c. During one of these reigns:
 - King Aserhaddon (681-669)
 - King Ashurbanipal (668-627)

3. CHRONOLOGICAL PLACE OF NAHUM

- a. **After**—Obadiah—Joel—Jonah—Amos—Hosea
- b. **Younger** contemporary of—Isaiah—Micah
- c. **Older** contemporary of—Zephaniah—Jeremiah
- d. **Before**—Habakkuk—Daniel—Ezekiel

F. SETTING

1. NINEVEH AND THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

- a. Nineveh
 - 1. Founded by Nimrod, great-grandson of Noah—[Gen 10:11](#)
 - Noah → Ham → Cush → Nimrod
 - 2. Capital of the Assyrian Empire—from the time of Sennacherib
 - 3. Named for the Assyrian river goddess Nina—symbolized by a fish
 - 4. At junction of Tigris and Khosr Rivers in northern Iraq
 - About 500 miles from Israel—and 250 miles north of Babylon
 - Located on the ‘left bank’ (looking down-river)
 - Near modern Mosul—across the Tigris on the he ‘right bank’
 - On the major north-south and east-west trade routes of the Middle East
 - 5. Largest city in the world
 - Almost 3 square miles (1851 acres)
 - 7-8 miles of walls—with 15 gates
 - 50 miles of aqueducts and waterworks
 - Population estimate—as high as 600,000
 - Jonah said—it took **3 days** to traverse its boundaries—[Jon 3:3](#)—could include suburbs outside the wall—extending to Khorsabad in the north and Nimrud in the south

6. Seemingly impregnable

- Walls—100 feet high—wide enough for three chariots abreast
- Moat—60 feet deep—150 feet wide
- Enough provisions to withstand a 20-year siege

b. Assyrian Empire

1. Sargon II (722-705)

- Defeated Israel
- Defeated Babylon and reunified it with Assyria

2. Sennacherib (705-681)—**II Kgs 19** and **II Chr 32**

- He remodeled, enlarged and named Nineveh the Assyrian capital
- His main problems: rebellion by Babylonians and opposition by Egypt
- Destroyed Babylon—and tried to enforce worship of Assyrian gods
- In Hezekiah's reign (701)—God defeated him in Judea—killing 185,000
- Was assassinated in Nineveh by his sons—during Manasseh's reign

3. Esarhaddon (681-669)

- Continued expansion of empire and began war with Egypt

4. Ashurbanipal (668-627)

a. Defeated Egypt

b. Expanded empire covered its greatest extent

- ▲ From eastern Turkey and Caucasus in the north/northwest
- ▲ To North Africa, Egypt, and edge of Arabia in south/southwest
- ▲ From Cyprus, Palestine, Syria in the west
- ▲ To central Persia and Persian Gulf in the east

c. Assyria was at the height of its power—seemingly unassailable

2. ISRAEL

- Under King Hoshea—had fallen in 722—to the Assyrians under Sargon II

3. JUDAH

a. After Hezekiah—Judah again became a vassal of Assyria

b. Manasseh (687-642)

1. Instituted pagan worship—Baal, Ashtoreth, and Moloch (child sacrifice)

2. Taken captive to Babylon by Assyrian king
 - Either Aserhaddon or Ashurbanipal
3. He repented—returned to Jerusalem—and restored worship of Jehovah
4. But many Judeans continued pagan worship
5. Manasseh's reign—most likely one for Nahum's prophecy (663-654)
- c. Amon (642-640)
 - Followed earlier pagan ways of Manasseh—but did not repent
- d. Josiah (640-609)
 - Removed pagan altars—repaired Temple—restored worship of Jehovah

G. STYLE AND GENRE

- NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF PROPHETIC ORACLE FROM DIVINE VISION
- WITH AN INTRODUCTORY HYMN—[1:2-8](#)

H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. Foundation of Nineveh—[Gen 10:11](#)
2. Zephaniah also prophesies judgment upon Assyria and Nineveh—[Zeph 2:13-15](#)
3. Nahum is not quoted in the New Testament
4. But Jesus refers to Nineveh—in His sign of Jonah—[Mt 12:40-41](#) and [Lk 11:30-32](#)
5. One of three prophets who focus on God's enemies
 - Obadiah (Edom)—Habakkuk (Babylonia)—Nahum (Assyria)

I. THEMES

1. GOD'S MERCY HAS BOUNDARIES: HE WILL PUNISH WICKEDNESS
2. GOD IS PATIENT—SLOW TO ANGER
3. GOD KEEPS HIS WORD—AND FULFILL HIS PROPHECIES
4. GOD IS ALMIGHTY—AND WILL MANIFEST HIS PRESENCE POWERFULLY
5. GOD IS GOOD—COMFORTING HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE OPPRESSED

J. OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION—[1:1](#)
2. PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT—[1:2-8](#)

3. DECREED DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH AND DELIVERANCE OF JUDAH—**1:9-15**
4. NINEVEH'S DESTRUCTION DESCRIBED—**chapter 2**
5. REASONS FOR NINEVEH'S DESTRUCTION—**3:1-11**
6. INEVITABILITY OF NINEVEH'S DESTRUCTION—**3:12-19**

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

1 *The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.* **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.* **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.* **4** *He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon wither.* **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.* **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.* **7** *The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.* **8** *But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.*

III. EXPOSITION

A. GOD'S MERCY HAS BOUNDARIES

1. HIS MERCY IS EVERLASTING AND UNIVERSAL

- He gives every generation a chance to repent
- He withholds forgiveness from nobody

2. BUT HE PUNISHES THE WICKED

a. Conditions

- After extending mercy
- When there is no sign of responding to mercy—no repentance

b. Reasons

- To show His love
- To maintain His integrity
- To exert His power over evil

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.*

3. HE SHOWS HIS LOVE—BY GUARDING IT JEALOUSLY

a. **Jealous** = fiercely protective of His **holiness** and His **love** for us

1. He is holy—and will not allow our relationship to taint Him with sin

2. He will bear no rival—but expects singularly loyal love only to Him

b. Jealous = zealous

1. For the victory of His righteousness—to restore our relationship with Him

2. To save His people—and make them righteous

c. He is jealous—*because* He loves us—it demonstrates that He really cares

4. HE MAINTAINS HIS INTEGRITY—BY EXECUTING VENGEANCE

a. **Avenging—vengeance** = repayment for a violation—settling the score

b. His righteousness requires this

▪ God as Holy Person—cannot let sin that violates His Person—go unpunished

c. His justice requires this

1. God as King and Judge—must be fair to—to everyone—the faithful and unfaithful

Ps 94:1-3—*O Lord, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up. O Judge of the earth, render recompense to the proud. How long shall the wicked, O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult.*

2. Fulfills His promise

a. Not allowing His enemies—who personally oppose Him—to escape

b. Not allowing the guilty—persistent lawbreakers—to go unpunished

3. His justice is thorough—His victory complete

1:8—*He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness*

4. He will repay kind for kind

➤ He repays rebellion with punishment

➤ He repays repentance with forgiveness

➤ He repays love with love

d. His salvation requires this

1. For those who are ‘saved’

➤ Vengeance to His enemies—defends and brings relief/salvation to His people

2. For the ‘unsaved’—His purpose is redemptive

- Punishment—discipline can lead to repentance—forgiveness—restoration
- 3. For the final purification of all creation
 - All evil must be purged—and creation restored to

II Pe 3:10, 13—*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. . . . But according to his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*

5. HE EXERTS HIS POWER OVER EVIL—BY DEMONSTRATING HIS WRATH

- a. Wrath = not frustrated impatience—not an outburst
but a deep, inner rational response to sin
expressed in controlled power
exercised perfectly and appropriately
- b. Purposes
 - 1. Draws attention to His presence, sovereignty and omnipotence—gets our attention
 - 2. Vindicates His holiness and righteousness—by punishing sin
 - 3. Eliminates evil—and restores justice

B. GOD IS PATIENT—SLOW TO ANGER

- 1. HE HAD POSTPONED HIS JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH 100 YEARS!
 - Even though He had already punished northern Israel with destruction—722 BC
- 2. AND HE WAS *STILL* POSTPONING JUDGMENT OF JUDAH
 - a. Despite several warnings already given by:
 - Joel—9th century BC
 - Isaiah—8th century BC
 - Micah—8th century BC
 - b. Especially in light of idolatry under Manasseh and Amon

3. GOD IS LONGSUFFERING—AND IS NOT BOUND BY OUR TIME-TABLE

II Pe 3:8-9—*But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

4. BUT HE WILL RELEASE HIS ANGER ON THE PERSISTENTLY UNREPENTANT

- a. He finally punished Israel—*I will spare them no longer*—Amos 7:8; 8:2
- b. He finally punished Judah—*I am tired of relenting*—Jer 15:6
- c. If God did not spare His own people—He will release His anger to all who rebel

C. GOD KEEPS HIS WORD—AND FULFILLS HIS PROPHECIES

1. NINEVEH WAS DESTROYED—612 BC

- Under Babylonian King Nabopolassar
- In alliance with Persian, Scythian, and Eastern Turkish armies

2. IT WAS FLOODED BY THE TIGRIS RIVER, WHICH UNDERMINED ITS WALL

1:8—*But with an overflowing flood, he will make a complete end of its site*

2:6—*The gates of the rivers are opened and the palace is dissolved*

3. INVADERS ENTERED THROUGH THE BREACHED WALL

3:13—*The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies*

4. THEY SACKED THE TEMPLES

1:14—*I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods.*

5. THEY BURNED THE PALACE AND MUCH OF THE CITY

2:13—*I will burn up her chariots in smoke*

3:13—*fire consumes your gate bars*

3:15—*There fire will consume you, the sword will cut you down*

6. THEY LOOTED THE TREASURES

3:9 *Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! For there is no limit to the treasure—Wealth from every kind of desirable object. 10 She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste!*

7. THEY SLAUGHTERED THE INHABITANTS

3:3—*Horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming, many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies—they stumble over the dead bodies!*

8. NINEVEH REMAINED HIDDEN OVER 2400 YEARS

1:14—*Your name will no longer be perpetuated*

2:13—*no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard*

3:11—*You will be hidden*

- a. Greek army retreating in 401 BC did not realize it was marching over its remains

b. Greek satirist Lucian (second century AD) said

Nineveh is so completely destroyed that it is no longer possible to say where it stood. Not a single trace of it remains

c. Finally—it was rediscovered and excavated in the 1840s

D. GOD IS ALMIGHTY

1. MICAH BEGINS WITH A ‘HYMN OF THEOPHANY’—**1:2-8**

2. HE PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE ALL-POWERFUL JUDGE

3. HE MANIFESTS HIMSELF WITH GREAT POWER

- Over all nature—and all humanity
- Everything and everybody—will know He is present

4. OVERWHELMING IMAGERY

- Demands our awe—holy fear—and repentance
- Like Isaiah—confronted by God in the Temple—**Is 6**

5. EVENTUALLY—IT WILL USHER IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

Mk 13:24-27—*But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.*

E. ‘THE LORD IS GOOD’—1:7****

1. HE IS A STRONGHOLD—FOR HIS PEOPLE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM—**1:7**

2. HE BRINGS PEACE—TO HIS PEOPLE—WHO CELEBRATE HIS FEASTS—**1:15**

3. HE RESTORES HIS PEOPLE—**2:2**—AND OVERTHROWS THEIR ENEMIES—**2:3-15**