

## **General Comments on Nahum**

The historical context is the kingdom of Judah shortly before the invasion by Babylon. Nahum would be contemporary with Jeremiah and Zephaniah, and the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi. The Southern Kingdom is largely wicked, despite the efforts of the reforming king Josiah, and the Lord is about to unleash destruction and captivity on them because of their rebellion. We see this subject addressed more directly in the companion books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah, where Nahum casts a wider net to point out that the Babylonian invasion is serving a larger purpose. The Babylonians aren't just punishing wicked Judah, they are also taking out an even more wicked Assyria.

The book of Nahum is a series of canticles, or songs, that take the substance of Isa. 10 and Isa. 14:24-27 as its source material and present the fulfillment of those texts as imminent. This book attacks Assyria, saying the Lord will bring Babylon against it, to utterly destroy it, while He preserves the righteous and faithful of His people Judah.

The book presents the Lord as preeminently powerful, the ruler of all the earth, and He uses the nations of the earth as pawns in His plans for humanity. At one point Assyria served His purposes in attacking and scattering the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but their wickedness has become so great He can no longer allow them to persist, so He brings Babylon against them to break their corruption.

As the text is clearly poetical, it is arranged by lines, instead of in verses, to more easily depict the lyrical style. While the KJV doesn't do this, all modern translations do.

There is a Qumran scroll, likely written shortly before the time of Jesus' mortal ministry, commenting on the book of Nahum, wherein they interpret the text in a line-by-line "I did liken all scriptures unto us" (cf. 1 Ne. 19:23) fashion (Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1996, Harper San Francisco, pages 215-220, 4Q169). That commentary reads the text in a very contemporary manner wherein the king of Assyria and Nineveh are interpreted as the Pharisees at Jerusalem.

## **Comments on Nahum 1**

Nahum's message is the Lord will punish the wicked king of Assyria and spare the righteous who are committed to Him (cf.

Nahum 1:6-7, 1:12-13, 1:15). This chapter relies heavily on the rhetoric and ideas of Isa. 10 and Isa. 14:24-47, review of those chapters is recommended.

The chapter is arranged in three cantos or strophes: the introduction (v. 1-5), the main subject of a rhetorical question answered (v. 6-13), the conclusion (v. 14-15).

<sup>1</sup>The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

<sup>2</sup>God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth;  
the LORD revengeth, and is furious;  
the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and  
he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and  
will not at all acquit the wicked:  
the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm,  
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

<sup>4</sup>He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and  
drieth up all the rivers:  
Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and  
the flower of Lebanon languisheth.

<sup>5</sup>The mountains quake at him, and  
the hills melt, and  
the earth is burned at his presence, yea,  
the world, and all that dwell therein.

v1-5 The Lord is introduced to the reader as One who mercilessly punishes His corrupt enemies (v. 2) with His immense unstoppable power (v. 3-4), as He churns the earth under His feet, and everything that lives on it (v. 5).

v3 This verse is a paraphrase of Exod. 35:4-7 and Num. 14:18 (also cp. Ps. 86:15, Ps. 103:8, Ps. 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2; all of these additional quotes include the mercy, this present use is the only once that drops the Lord's mercy), with the exception that it drops the part about mercy, choosing instead to focus very squarely on Judgement and Punishment. This chapter is primarily about punishing the wicked, so Nahum leaves no opportunity for mercy for Assyria. That mercy is later granted for the victims of Assyria (cf. v. 13), who in this case are Judah (cf. v. 15).

To a Jewish audience, it would have been completely obvious that Nahum dropped the mercy from the Exodus quote, and they would have immediately understood what he was implying.

v5 "and all that dwell therein", the presentation of the power of the Lord over all the earth is set in such a way that is belittles humankind. If the Lord can whip up storms and dry up oceans and rivers and cause earthquakes and melt hills, then everything that lives on the earth is going to be affected as well. Human pride vanishes when nature turns against us, and since the Lord controls nature, that shows us Who is in control of human fate.

<sup>6</sup> Who can stand before his indignation? and  
who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?  
his fury is poured out like fire, and  
the rocks are thrown down by him.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD is good,  
a strong hold in the day of trouble; and  
he knoweth them that trust in him.

<sup>8</sup> But with an overrunning flood  
he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and  
darkness shall pursue his enemies.

<sup>9</sup> What do ye imagine against the LORD?  
he will make an utter end:  
affliction shall not rise up the second time.

<sup>10</sup> For while they be folden together as thorns, and  
while they are drunken as drunkards,  
they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.

<sup>11</sup> There is one come out of thee,  
that imagineth evil against the LORD,  
a wicked counsellor.

<sup>12</sup> Thus saith the LORD;  
Though they be quiet, and likewise many,  
yet thus shall they be cut down,  
when he shall pass through.  
Though I have afflicted thee,  
I will afflict thee no more.

<sup>13</sup> For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and  
will burst thy bonds in sunder.

v6-13 This strophe starts with a rhetorical question (v. 6), that is answered later. Against a Lord Who is so powerful, who can possibly withstand Him (v. 6)? The Lord is good to those who rely on Him (v. 7), but He is like an overwhelming flood to his enemies (v. 8). What could anyone imagine they could do against the Lord? He will end them, they will not have a second chance (v. 9). His feckless enemies will be helpless to stop His consuming anger (v. 10), because they have done evil against Him (v. 11). While the wicked were cut down, He will no longer

allow the victims of Assyria's brutality to be punished (v. 12), as He will set them free (v. 13).

v6 The rhetorical question is, "Who can possibly withstand the Lord's anger?" The answer is righteous Judah can (v. 7, 13, 15), because He is not angry with them. The only way to be spared the Lord's Judgement is for him to not be angry at you. Obviously, the king of Assyria cannot.

v8 "darkness shall pursue his enemies", following the imagery of the flood, the poetical reading on this could be that his enemies are drowned in the darkness of the depths of the sea.

v12 The Hebrew in this verse is obscure, making it difficult to discern the meaning, whether it is following the preceding verses or changing subject to precede the subsequent verses.

The NAS renders the first two lines to follow the meaning of the previous verses and the last two lines to precede the following verses, while the JPS renders it to precede the meaning of the following verses, as follows:

"Though *they are at full strength* and so *they are many*,  
So also they will be cut off and pass away.  
Though I have afflicted you,  
I will afflict you no longer. (NAS)

Thus said the LORD:  
"Even as they [i.e., the days of your affliction] were full and many,  
Even so are they over and gone;  
As surely as I afflicted you,  
I will afflict you no more. (JPS)

Owing to the obscure Hebrew, it is difficult to know which is the better reading. And, frankly, neither reading substantially changes the meaning of the text either way.

**14** And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee,  
that no more of thy name be sown:  
out of the house of thy gods  
will I cut off the graven image and  
the molten image:  
I will make thy grave;  
for thou art vile.

**15** Behold upon the mountains the feet  
of him that bringeth good tidings,  
that publisheth peace!  
O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts,

perform thy vows:  
for the wicked shall no more pass through thee;  
he is utterly cut off.

v14-15 The conclusion. The Lord has decided to utterly annihilate the king of Assria (v. 14), while those of Judah who are faithful will be established upon the mountains, keep the [regalim](#), and keep their covenants, because the king of Assyria will never bother them again (v. 15).

v15 A paraphrase of Isa. 52:7, pulling in the entire context of Isa. 52, which has the subject of the redemption of Zion.

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