

# NAHUM

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## Contents:

[Background](#)

[Author](#)

[Date](#)

[Recipients](#)

[Purpose](#)

[Unique Features](#)

[Comparison with Other Bible Books](#)

[Outline](#)

[Timeline](#)

## BACKGROUND

The end of the seventh century B.C. was an exciting time for Judah, as the great reformer Josiah (640-609) ruled in Jerusalem. Over this time of blessing, however, loomed the threat of invasion by Assyria. Nineveh, Assyria's capital, had been the site of a great revival in Jonah's day, nearly 150 years before in about 750 ([Jonah 3:4-10](#)). But the revival had faded quickly, and Assyria destroyed Israel's northern kingdom in 722 and nearly destroyed Judah in 701. Now Assyria had set its sights on Judah once again, so God called Nahum to proclaim his final judgment against Nineveh.

Nineveh's doom would come soon after Nahum's warnings, when the rising Babylonian empire defeated it in 612. Babylon would go on to win victories against Judah in 605 and 597, finally defeating it in 586.

Zephaniah and Jeremiah were Nahum's contemporaries.

## AUTHOR

Nahum. Biographical details unknown. Even the location of his hometown, Elkosh ([Nahum 1:1](#)), is uncertain.

## DATE

The fall of Thebes (also called "No-amon," [Nahum 3:8](#)), which occurred in 663 B.C., had already taken place by Nahum's time. Assuming that Nineveh's fall in 612 (the focus of Nahum's prophecy) was yet to come, Nahum's ministry would be dated sometime between those two events. The zeal for feasts and vows ([Nahum 1:15](#)) may indicate a time after Josiah's reforms had reached their climax with the rediscovery of the law in 621.

## RECIPIENTS

Though Nahum focused on Assyria, his prophecy was addressed to his own people, who had suffered long under Assyria and were now invited to rejoice at its approaching destruction ([Nahum 1:15](#)).

## PURPOSE

- To announce Nineveh's doom, but in a larger sense to affirm that God punishes all sin. Though he is "slow to get angry," he will not let wickedness go unpunished ([Nahum 1:3](#)).

- To affirm God's sovereign control over history. Nineveh's destruction was not coincidence or simply the transition from one human empire to another. It was the direct result of God's judgment.
- To assure Judah that God cares for his own.

## UNIQUE FEATURES

- Nahum is our major source of information concerning the destruction of Assyria. Other prophets focusing on the doom of particular nations include: Isaiah (Assyria and Babylon); Jeremiah (Babylon); Obadiah (Edom); Zephaniah (Judah); Ezekiel (Egypt); and Daniel (Babylon and Persia).
- Nahum and Obadiah were the only OT prophets who pronounced doom on a pagan nation without also mentioning the sins of Israel.
- Nahum documents the cruelty of Assyria, which has been called the arch villain of the OT, more ruthless by far than Israel's other foes.

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

*Isaiah and Romans:*

- Nahum spoke of a messenger on the mountains, bringing the good news of deliverance from Assyria ([Nahum 1:15](#)):
- Isaiah, writing some 100 years before Nahum, used similar words to describe the good news of deliverance from Babylonian exile ([Isaiah 40:9](#); [Isaiah 52:7](#)).
- Paul, writing some 700 years later, used similar words to describe deliverance from sin through the good news of Jesus ([Romans 10:15](#)).

## OUTLINE

1. WHO WILL DESTROY NINEVEH? ([Nahum 1](#))

2. HOW WILL HE DESTROY NINEVEH? ([Nahum 2](#))

III. WHY WILL HE DESTROY NINEVEH? ([Nahum 3:1-7](#))

IV. WHEN WILL HE DESTROY NINEVEH? ([Nahum 3:8-19](#))

## TIMELINE

c. 750 B.C.:	Jonah preaches, Nineveh repents
722 B.C.:	Nineveh (Assyria) conquers Israel
627 B.C.:	Jeremiah begins ministry
621 B.C.:	Law rediscovered, Nahum predicts Nineveh's fall?
612 B.C.:	Fall of Nineveh
586 B.C.:	Fall of Judah

**Nahum 1:1-7** *The God of Judah, that's who!* Nahum began his prophecy against Nineveh by describing the God who intended to destroy that oppressive nation. He is

- a jealous God, taking vengeance on his enemies ([Nahum 1:2](#))
- a patient God, slow to anger ([Nahum 1:3](#))
- a God of power whom none can resist ([Nahum 1:3-6](#))
- a good God, a refuge to those who love him ([Nahum 1:7](#))

The God of Judah is certainly capable of executing his judgment against Nineveh.

**Nahum 1:8-14** *"And it's no use resisting."* Any resistance Nineveh might muster against the Lord would be futile ([Nahum 1:8-9](#), [11](#)). Though they may have succeeded in the past against God's people (see [2 Kings 17-19](#)), they would not succeed this time ([Nahum 1:9](#)). They would be destroyed in a flash, like dry stubble ([Nahum 1:10](#)). God addressed Israel, promising Assyria's destruction ([Nahum 1:12-13](#)), then turned his attention back to Assyria, vowing that he was "preparing a grave" for them ([Nahum 1:14](#)).

**Nahum 1:15** *Wonderful news! They've been wiped out!* Nineveh's doom and Sennacherib's death would be good news for Judah. They would be able to go about their peaceful endeavors without fear. The prophecy had been partially fulfilled many years before, in 701 B.C., when God had forced Sennacherib to lift his siege of Jerusalem (see [2 Kings 18-19](#)). Its final fulfillment would come with Nineveh's destruction in 612.

**Nahum 2:1-7** *"Attention, Nineveh: You're next!"* Nahum warned Nineveh to prepare for an attack ([Nahum 2:1](#)). They had taken Israel into captivity and had ravaged Judah ([Nahum 2:2](#)); now it was their turn to be ravaged. Nahum accurately foresaw the red-robed Medo-Babylonian army, whose chariots, according to secular historians, had sharp implements attached to their wheels, giving the appearance of torches or lightning as the sunlight reflected off the rotating blades ([Nahum 2:3-4](#)). The drunken defenders were taken totally by surprise and were helpless before this great army ([Nahum 2:5-7](#)).

It is unclear to archaeologists how the attackers used Nineveh's extensive waterways to invade. They either

- opened the floodgates and flooded the city, causing its foundations to crumble, as [Nahum 2:6](#) might suggest,
- or they drained the waterways (see [Nahum 2:8](#)) and entered through the exposed walls.

**Nahum 2:8-10** *The city stripped of silver.* Nineveh had been a center of power for more than 300 years, but that was about to end. The attackers would leave Nineveh completely void of its treasures, most of which had been taken from its own victims such as Israel. Ninevites were in a state of disbelieving grief and shock. The unimaginable had happened.

**Nahum 2:11-13** *The vicious lion will be the victim.* Comparing Nineveh to a mighty lion, Nahum foresaw a time when there would be no trace of his den. Though it would not happen for another 20 years, Nahum viewed Nineveh's destruction as an accomplished fact. God had given the word; it was as good as done. History records that armies later marched over the site of Nineveh without realizing it

had ever been there. Assyria would learn the bitter lesson that to oppose Israel is to seal one's own doom (see [Genesis 12:3](#)).

**[Nahum 3:1-7](#)** *How and why it will fall.* Amid horrifying descriptions of Nineveh's fall, Nahum listed some of the sins that had brought it down ([Nahum 3:1, 4](#)). Nineveh would receive what it had given: cruelty without mercy. Nineveh had an estimated population of 600,000 at the time of its fall. So many of them were slain that the few survivors stumbled over the corpses ([Nahum 3:3](#)).

**[Nahum 3:8-13](#)** *What goes around, comes around.* God had used Assyria to bring judgment on the Egyptian city of Thebes ([Nahum 3:8-10](#)), but Assyria had been unnecessarily cruel in the process ([Nahum 3:10](#)). Now, Nineveh would be as helpless before God's judgment as Thebes had been before Assyria. Its outposts of defense would fall, just like fruit shaken from a tree ([Nahum 3:12-13](#)). The "ripe figs" ([Nahum 3:12](#)) may also suggest the imminence of Nineveh's fall.

**[Nahum 3:14-18](#)** *They'll flee like locusts, never to return.* Nahum mockingly urged the Ninevites to prepare for a long siege ([Nahum 3:14](#)), knowing full well that the invading army was at hand and such preparations would be too late ([Nahum 3:15](#)). The swarms of people descending daily on Nineveh to seek wealth would flee like locusts before the sun when the invaders came ([Nahum 3:15-17](#)). Nineveh's people would be scattered, never to return ([Nahum 3:18](#)). Assyria would reap what it had sown (see [2 Kings 17:24](#)).

**[Nahum 3:19](#)** *A fatal wound, a fitting end.* The news of Nineveh's fall would cause great rejoicing in Judah and the many other nations it had oppressed.

## NAHUM

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM NAHUM)

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**Key Facts:** Prophet, predicted destruction of Nineveh

**Total Bible References:** 1 ([Nahum 1:1](#))

**Key References:** [Nahum 1-3](#)

*Nahum Speaks*

I wonder if the city is as huge and magnificent as everyone claims. At least the last prophet assigned to it had the opportunity to actually hold a revival within its massive walls. But it's been nearly 150 years since Jonah thundered out his message. I'm sure I'll never see Nineveh, however much I proclaim its doom to its former victims here in Israel. ([Nahum 1:1-3](#); [Jonah 3:3-4](#))

What an incredibly wicked city it must be, filled with immorality, bloodshed, lies, and unspeakable cruelty! Well, at least they can't complain of no warning when it finally does happen. Our God is "slow to get angry." But apparently Nineveh has crossed the line of his patience, thus sealing its doom. ([Nahum 1:3](#); [Nahum 3:1-4, 6, 10](#))

I wonder if ever a prophet received such graphic descriptions of a city's destruction as have been given me—the shields flashing in the sunlight, scarlet-clad enemy troops advancing with raised swords, glittering chariots pulled by prancing steeds rushing down the streets, angry torrents of water

wiping out everything in their wake, and the panic-filled people staggering like drunkards in their final death throes of agony! It's too bad for them that Jonah's revival didn't last. ([Nahum 2:3-3:18](#))

### *Spiritual Lessons from Nahum*

- When speaking out on moral issues, we should maintain Nahum's balanced perspective:
  - He rebuked the sinners ([Nahum 1:2](#)).
  - He reassured the saints ([Nahum 1:7, 15](#)).

### *Key Verses*

"The LORD is good. When trouble comes, he is a strong refuge. And he knows everyone who trusts in him. But he sweeps away his enemies in an overwhelming flood. He pursues his foes into the darkness of night" ([Nahum 1:7-8](#)).