

## NAHUM

David C F Wright DD

Nahum is another neglected book and yet these three chapters contain some inspiring and uplifting verses.

1 v 3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power

1 v 7 The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, an enormous city with a circumference of some eight miles and with a population of 300,000. The river Tigris ran by its western side and it was surrounded by moats 150 foot wide. It was a wealthy city and a commercial centre.

Assyria was a plague to the kingdom of Israel and invaded them in 722 BC deporting most of its people. The kingdom of Judah became a vassal state and Hezekiah had to pay heavy tribute to Sennacherib of Assyria.

The date of this book is probably between 663 BC and 612 BC or thereabouts. In chapter 3. 8-10 the prophet makes mention of the destruction of Thebes which was about 663BC but does not mention that city's restoration in 654BC.

The name Nahum means comfort and we know nothing about him.

We recall that Jonah in the 9th century reluctantly went to the evil city of Nineveh and they repented. The date of his prophecy is said to be around 862 BC, perhaps as much as two centuries earlier than Nahum. Most people refer to Jonah's visit as a century or more earlier.

The word of the Lord came to Nahum stating that God is jealous and He is to punish Nineveh and all the enemies of His people and that He could not hold his anger any longer. But He is slow to anger and great in power. He does not act rashly or impetuously. On the other hand, God will not let the wicked get away with it. He is the God that is righteous and He is the God of justice. He is in control and even the clouds, whirlwinds are no obstacle to Him. He controls the seas and rivers and nature itself; the flowers languish if it is His will. Mountains and hills quake at Him and the world is in His hands. He is the Divine Creator and the Sustainer of creation.

A few more comments should be made. People do not understand why God should be jealous. Because He loves His people, He is not prepared to tolerate any rival and therefore He rightly claims the devotion of His own. Nineveh was a pagan city and like heathen people everywhere they want to persecute Jews and Christians, hating the morality of the Bible.

Nineveh is to be made to suffer the agony and disgrace and destruction she has inflicted upon others. She has taken kings captive and now her own royalty will be taken away (2.8). She will suffer siege having laid sieges against a hundred cities herself (3.14). She has spoiled others; now she is to be spoiled (2.10). She has massacred many and now the number of her own slain will be a staggering figure (3.3). She has burned many cities and now her own palaces and homes will be so destroyed (3.15). She has ruined cities by flooding and now she will suffer the same fate (2.7). She has left cities in ruins and now that desolation will overtake her (2.11). With cruelty and insensitivity she has scattered people and now she will be dispersed beyond the possibility of reunion (3. 16-18), The humiliation she has brought to captains of opposing armies will result in her being a gazing stock (3.6). She was responsible for many fleeing for their lives but now an utter end will be made of her (1.8).

And these things are still relevant today. God loves His people, Jews and Christians, and even those who do not acknowledge Him. His will is that all men (and women) everywhere repent and accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour. He is not willing that any should perish. He is still the jealous God who will not tolerate any rival whether it is another god or a political or ideological belief or the new car or house. That which is contrary to His will and His morality will never gain His approval and Christians should not entertain such matters either. God takes account of all that we do and He is not deceived.

The judgement will fall on Bashan with its rich and fertile land and Carmel as well for its fertile ground. But alongside this judgement there is Divine mercy for His people. He would not neglect or forget them and that applies to believers today although we may not always realise it.

As for Nineveh the city, it vanished without trace and the surviving people were scattered. Assyria became no more.

Nineveh had repented in response to Jonah's preaching but in Nahum's time there was no opportunity for them to have another chance. They were spared before in the great mercy of God but their change of heart did not last. Chapter 1. 9 hints at some possible action from Assyria or that these words were addressed to the people of Judah who feared what might happen. What is clear is that Nineveh would come to a complete end. Verse 10 states that they will be trapped by thorns and tangled and consumed like dry stubble in a fire. There would be no escape. God's will and power cannot be broken.

The following verse talks about someone in Nineveh who is plotting evil against Judah, a so-called counsellor of Beliah. This is probably a reference to the past when Judah under Hezekiah was a vassal to Assyria paying heavy tribute to their king Sennacherib. Hezekiah revolted against this (2 Kings 18, 7) and the Assyrians invaded Judah. Eventually, the invaders were defeated by the angel of the Lord (2 Kings 18.33 to 19.37).

Sennacherib was a cruel, evil and ruthless man and, like many today, despised the Jews and, also in our day, people despise Christians who may be the second most persecuted people on earth. All such oppressors will be judged by the Lord in days to come when everyone will bow the knee to the Lord Jesus and confess that He is Lord. We are in battle and may suffer defeats but the ultimate victory will be ours. We would all wish that our oppressors and tormentors would be dealt with both now and effectively.

Judah's deliverance is the theme of verses 12 and 13. Sennacherib's army was very powerful and, as we said above, his army was completely routed in 701Bc with army casualties totalling 135,000. The Lord often used foreign powers to punish His people for their evil ways and this must be appreciated with two facts namely that God loved His people with an everlasting love and would not entertain any rival, but His people were sometimes disloyal, fickle and evil. His people had innumerable benefits from the Lord and, to say the least, were ungrateful and dismissive of Him.

Sennacherib had been defeated and now perhaps 50 to 60 years later the Assyrians were to be cut down despite their strength and, although God has afflicted His people with justifiable punishment before, He will not do it again provided they will be true to Him. The burden and yoke will be removed and the Jews will be free.

The prophet seems to be quickly moving between Assyria and Judah. In verse 14 the name of Assyria will not be sown and their pagan and evil gods will be forgotten. Assyria will die and their graves be unknown. Nothing would perpetuate their name. What Assyria sowed she reaped and that is the same with us all. Every believer must face the assessment of his own life and works (2 Corinthians 5 9-10) and this should exercise us now instead of waiting for that day. This is one reason why in verse 15 God's people are called to fulfil their vows and Judah was to celebrate their festivals. Personally, I do not like the word celebrate as it suggests in our day a party and how Catholics refer to the Mass.

Jewish festivals were the acknowledgement and remembrance of God and His goodness and a means of worship. And there are still Christians who do not realise that the Lord desires fellowship with us and to receive our worship. He does not want our life story and testimony or our self-promotion. He does not want our self-expression in music and dance, the raising of arms and the latest worship songs which are often both irrelevant and inane.

Micah 6. 8 tells us what the Lord requires of us and that is that we are just and show mercy and that we are to be humble in our walk, which is our life, with God. The epistle to James reminds us that God resists the proud and the apostle Paul tells us not to preach or proclaim self but the Lord Jesus. Leith Samuel in speaking on Ephesians reminded us that we must be filled with the Spirit but that cannot be if there is self.

The glad tidings of Nahum 1.15 was that while Judah felt under threat from the Assyrians, which caused the decline of worship now because the enemy was to be defeated, they could once again enjoy fellowship with God and the worship of Him.

It is sad today that so many people regard worship as a social or community event which must be modern and trendy but worship or worthship is the reverential acceptance of the greatness of God and His love and mercy towards us. Isaiah 30.15 states that in quietness and confidence is our strength. Hebrews 12.28 says that we serve God with reverence and godly fear, that is to say respect.

Chapter 2 begins with the approach of the Assyrian army and Nahum was telling the Ninevites to make preparations to resist the foe. They had destroyed other countries and now they were to be put to the test. God was restoring the glory of both Israel and Judah. It may also refer to a coming day still ahead in the future when the two Jewish kingdoms will be united in the land covenanted to them and there will be a new Temple in Jerusalem where the Lord will reign for a thousand years.

A coalition of armies attacked Nineveh and it was sacked in 612 BC. The soldiers were blooded and the chariots careered madly in the streets. It was chaos and carnage. This devastation is continued in the following chapter; the suburbs are overrun and people stumbled over each other; the walls of the city are breached with battering rams and the men using them had a covering to protect them from any falling missiles.

I take it that Huzzab in verse 7 is the queen of Nineveh and she and her ladies in waiting are agitated and drumming on their breasts. Nineveh is now flooded and like a pool of water and the inhabitants are fleeing in terror and for their own safety. Even when others suggest they halt and not panic, they do not turn back but keep running. The city being abandoned to some extent and so there was looting of an abundance of precious items. A few decades earlier, the Medes and the Babylonians ransacked the city and stripped it of its treasures.

With this coalition army there would be desolation and dilapidation. Fear caused the knocking of knees and heart irregularities, anguish in the abdomen and shock shown upon their pale faces. The inhabitants were completely helpless. The courage and pomp had gone and fear was also probably shown in rapid breathing. Fear can cause internal pain. Nerves would be in uncontrollable disorder. There would be over-active hearts and throbbing blood vessels. (2.10).

In verses 11 and 13, there is a reference to lions and their dens and how the lions fill the caves with prey as torn carcasses. The Lord likens the capture prey of the lions to the Assyrians who will be cut off never to be heard again.

During the time of Ashurbanipal, lions had become frequent in Assyria and were a danger and they were also featured in the sculpture of the nations. Some Assyrian leaders likened themselves to lions as did Sennacherib who said, "Like a lion, I raged."

The lion is known for its rapacity and its fierceness. Now the Assyrians would face the anger and wrath of God. Their cruelty was to be paid for. Their hatred of God's people would end in their total destruction.

No weapon lifted against the people of God will prosper. And the increasing persecution of Jews and Christians today is apparent. The psalmist said, Princes have persecuted me without a cause (Psalm 119.161).

Mark 13, from verse 9 tells of the persecution of early Christians and verse 13 says that they will be persecuted because they own the name of the Lord. Luke 6.22 reads, Blessed are ye when men hate you and will not keep company with you and cast you out and despise you for My Name's sake. Christians are hated because people hate the Lord, His teaching and His morality. Persecution is inevitable. We are sheep among wolves. The Lord's message to one of the churches in Revelation 2 verse 3 talks about Christians who have borne trouble with patience and worked hard in Christian service and not given up.

The hymn says

Who suffer with the Lord below  
Shall reign with Him above.

The third and final chapter begins with the pronouncement of woe on Nineveh, the city of blood. Its destruction was justified because of its shocking iniquity. It was full of lies, broken treaties in which nations were deluded. It dealt with pledges which they did not keep to the chagrin of other nations. They were ruthless and arrogant in business as well as warfare. Now they were the prey and they could not escape.

The dead were in the streets. There the sounds of whips, rumblings and crashing chariots and people falling over multitudes of corpses (Verses 2 and 3).

Adultery and fornication is often used in the Old Testament to describe the unfaithfulness of both Israel and Judah and this deception is used by Nahum to indicate the deceptions of Nineveh. She had used her glamorous and attractiveness to seduce and misled many nations just as a prostitute would entice a client. There is also a condemnation of sorceries that is to say witchcraft. The Bible condemns all forms of witchcraft, spiritualism, divination, necromancy and sorcery.

There are many verses to this effect such as Deuteronomy 18. 9ff and notice mediums are included. The Assyrians often used these features to achieve their goals. Today there are countless people involved in such things and often people are deluded and deceived and their health and well-being declines.

Verses 5 to 7 are distressing but relevant. It was a shame for an eastern woman to show what she wore under her dress or skirt, as it is for any decent woman, since only a harlot would do that which is defined by God as nakedness. In Exodus 20 you could not go up the steps to the altar since you could see the nakedness of those in front of you and to see up someone's skirt or tunic was to see their nakedness. In Isaiah 47, Babylon is likened to a woman showing her bare thighs and God calls that nakedness. The modesty of women is a Biblical theme and it is stated so that decent women would not be considered as immoral and to aid their protection from immoral men. It is true that in our day women dress provocatively and this does ensnare normal red-blooded men to take advantage of women and the consensus of opinion is that women are also to blame for many sexual attacks because of how they dress, Of course, it does not condone any man from violent attacks on women. If you see how young women dress in the pop music industry and in pornography then they are degrading all women and advertising sex and immorality. As the prophet says such people are a gazing stock.

In God's sight, such things are sinful and an abomination. They are vile (verse 6). In Malachi 2.3 God

says that He will pelt her with loathsome filth. Nakedness and scantily clad people were often paraded by the Assyrians so that men, women and children would be exposed and shamed.

Verses 8 to 10 describe the fate Of Thebes which had been defeated by the Assyrians. It was a great and ancient city situated on the Nile with some magnificent temples. It took the name No-Amon after a sun-god worshipped by the Egyptians but the Greeks later renamed it as Thebes.

This city fell to Ashurbanipal and the inhabitants of the city were cruelly treated. Many were taken as slaves into captivity. Infants and children were smashed to pieces at street corners (2 Kings 8.12).

When you think of these horrors then you must conclude that God was right to punish them. Now they were to drink of God's wrath.

There are always manifold problems in cities which you seldom get in the country and country towns. Cities and big towns have high rates of crime, prostitution and drunkenness (verse 11 and 12). People that are drunk usually behave irrationally. Now the Ninevites were to drink of God's wrath. Even their fortresses were like fig trees losing their fruit just as blows of the invaders would fall on them.

The Assyrian soldiers were now like women and the city is wide open. Fire burns on the bars of the gates (verse 13). The situation is hopeless. The reference to women is not degrading to them but to indicate effeminacy. Effeminacy and homosexuality is condemned in the Bible (Isaiah 19.16, Jeremiah 50. 37 etc... Leviticus 20.13, Romans 1.23ff). It is also interesting to note that in Amos 2.16 we read of soldiers running away naked. It does not mean that they were nude but scantily dressed having thrown off their armour.

As the walls of the city were being destroyed water and clay was needed to make the mould for new bricks. Building repairs was an essential but this would not help. Fires would be out of control and the sword and other weapons be devastating despite the army and auxiliaries being increased as if they were a swarm of locusts (verses 14 and 15).

The following verses talk of merchants and captains. Trade had increased more than the stars of heaven but like the locust such trade is stripped as if by a young locust who flies away. Princes and scribes are compared to locusts which may settle on a wall in the cold and when the sun gives warmth they fly away and where they go no one knows.

Suddenly, the merchants of Nineveh will be up and fly away. The scribes would also include military officials, just as in the army you have clerical officers.

The final verses refer to shepherds since the Assyrians regarded their people as sheep. They had to do as they were told but now the shepherds are asleep and uncaring in the times of great danger to their flock. There was no support from the nobles and rulers. Any survivors would be leaderless. It was the end of an empire.

This prophecy is full of detail which historical accounts has confirmed as true which is yet another evidence of the reliability of Scripture.

(3278)