

June 7, 2011

## The Prophet Nahum

### **“I Will Afflict You No More”**

#### **Introductory Details**

**Author:** The Prophet Nahum of Elkosh (Nah 1:1- location unknown), name means “Comfort”

**Subject:** YHWH fights for those who take refuge in Him

**Date:** c663 – 612 BC = sometime between the Fall of Thebes (Nah 3:8-10) and the Fall of Nineveh

**Mission Field:** The Nation of Judah

**Current Kings:** In Judah: Manasseh (696-642), Amon (642-640), and Josiah (640-609); Israel has already been defeated by Assyria.

**Contemporary Prophets:** *Zephaniah, Huldah, Jeremiah*

**Style:** Nahum writes in beautiful Hebrew poetry with much psalmic language. Nahum’s rhythm “rumbles and rolls, leaps and flashes, like the horsemen and chariots that he describes.” (G. A. Smith)

#### **Difficulties**

**Relevance-** It is somewhat difficult for 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians to see the importance of this oracle against Nineveh and Assyria. As such, it is easily ignored. However it is important to see how concerned YHWH is with human affairs, especially those things that affect the lives of His People.

**The Angry Warrior God-** Nahum’s depiction of YHWH as an angry warrior (1:2-14) will certainly offend modern sensibilities. Nevertheless, it agrees with the whole of Scripture which will at other times depict God in the same light. Our sensibilities must conform to the Word of God, not the other way around.

#### **Structure of the Book**

- I. Address to Judah: God will judge Nineveh (1:2-15)
- II. Address to Nineveh: Assyria’s fall will be fierce (2:1 – 3:18)

1:1 “An oracle”- *a divinely inspired message uttered by a prophet sent by God...Oracles were most often spoken against a foreign power. (TLSB)*

#### **The Address to Judah: God Will Judge Nineveh (1:2-15)**

1:2 This verse displays Hebrew parallelism quite nicely:

God is jealous and avenging is YHWH

Avenging is YHWH and a master (Baal) of wrath

Avenging is YHWH against his adversaries

And He is keeping (it) for his enemies.

This whole address relies heavily on the imagery & language of certain Psalms and Isaiah.

The Poem/Psalm/Oracle:

1:3b-5 YHWH’s power over the Earth

1:6-11 YHWH protects those who take refuge in Him and will lay waste to His adversaries (Assyria)

*“one who plotted evil against YHWH // one who advises worthlessness”- King Sennacherib (700s)*

1:12-13- addressed to the afflicted Judah

1:14 -address to King Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668-627)

1:15 The witness to Nineveh’s fall brings the Good News to Judah (Isaiah 52:7-8)

*Augustine (City of God)- The Prophet Nahum (or, better, God speaking through him) says, “I will destroy the graven and molten thing; I will make it your grave. Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that*

*brings peace. O Judah, keep your festivals and pay your vows, for it shall no longer be that they may pass into disuse. It is completed, it is consumed, it is taken away. He is come up that breathes into your face and rescues you from tribulation.” Anyone who knows the Gospels will recognize who it was that came up from hell and breathed the Holy Spirit into the face of Judah, that is, into the face of his Jewish disciples. The words about the festivals are, of course, a reference to the New Testament, in which festivals are so spiritually renewed that they can never “pass into disuse.” The rest of the prophecy too we see realized in that the gospel brought about the destruction of “graven and molten things,” that is, the idols of the false gods, consigned now to the oblivion of the grave.*

### **The Address to Nineveh: Assyria’s Fall Will Be Fierce (2:1 – 3:18)**

The rest of the Book of Nahum is all focused and addressed to Assyria and her capital, Nineveh.

There are less Psalm references, but this poetry still reflects some of Isaiah. Likewise, Jeremiah, who comes after Nahum, will employ some of the same imagery.

The English Standard Version does a pretty good job capturing the short and fast flow of the poem.

2:2 “For YHWH is restoring the majesty of Jacob/Israel”- this is finally fulfilled in the NT Church

2:3-12 depicts in vivid detail the battle and desolation of Nineveh.

2:7 “its mistress is stripped”- perhaps a reference to the Queen going into exile (see ESV note)

2:10 wonderful depiction of the physical effects of fear and terror over their defeat

2:11-12- Assyrian kings often depicted themselves as lions in their annals.

2:13 The poem pivots from description to the Declaration of YHWH

3:1-4 “WOE!” Often used in laments, here Nahum gives a moving lament of the futility of Assyria

3:4 You can hear the desperation and mourning in Nahum’s words

3:5-7 YHWH declares what He will do to the wicked nation

3:5 “lift up your skirts over your face”- public disgrace as that of a prostitute or adulteress

3:6 “throw filth at you”- literally “detestable things,” often used to refer to idolatry

3:8-13 Seems a bit like taunting, while still prophetic of the things to come at the hand of YHWH

3:8 Thebes- a capital city of Egypt, along the Nile River, it fell to Assyria in 663 BC

3:10 “infants were dashed in pieces”- Assyria was not the only conquering nation to employ this tactic

3:13 “your troops are women”- Nahum is not being a chauvinist, but he is taunting them through this

3:14-17, Nahum gives instructions with the understanding it will be futile, the destruction is certain

3:18-19 A final slap towards the King of Assyria

In 612 BC the Kingdom of Assyria fell to the combined armies of the Babylonians and the Medes

*TLSB- For Nineveh, God’s patience came to an end. The evil nation of Assyria that had tyrannized surrounding peoples, acquiring wealth and power at their expense, was overthrown, and it disappeared from the annals of history. God’s wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness (Rm 1:18). Because of our sins, we also deserve His wrath and displeasure. Yet “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Th 5:9).” God’s wrath was poured out on Christ, and by faith in Him we have pardon and peace.*

Nahum’s name means “Comfort.” What comfort are the people of Judah to receive from this prophecy?

What comfort can the Church receive from these words about her Lord?