

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## NAHUM

### THEME

#### Author and Title

The book is named after its author, the prophet Nahum of Elkosh. His name means “comfort.” The message given to him by God, that Nineveh would be destroyed, brings comfort to Judah. The location of Elkosh is uncertain, although the date (see below) and the address to Judah (1:15) make it likely that Nahum was from Judah.

#### Date

Nahum refers to the fall of Thebes as a well-known occurrence (3:8–10). The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal took the city in 664/663 B.C. Nahum also predicts the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, as a future event. Nineveh fell to a coalition of Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C. (see note on 2:3–4). The book was composed, therefore, between 664/663 and 612 B.C.

This range can be further narrowed. The book implies that Nineveh (and Assyria) was still at or near the height of its power (cf. 1:12a; 2:11–13; 3:1, 4b) and that Judah was still firmly under Assyrian control (from which the Lord would free them; 1:12b–13, 15; 2:2). Assyria remained at the zenith of its might until 640 B.C., after which it began to weaken, and rapid decline set in after the death of the last great Assyrian emperor, Ashurbanipal (669–627).

Further, Josiah, king of Judah (640–609 B.C.), began a religious reformation in the twelfth year of his reign (628/627; cf. 2 Chron. 34:3), about the time that Ashurbanipal died. The extension of Josiah’s reforming efforts beyond Judah’s borders (2 Chron. 34:6–7) probably indicates that Assyrian control over Judah and neighboring regions had come to an end.

Taking these dates into consideration, the book was likely composed after c. 660 B.C. and before 630.

#### Theme

Nineveh, the arrogant capital of the Assyrian Empire, would be destroyed.

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## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Nahum was God's messenger to announce the fall of Nineveh and the complete overthrow of Assyria. This coming judgment from the Lord was certain and irrevocable, as was Obadiah's message concerning Edom.

Nahum's book is a sequel to, and a dramatic contrast with, the book of Jonah. Jonah's mission to Nineveh was probably sometime in the first half of the eighth century B.C. He was to warn that large city of God's impending judgment because of Nineveh's wickedness. To Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites heeded his message, repented, and were spared God's judgment.

This repentance, however, did not last beyond 745 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III (745–728/727) made his people the leading military power in the Near East. The vast Assyrian Empire was established by bloodshed and massacre, cruelty and torture, destruction, plundering, and exiling such as has seldom been seen in history. After several campaigns, Tiglath-pileser greatly enlarged the territory paying him homage with annexed land and vassal kingdoms, including the northern kingdom of Israel (reduced in size by the Assyrians) and the southern kingdom of Judah. Succeeding rulers maintained and expanded this empire. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians brought to an end the northern kingdom of Israel.

Sennacherib (reigned 704–681 B.C.) made Nineveh the capital of his kingdom (c. 700). His energetic building program included a splendid palace, water-supply and water-control projects, and a massive wall to surround the expanded city. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., never to be restored, marking the end of Assyria. A small remnant of Assyrians did escape the city, fleeing to Haran and making Ashur-uballit II "king of Assyria." In 610 B.C., though, Haran fell to the Babylonians and their allies. Ashur-uballit retreated, but in 609 B.C., with Egyptian help, he tried to recapture Haran. That attempt failed, and Ashur-uballit and the Assyrians disappeared from history.

## Key Themes

1. Nahum proclaims that the Lord is slow to anger and long-suffering, a jealous God (for his own honor, and for his people), wrathful and avenging (against his enemies), the one who controls nations and history, just, righteous, the majestic ruler of nature, good, merciful, gracious, loving, faithful, and the deliverer and protector of those who trust in him.

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2. God had used Assyria as his scourge on unfaithful Israel (both northern and southern kingdoms), but he in turn brought well-deserved judgment on Assyria, according to his timetable and method.
3. Nineveh fell not because it was a large, wealthy, Gentile commercial city, but because it was a godless and idolatrous city, a city of violence, lust, and greed.
4. The Lord of history is a “stronghold” for “those who take refuge in him” (1:7). He can handle any and all problems in their individual lives. He has defeated powers far greater than Assyria. He grants to his own the ultimate deliverance and vindication.

## History of Salvation Summary

Although God had used the Assyrians to chasten the wayward southern kingdom, he did not allow Judah to be annihilated. God’s plan, that the Messiah would come from the line of David, would not be thwarted. The religious feasts of Judah, which God encouraged them to keep (1:15), would have reminded them of the future Savior. (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the [Overview of the Bible](#). See also [History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

## Literary Features

The prophetic book of Nahum consists entirely of oracles of judgment, with no oracles of redemption or blessing, though a future restoration of Judah is indicated in passing. The second half of the book includes taunts, pronouncements of woe (sometimes called “the woe formula”), and vivid narratives of destruction. In a sense, the whole book is an extended taunt. Since the imagery and motifs are consistently military in reference (with God pictured as a divine warrior), the book can be considered war poetry.

The book of Nahum is constructed on a simple two-part plan. [Chapter 1](#) is a prelude to battle. [Chapters 2–3](#) move from preview to actual battle, pictured as a series of oracles of judgment against Nineveh and vivid pictures of her destruction (narrated as if by an eyewitness reporter).

## The Near East at the Time of Nahum

c. 660–614 B.C.

Nahum likely prophesied sometime between the zenith of Assyria’s power around 664 B.C. and the fall of Nineveh in 612. During this time the Assyrian Empire was in

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decline as Egypt, Judah, and Babylonia (with the help of the Medes) regained autonomy and eroded the power of Assyria. Nahum foretold of the fall of Nineveh, the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire.



## Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. A Psalm Descriptively Praising the Lord (1:2–8)
  - A. The Lord takes vengeance on his guilty adversaries (1:2–3a)
  - B. The Lord rules creation in majesty, and no one can stand before his wrath (1:3b–6)
  - C. The Lord delivers those who take refuge in him (1:7)
  - D. The Lord destroys his adversaries (1:8)
- III. The Lord's Coming Judgment on Nineveh and Deliverance of Judah (1:9–15)

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- A. The destruction of wicked, plotting Nineveh (1:9–12a)
  - B. Judah, having been afflicted by the Lord, is freed from Assyrian bondage (1:12b–13)
  - C. The termination of vile, idolatrous Nineveh (1:14)
  - D. Peace and deliverance for Judah (1:15)
- IV. Focus on Nineveh: The Lord's Coming Judgment (2:1–13)
- A. The beginning of the attack on Nineveh (2:1)
  - B. Reasons for judgment: the Assyrians' plundering of Judah, though Judah's restoration by God is planned (2:2)
  - C. Attacking soldiers and military action at Nineveh (2:3–5)
  - D. The fall and plundering of Nineveh (2:6–9)
  - E. A taunting song portraying Nineveh's destruction because of the city's lust for conquest (2:10–12)
  - F. The Lord speaks a word of judgment (2:13)
- V. Again, Focus on Nineveh: More concerning the Lord's Coming Judgment (3:1–19)
- A. Reasons for judgment: the violence, lying, and greed of Nineveh (3:1)
  - B. Military action at Nineveh and the ensuing slaughter of the Assyrians (3:2–3)
  - C. Reasons for judgment: the wickedness of Nineveh (3:4)
  - D. The Lord speaks a word of judgment (3:5–7)
  - E. Comparison with the conquest of Thebes (3:8–11)
  - F. A taunting song presenting Nineveh's inevitable destruction because of the city's incessant evil (3:12–19)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 1709-1711). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.