

Language: English

Book: Nahum

Nahum

Chapter 1

¹ The declaration about Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite.

² Yahweh is a jealous God and avenges;
Yahweh avenges and is full of wrath;
Yahweh takes vengeance on his adversaries,
and he continues his anger for his enemies.

³ Yahweh is slow to anger and great in power;
he will not acquit the wicked.
Yahweh makes his way in the whirlwind and the storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers.
Bashan is weak, and Carmel also;
the flowers of Lebanon have become weak.

⁵ The mountains shake in his presence,
and the hills melt;
the earth collapses in his presence, indeed,
the world and all people who live in it.

⁶ Who can stand before his rage?
Who can resist the fierceness of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and the rocks are broken apart by him.

⁷ Yahweh is good,
a stronghold in the day of trouble;
and he acknowledges those who take refuge in him.

⁸ But he will make a full end to his enemies
with an overwhelming flood;
he will pursue them into darkness.

⁹ What are you people plotting against Yahweh?
He will make a full end to it;
trouble will not rise up a second time.

¹⁰ Like tangled thorns
and like the drink of drunkards,
they will be consumed like dry stubble.

¹¹ From you, Nineveh, has come out
someone who plotted evil against Yahweh,
a wicked counselor.

¹² This is what Yahweh says,

"Even if they are at their full strength and full numbers,
they will nevertheless be sheared; their people will pass away.
But you, Judah: Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no more.

¹³ Now will I break that people's yoke from off you;
I will break your chains."

14 Yahweh has given a command about you, Nineveh:
"There will be no more descendants bearing your name.
I will cut off the carved images and the cast metal figures
from the houses of your gods.
I will prepare your grave,
for you are contemptible."

15 Look, on the mountains
there are the feet of someone who is bringing good news,
who is announcing peace!
Celebrate your festivals, Judah,
and fulfill your vows,
for the wicked one will invade you no more;
he is completely cut off.

Nahum 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations prefer to set apart extended quotations, prayers and songs. The ULB and many other English translations set the lines of the entire book (except for verse 1 of this chapter) farther to the right on the page than regular text because they are poetic prophecy. (See: prophet)

Despite being divided into three chapters, this book consists of one long prophecy.

Special concepts in this chapter

Yahweh's anger against Nineveh

This prophecy should be read in reference to the book of Jonah. That book described how the people of Nineveh, Assyria's capital city, repented when Jonah warned them that Yahweh was angry at them. The book of Nahum, written a little over one hundred years later than when Jonah was set, indicates that the Ninevites would be punished by God, but only after he had used them for his own purposes. These actions of Yahweh, although described as vengeance or anger, do not have the same sinful quality as they usually do with humans. (See: evil and avenge and sin)

Complete destruction

At that time, Assyria controlled almost the entire Near East. Nahum prophesied that the Assyrians would be so completely destroyed as a nation that they would no longer even be a people group. This prophecy came true very suddenly.

Nahum 1:1

General Information:

Nahum describes the destruction of Nineveh in poetry.

The declaration about Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite

These words are an introduction to the entire book. This can be stated as a complete sentence.
Alternate translation: "This is the book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite, which gives a declaration about Nineveh"

Elkoshite

A person from the village of Elkosh

Nahum 1:2

General Information:

Nahum begins to describe Yahweh coming to judge his enemies and to save his people. The vision is full of metaphorical language and uses different kinds of parallelism.

Yahweh

This is the name of God that he revealed to his people in the Old Testament. See the translationWord page about Yahweh concerning how to translate this.

full of wrath

"very angry" or "most angry"

he continues his anger for
"continues to be angry with"

Nahum 1:3

slow to anger
"slow to become angry"

he will not acquit the wicked
This emphatic negative statement can be translated positively. Alternate translation: "he will always be sure to punish the wicked"

Yahweh makes his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet
The biblical writers often associated Yahweh's presence with powerful storms. Here the writer speaks of Yahweh as if he were a person walking or marching and kicking up dust as he comes to judge the people.

the dust of his feet
"the dust that his feet kick up"

Nahum 1:4

General Information:
Nahum continues to describe Yahweh coming to judge his enemies and to save his people.

Bashan is weak, and Carmel also; the flowers of Lebanon have become weak
The word translated as "weak" can also mean "withered" or "dried out." Bashan was known for its good pastureland where people tended sheep and cattle, "Carmel" refers to Mount Carmel, which was known for its tree orchards, and the snow from the mountains in Lebanon kept that place fertile. Since Yahweh dries up all the rivers and causes drought, these fertile places will no longer be fertile. Alternate translation: "The fields of Bashan wither, the trees of Mount Carmel die, and the flowers of Lebanon fade"

Nahum 1:5

the hills melt
Possible meanings are 1) the earthquake causing the hills to crumble to pieces is spoken of as if the hills were melting or 2) the water from the storms coursing down the hills and causing them to erode is spoken of as if the hills were melting.

the earth collapses
Possible meanings are 1) the mountains and hills collapse or 2) the entire ground begins to move with violent motions.

the world and all people who live in it
Here the word "world" refers to the inhabited places on the earth. The verb for this phrase is understood from the previous phrase. Alternate

translation: "the world shakes and all the people who live in it collapse"

Nahum 1:6

General Information:
Nahum continues to describe Yahweh coming to judge his enemies and to save his people.

Who can stand before his rage? Who can resist the fierceness of his anger?
These two rhetorical questions mean basically the same thing. They can be translated with statements. Alternate translation: "No one can stand before his rage! No one can resist the fierceness of his anger!"

resist the fierceness of his anger
Possible meanings are 1) "rise up and fight against him when he is angry" 2) "keep him from destroying him when he is angry"

fierceness of his anger
"intensity of his anger" or "amount of his anger"

His wrath is poured out like fire
Nahum speaks of Yahweh's anger as if it were a liquid that he pours out and which burns like fire. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "He pours out his wrath like fire" or "He expresses his fierce anger"

the rocks are broken apart by him
This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "he breaks apart the rocks" or "he causes the rocks to break apart"

Nahum 1:7

a stronghold ... those who take refuge in him
Nahum speaks of Yahweh as if he were a place where people can be safe from those who wish to harm them, and of those who trust Yahweh to protect them as if they were taking refuge inside that safe place.

in the day of trouble
"in times of trouble" or "when troubles happen."
The word "day" here refers to a general period of time.

Nahum 1:8

he will make a full end to his enemies
The idiom "make a full end" refers to causing his enemies to die. Alternate translation: "he will completely destroy his enemies" or "he will kill all his enemies"

with an overwhelming flood
Nahum speaks of Yahweh destroying his enemies in such a way that they will be powerless to avoid death as if Yahweh caused them to drown in a great flood of water.

he will pursue them into darkness

Here the word "darkness" represents the place of the dead, which is characterized as a dark place. Nahum speaks of Yahweh killing his enemies as if he were chasing them into this dark place. Alternate translation: "he will cause all his enemies to die"

Nahum 1:9

General Information:

Nahum tells the people of Nineveh how Yahweh will deal with them.

What are you people plotting against Yahweh?

This rhetorical question emphasizes the futility of making evil plans against Yahweh. Alternate translation: "It is futile for you people to plot against Yahweh"

He will make a full end to it

The idiom "make a full end" refers to causing something to exist no longer. Alternate translation: "He will completely stop what you do" or "He will cause your plotting to fail"

trouble will not rise up a second time

Possible meanings are 1) "trouble" is a metonym for the punishment that Yahweh will inflict upon the people. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will not have to punish you a second time" or 2) "trouble" refers to the trouble that the people cause by plotting against Yahweh. Alternate translation: "you will not cause trouble a second time"

Nahum 1:10

General Information:

Nahum uses three metaphors to show that Yahweh will destroy

Like tangled thorns

Possible meanings for this metaphor are that Nahum speaks of 1) the people who plot against Yahweh being unable to free themselves from the trouble that Yahweh will bring upon them as though they were tangled up in thorn bushes and unable to get free or 2) Yahweh quickly destroying those who plot against him as if Yahweh were a person weaving thorn bushes together so they will burn quickly and putting them in a fire.

like the drink of drunkards

Possible meanings for this metaphor are that Nahum speaks of 1) those who plot against Yahweh suffering the consequences of their plans as if they were completely drunk with alcohol or 2) Yahweh destroying those who plot against him as if he were a drunkard drinking a large amount of alcoholic drink.

they will be consumed like dry stubble

Nahum speaks of Yahweh completely destroying those who plot against him as if fire would burn them up like fire burns up dry stubble. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "fire will completely devour them like it devours dry stubble"

consumed

Nahum speaks of fire burning something completely as if the fire were devouring that thing. Alternate translation: "burned up by fire"

Nahum 1:11

From you, Nineveh, has come out someone who plotted evil against Yahweh

"Someone who planned evil against Yahweh has come out from you, Nineveh." The words "From you, Nineveh" are at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize that the writer is now speaking to Nineveh.

From you, Nineveh, has come out someone

The writer speaks as if the city of Nineveh were one person who could hear him speak. The word "Nineveh" is a personification of the people who live in Nineveh. Alternate translation: "From among the people of Nineveh has come out someone" or "From Nineveh have come out people"

a wicked counselor

someone who encouraged people to do wicked things

Nahum 1:12

General Information:

Yahweh speaks to the Israelites about Nineveh.

Even if they are at their full strength and full numbers

This refers to the Assyrians or to the people of Nineveh.

they will nevertheless be sheared

Yahweh speaks of destroying the people of Nineveh as if they were sheep that he will shear. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "I will nevertheless shear them" or "I will nevertheless destroy them"

pass away

"disappear" or "waste away" or "all die"

Nahum 1:13

Now will I break that people's yoke from off you; I will break your chains

Yahweh speaks of freeing Judah from Assyrian oppression as if he were breaking the yoke and chains that the Assyrians had placed on them. Alternate translation: "Now I will free you from that people and they will no longer oppress you"

Nahum 1:14

Yahweh has given a command about you, Nineveh ... your name ... your gods ... your grave ... you are

The writer speaks as if the city of Nineveh were one person who could hear him speak. The word "Nineveh" is a personification of the people who live in Nineveh. See how you translated "you, Nineveh" in [Nahum 1:11]

I will cut off the carved images and the cast metal figures from the houses of your gods

Yahweh speaks of destroying the Assyrian idols as if he were cutting them off, like a person would cut a branch from a tree. The word "house" is a metonym for the temples in which the people worshiped these idols. Alternate translation: "I will destroy the carved images and the cast metal figures that are in the temples of your gods"

I will prepare your grave

It is implied that Yahweh will also bury them in the graves that he digs for them. Alternate translation: "I will dig your graves and bury you in them"

Nahum 1:15

on the mountains there are the feet of someone who is bringing good news

Here the word "feet" represent the person who is running in order to declare a message. Alternate translation: "on the mountains there is someone who is bringing good news"

wicked one ... he

Nahum refers to the people of Nineveh as though they were one person.

he is completely cut off

Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh being completely destroyed as if they had been cut off, like a person would cut a branch from a tree. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "he is completely destroyed" or "Yahweh has completely destroyed him"

Chapter 2

- ¹ The one who scatters is coming up against you.
Guard the city wall, watch the road,
strengthen your loins, pull together all your strength.
- ² For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of Jacob
like the majesty of Israel,
although the plunderers devastated them
and destroyed their vine branches.
- ³ The shields of his mighty men are red,
and the soldiers are clothed in scarlet;
the chariots flash with their metal
on the day that they are made ready,
and the cypress spears are waved in the air.
- ⁴ The chariots speed through the streets;
they rush back and forth in the wide streets.
They look like torches,
and they run like lightning.
- ⁵ He remembers his nobles;
they stumble over each other in their march;
they hurry to attack the city wall.
The large shield is made ready to protect these attackers.
- ⁶ The gates at the rivers are forced open,
and the palace collapses.
- ⁷ Huzzab is stripped
and is taken away;
her female servants moan like doves,
beating on their breasts.
- ⁸ Nineveh is like a leaking pool of water,
with its people fleeing away like rushing water.
Others shout, "Stop, stop,"
but no one turns back.
- ⁹ Take the silver plunder, take the gold plunder,
for there is no end to the treasure,
to the splendor of all Nineveh's desirable things.
- ¹⁰ Nineveh is empty; empty and devastated.
Everyone's heart melts, everyone's knees strike together,
and anguish is in all loins; their faces are all pale.
- ¹¹ Where now is the lions' den,
the place where the young lion cubs were fed,
the place where the lion and lioness walked,
with the cubs, where they were afraid of nothing?
- ¹² The lion tore his victims to pieces for his cubs;
he strangled victims for his lionesses,
and filled his cave with victims,
his dens with torn carcasses.
- ¹³ "See, I am against you—
this is the declaration of Yahweh of hosts.
I will burn your chariots in the smoke,
and the sword will devour your young lions.
I will cut off your prey from your land,
and the voices of your messengers will be heard no more."
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Nahum 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

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Special concepts in this chapter

Complete destruction

At that time, Assyria controlled almost the entire Near East. Nahum prophesied that the Assyrians would be so completely destroyed as a nation that they would no longer even be a people group. This prophecy came true and did so very suddenly. At times, this chapter is very violent in describing the destruction of Assyria, and this violence should not be toned down through the use of euphemism.

Nahum 2:1

General Information:

Nahum often wrote prophecy in the form of poetry. Hebrew poetry uses different kinds of parallelism. Here he begins to describe the destruction of Nineveh.

The one who scatters

Nahum speaks of an army or military leader destroying Nineveh as if he were to break Nineveh apart as one would shatter a clay pot and scatter the pieces around. Alternate translation: "The one who will destroy you"

is coming up against you

The idiom to "come against" means to attack. Alternate translation: "is preparing to attack you"

Guard the city wall, watch the road, strengthen your loins, pull together all your strength

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh. He tells them to prepare for battle although he knows that the enemy will destroy the city.

watch the road

This refers to having soldiers watch the roads leading to the city so that they can keep track of the enemy's approach.

strengthen your loins

The loins are a synecdoche for the whole body. Alternate translation: "make yourselves strong" or "prepare for battle"

pull together all your strength

This is an idiom that means to prepare oneself for action. Here it applies to military action. Alternate translation: "prepare yourselves for battle"

Nahum 2:2

For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of Jacob, like the majesty of Israel

The words "Jacob" and "Israel" are metonyms for the people who are descended from Jacob. Possible meanings are 1) the word "Jacob" refers to the southern kingdom and the word "Israel" refers to the northern kingdom. Alternate translation: "For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of Judah, as he promised to restore the majesty of Israel" or 2) both "Jacob" and "Israel" refer to the nation as a whole, included both northern and southern kingdoms and the two lines are parallel. Alternate translation: "For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of all Israel"

the plunderers

people who steal things by force, usually in war

destroyed their vine branches

Possible meanings are 1) this is a metaphor in which the Assyrians taking away Israel's possessions by force is spoken of as if Israel were a vine whose branches the Assyrians had stripped bare. Alternate translation: "robbed them of all of their possession, like one would strip bare vine branches" or 2) the words "vine branches" are a synecdoche for the agricultural fields throughout the nation. Alternate translation: "destroyed their fields of crops"

Nahum 2:3

The shields of his mighty men are red

Possible meanings are 1) the shields appear red as the light from the sun reflects upon their metal surfaces or 2) the shields are covered with leather that has been dyed red.

his mighty men

the soldiers of the one "who will dash" Nineveh "to pieces" (Nahum 2:1).

the chariots flash with their metal

This likely refers to the light from the sun reflecting upon the metal chariots.

on the day that they are made ready

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "when the soldiers have made them ready" or "when the soldiers have prepared them to attack"

the cypress spears are waved in the air

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "the soldiers wave their cypress spears in the air"

cypress

a type of tree whose wood is good for weapons

Nahum 2:4

The chariots speed through the streets

"The soldiers drive the chariots wildly through the streets"

They look like torches

Nahum compares the way that the light from the sun reflects upon the chariots with torches whose fire gives light.

they run like lightning

Nahum compares the way that the light from the sun reflects upon the chariots, and the quickness with which the chariots move, with lightning that flashes quickly in the sky.

Nahum 2:5

He remembers his nobles

The word "remembers" is a metonym for what he does after he remembers them: he calls them to action. Alternate translation: "He calls his nobles" or "He summons his nobles"

nobles

military leaders

in their march

The word "march" can be translated as a verb. Alternate translation: "as they march"

The large shield is made ready to protect these attackers

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "The attackers make ready the large shield to protect themselves"

The large shield

This refers to a large cover that those who besieged a city would set up over themselves and their battering rams to protect themselves against the arrows and other projectiles with which the people in the city would attack them.

Nahum 2:6

The gates at the rivers are forced open

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "The enemy forces open the gates at the rivers"

The gates at the rivers

This refers to the gates that controlled the flow and direction of the river.

Nahum 2:7

Huzzab is stripped and is taken away

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "The enemy strips Huzzab and takes her away"

Huzzab is stripped and is taken away

The exact meaning of the word "Huzzab" is uncertain. Two possible meanings are 1) it is the name of a queen in Nineveh and the sentence means that the attacking soldiers have stripped her of her clothes in order to humiliate her and then have carried her off into captivity or 2) it is the name of an idol and the sentence means that the attackers have stripped the gold and silver off the idol and have carried it away.

is stripped

If your language has a word for forcibly taking a person's clothes off of that person and leaving him embarrassed and with nothing to keep him warm, you should use it here.

her female servants moan like doves

The moaning sounds that the female servants make sound like the sounds that doves make.

her female servants

If the word "Huzzab" refers to a queen, then this phrase refers to the young women who attended her. If the word "Huzzab" refers to an idol, then this phrase refers to the young women who worked as temple prostitutes.

beating on their breasts

Beating one's breast was a gesture used to express great mourning.

Nahum 2:8

Nineveh is like a leaking pool of water, with its people fleeing away like rushing water

Nahum compares the way that the people flee from the city of Nineveh with the way that water gushes from a reservoir of water when the dam has been broken.

Nahum 2:9

Take the silver plunder ... Nineveh's desirable things

It is not clear who is speaking here. This may be an apostrophe in which Nahum gives directions to the attackers, or the attackers may be speaking and giving directions to one another.

Take the silver plunder, take the gold plunder

The word "plunder" means things stolen by force, usually in war. Alternate translation: "Take the silver as plunder, take the gold as plunder" or "Take the silver, take the gold"

there is no end to the treasure, to the splendor

The words "no end" are an exaggeration to express that there is a great amount of something. Alternate translation: "there is a very great amount of treasure, of the splendor"

to the splendor of all Nineveh's desirable things

This phrase refers to the silver, gold, and other treasures in Nineveh. The verb may be supplied from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "there is no end to the splendor of all Nineveh's beautiful treasures"

Nahum 2:10

Everyone's heart melts

Nahum speaks of the people losing courage as if their hearts melt like wax. Alternate translation: "Everyone loses courage"

everyone's knees strike together

This describes a physical response to great fear. The people's legs shake so badly that their knees knock together and they are unable to walk or run.

anguish is in all loins

The loins are either 1) a synecdoche for the whole person. Alternate translation: "everyone is in anguish" Or 2) a metonym for the internal organs, and you should describe them using your language's words for how a person's stomach feels when he is very frightened. Alternate translation: "everyone's stomachs are churning"

Nahum 2:11

General Information:

In these verses, Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were a group of lions, and of the city Nineveh as if it were their den. The metaphor speaks of the way in which the Assyrians would conquer other people and take their possessions as their own as if they were lions hunting prey and bringing the dead animals back to their den.

Where now is the lions' den ... afraid of nothing?

Nahum uses this rhetorical question to mock Nineveh, which has been destroyed. Alternate translation: "The lions' den is nowhere to be found ... afraid of nothing." or "Look at what has become of the lions' den ... afraid of nothing!"

Nahum 2:12

he strangled victims

"he choked victims." This is probably a reference to the way that lions usually kill their prey, by biting its throat. Alternate translation: "he killed his victims"

filled his cave with victims, his dens with torn carcasses

These two phrases are saying the same thing in different ways. The verb may be supplied for the second phrase. Alternate translation: "filled his cave with victims, and filled his dens with torn carcasses"

Nahum 2:13

See

"Look" or "Listen" or "Pay attention to what I am about to tell you."

the sword will devour your young lions

Here the word "sword" is a metonym for soldiers who attack with swords and is spoken of as if it were a person who eats its victims. Nahum also continues to speak to the people of Nineveh as if they were lions. Alternate translation: "attackers will kill your people with swords"

I will cut off your prey from your land

Yahweh speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were lions who preyed upon the nations. Possible meanings are 1) the word "prey" is a metonym for the things that they have taken from those upon whom they preyed, and Yahweh speaks of taking those things away from them as if it were cutting off their prey. Alternate translation: "I will take away from your land all the things that you took from others" or 2) Yahweh speaks of the nations whom the people of Nineveh had plundered as if they were Nineveh's prey, and preventing Nineveh from plundering any more nations as if he were cutting off their prey. Alternate translation: "I will stop you from preying upon any other nation"

the voices of your messengers will be heard no more

This likely refers to the messengers that the Assyrians sent out to other nations to demand surrender or payment of tribute. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "no one will ever hear the voices of your messengers again"

Chapter 3

- ¹ Woe to the city full of blood!
It is all full of lies and stolen property;
victims are always in her.
- ² But now there is the noise of whips
and the sound of rattling wheels,
prancing horses, and bounding chariots.
- ³ Horsemen charging,
flashing swords and glittering spears!
Piles of the dead, bodies that could not be counted—
their attackers stumble over the bodies.
- ⁴ This is happening because of the lustful actions
of the beautiful prostitute, the expert in witchcraft,
who sells nations through her prostitution,
and peoples through her acts of witchcraft.
- ⁵ "See, I am against you—
this is the declaration of Yahweh of hosts—
I will raise up your skirt over your face
and show your private parts to the nations,
your shame to the kingdoms.
- ⁶ I will throw disgusting filth on you
and make you vile;
I will set you up as a spectacle.
- ⁷ It will come about that everyone who looks at you
will flee from you and say,
'Nineveh is destroyed; who will weep for her?'
Where can I go to find anyone to comfort you?"
- ⁸ Nineveh, are you better than Thebes,
which was located on the Nile River,
which had water around her,
whose rampart was the sea,
and the sea was its wall?
- ⁹ Cush and Egypt were her strength,
and there was no end to it;
Put and Libya were allies to her.
- ¹⁰ Yet Thebes was carried away;
she went into captivity;
her young children were dashed in pieces
at the head of every street;
her enemies threw lots for her honorable men,
and all her great men were bound in chains.
- ¹¹ You also will become drunk; you will try to hide,
and you also will look for a refuge from your enemy.
- ¹² All your fortresses will be like fig trees
with the earliest ripe figs:
if they are shaken,
they fall into the mouth of the eater.
- ¹³ See, the people among you are women;
the gates of your land have been opened wide to your enemies;
fire has devoured their bars.
- ¹⁴ Go draw water for the siege;
strengthen your fortresses;
go into the clay and tread the mortar;
pick up the molds for the bricks.
- ¹⁵ Fire will devour you there, and the sword will destroy you.

It will devour you as young locusts devour everything.

Make yourselves as many as the young locusts,
as many as the full-grown locusts.

16 You have multiplied your merchants
more than the stars in the heavens;
but they are like young locusts:
they plunder the land and then fly away.

17 Your princes are like locust swarms,
and your commanders are like locusts
that camp in the walls on a cold day.
But when the sun rises they flee,
and the place they go to is not known.

18 King of Assyria, your shepherds are asleep;
your nobles are lying down resting.
Your people are scattered on the mountains,
and there is no one to gather them.

19 No healing is possible for your wounds.
Your wounds are severe.
Everyone who hears the news about you
will clap their hands in joy over you.
On whom has your wickedness
not trodden continually?

Nahum 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

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Despite being divided into three chapters, the book contains one long prophecy.

Special concepts in this chapter

Euphemism

This chapter speaks about the evils of the Assyrians in violent ways. It is important to avoid toning down this language through the use of euphemism, if at all possible. Although there is some hyperbole, the reader should not assume that the author intends this writing to be taken as completely hyperbolic. (See: and evil)

Nahum 3:1

General Information:

Nahum often wrote prophecy in the form of poetry. Hebrew poetry uses different kinds of parallelism. Here he continues to describe the destruction of Nineveh.

the city full of blood

Here the word "blood" represents bloodshed and refers to the people who have committed murder. Alternate translation: "the city full of murderers"

It is all full of lies

Here the word "lies" is a metonym for those who tell lies. Alternate translation: "It is full of liars"

Nahum 3:2

the noise of whips and the sound of rattling wheels, prancing horses, and bounding chariots

These phrases describe the sound of chariots rushing through the streets as their drivers use their whips on the horses.

Nahum 3:3

Piles of the dead, bodies that could not be counted

There were so many dead bodies that the attackers piled them in heaps.

bodies

bodies of people who have died

their attackers stumble over the bodies

This shows that there were very many dead bodies on the ground.

Nahum 3:4

the lustful actions of the beautiful prostitute

Nahum speaks of Nineveh causing other nations to be subject to her as if the city were a prostitute who seduces men with her beauty.

the expert in witchcraft

Nahum speaks of Nineveh causing other nations to be subject to her as if the city were a witch who casts a spells on others.

who sells nations through her prostitution, and peoples through her acts of witchcraft

Here the word "sells" implies that the people of Nineveh cause other nations and peoples to become slaves. Nineveh uses her beauty, power, and influence to make others her slaves. Alternate translation: "who by her prostitution and witchcraft causes the people of other nations to become her slaves"

Nahum 3:5

See

"Look" or "Listen" or "Pay attention to what I am about to tell you"

I will raise up your skirt over your face and show your private parts to the nations

This refers to the practice of publicly humiliating prostitutes by stripping them naked in front of the community. This continues the metaphor of Yahweh speaking of the city of Nineveh as if it were a prostitute. Alternate translation: "I will publicly humiliate you, as one would humiliate a prostitute by raising up her skirt over her face and showing her private parts to all the people"

your shame to the kingdoms

This phrase explains the purpose of lifting up Nineveh's skirt. The verb may be supplied from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "I will show your shame to the kingdoms"

Nahum 3:6

I will throw disgusting filth on you

The words "disgusting filth" refer to all kinds of garbage. Throwing garbage at a person was a sign of strong contempt. Alternate translation: "I will show my contempt for you, like a person would throw disgusting filth at another"

Nahum 3:7

who will weep for her?

The people ask this rhetorical question to emphasize the negative answer. Alternate translation: "no one will weep for her."

Where can I go to find anyone to comfort you?

Yahweh uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there will be no one who will be able to comfort Nineveh. Alternate translation: "There is nowhere I could go to find someone to comfort you." or "There will be no one to comfort you."

Nahum 3:8

General Information:

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself.

are you better than Thebes ... wall?

Nahum asks this rhetorical question to emphasize the negative answer that it anticipates. Alternate translation: "you are not better than Thebes ... wall."

Thebes

This was the former capital of Egypt, which the Assyrians had conquered.

which was located on the Nile River

"which was built by the Nile River"

whose rampart was the sea, and the sea was its wall

These two phrases share similar meanings. The word "sea" refers to the Nile River, which ran near the city. Nahum speaks of the Nile as if it were the wall that protected the city. Alternate translation: "which had the Nile river as its defense, as some cities have a wall for their defense"

rampart

A rampart is a wall built around a city to keep enemy armies from getting into the city.

Nahum 3:9

Cush and Egypt were her strength

"Ethiopia and Egypt strengthened her" or "Cush and Egypt were her allies"

there was no end to it

The word "it" refers to the "strength" that Cush and Egypt gave to Thebes. That there was no end to it is a hyperbole that expresses the great amount of strength. Alternate translation: "their strength was very great"

Put and Libya

These are the names of places in northern Africa that were close to Thebes.

Nahum 3:10

General Information:

Nahum continues to speak to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself.

Yet Thebes was carried away

The word "Thebes" represents the people who lived in Thebes. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "Yet those who attacked Thebes carried the people away"

she went into captivity

The word "she" refers to Thebes and represents the people who lived there. Alternate translation: "they went into captivity"

her young children were dashed in pieces

This is a brutal description of the soldiers killing children. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "enemy soldiers dashed her young children to pieces" or "enemy soldiers beat her young children to death"

at the head of every street

The beginning of a street is spoken of as if it were the head. Also, "every" is a generalization that means many places all over the city. Alternate translation: "on every street corner" or "in the streets all over the city"

all her great men were bound in chains

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "they bound all her great men in chains"

Nahum 3:11

You also will become drunk

Here the word "You" refers to Nineveh. Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh suffering and dying in battle as if they had become drunk from drinking too much wine.

Nahum 3:12

General Information:

Nahum continues to speak to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself.

All your fortresses

Possible meanings for the word "fortresses" are 1) it refers to Nineveh's fortifications, such as the wall that surrounded the city Alternate translation: "All of your fortifications" or "All of your defenses" or 2) it refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders and prevented enemy armies from attacking Nineveh. Alternate translation: "All of your fortified cities"

All your fortresses will be like fig trees with the earliest ripe figs: if they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater

Nahum compares the ease with which the attackers will conquer Nineveh with the ease with which a person can cause ripe figs to fall from a tree. Alternate translation: "Your enemies will destroy your fortresses as easily as a person can shake a fig tree and eat the first ripe figs that fall"

the earliest ripe figs

This refers to the figs that would ripen first on the tree. These figs fell from the tree easily, so that a person only had to shake the tree to make them fall. Figs that ripened later would require a person to climb the tree and pick them by hand.

if they are shaken

"if the trees are shaken." This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "if a person shakes the trees"

they fall into the mouth of the eater

"the figs fall into the mouth of the eater." This is an exaggeration. By saying that the figs fall from the tree into the mouth of the one who eats it, Nahum emphasizes that the figs are ready to eat immediately. Alternate translation: "a person can eat the fig immediately"

Nahum 3:13

the people among you are women

In this ancient culture, women were not warriors for a number of reasons, including their being generally weaker physically than men. Here Nahum speaks of Nineveh's warriors losing their strength and courage to fight as if the people in the city were all women. Alternate translation: "your people are all like women who are weak and cannot defend themselves"

the gates of your land have been opened wide to your enemies

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "the gates of your land are wide open to your enemies" or "someone has opened wide to your enemies the gates of your land"

the gates of your land have been opened wide to your enemies

Possible meanings are 1) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the Nineveh's defenses, then "the gates of your land" refers to the gates in the walls around Nineveh. Alternate translation: "the gates of your city are wide open for your enemies to attack" or 2) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders, then "the gates of your land" is a metaphor in which those cities are spoken of as if they were gates that prevented enemy armies from entering the land. Alternate translation: "your land is defenseless before your enemies because they have destroyed the cities that protected your borders"

fire has devoured their bars

Possible meanings are 1) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the Nineveh's defenses, then "their bars" refers to the bars that locked the gates in the walls around Nineveh. Alternate translation: "fire has destroyed the bars that lock your city gates" or 2) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders, then "their bars" is a metaphor in which those cities are spoken of as if they were locked gates that prevented enemy armies from entering the land. Alternate translation: "the cities on your borders can no longer protect you, just as gates can no longer protect a city when fire has destroyed their bars"

fire has devoured

Nahum speaks of fire burning up and destroying as if fire were eating. Alternate translation: "fire has destroyed" or "fire has burned up"

Nahum 3:14

General Information:

Nahum continues to speak to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself.

Go draw water for the siege ... pick up the molds for the bricks

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh. He tells them to prepare for battle and to repair the walls, although he knows that the enemy will destroy the city.

strengthen your fortresses

"repair the fortifications"

go into the clay and tread the mortar; pick up the molds for the bricks

These phrases refer to making mud bricks that they will use to repair the city's wall.

Nahum 3:15

Fire will devour you there

Nahum speaks of fire burning and destroying as if it were eating. Alternate translation: "Fire will destroy you there" or "Your enemies will burn you with fire there"

the sword will destroy you

Here the word "sword" is a metonym for the enemies who will attack with swords. Alternate translation: "your enemies will kill you with their swords"

It will devour you as young locusts devour everything

The word "It" refers to the "sword," which is personified as eating those whom it kills. The soldiers using their swords to kill everyone in Nineveh is compared with the way that a swarm of locusts eats every plant in its path. Alternate translation: "Your enemies' swords will kill all of

you, just as easily as a swarm of locusts devours everything in its path"

Make yourselves as many as the young locusts, as many as the full-grown locusts

These words begin a new paragraph where Nahum compares the number of people in Nineveh with the large number of locusts in a swarm.

Nahum 3:16

General Information:

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself.

You have multiplied your merchants more than the stars in the heavens

This exaggeration emphasizes the great number of merchants who lived and worked in Nineveh. Alternate translation: "It is as if you have more merchants than there are stars in the sky" or "You have more merchants than anyone could count"

they are like young locusts: they plunder the land and then fly away

Nahum compares the way that these merchants, who have made their profit by selling their goods in Nineveh, will flee from the city when the battle begins with the way that locusts fly away after they have eaten all of the plants in their path.

Nahum 3:17

your commanders are like locusts that camp in the walls on a cold day. But when the sun rises they flee

Nahum compares the way that the officials in Nineveh will flee when the battle starts with the way that locusts will remain still while it is cold, but will fly away when the sun rises and the air becomes warm.

the place they go to is not known

"and no one knows where they have gone"

Nahum 3:18

your shepherds are asleep; your nobles are lying down resting

These two lines share similar meanings. Nahum speaks of the leaders of Assyria as if they were shepherd who are to care for their sheep. He speaks of the shepherds and rulers dying as if they had fallen asleep. Alternate translation: "your leaders who are like shepherds are dead; your rulers are all dead"

Your people are scattered on the mountains

Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were sheep that scatter after the shepherds have died. Alternate translation: "Your people are scattered like sheep on the mountains"

Nahum 3:19

No healing is possible for your wounds. Your wounds are severe

Nahum speaks of the certainty of the destruction of Nineveh and the defeat of its king as if the king had suffered an incurable wound.

No healing is possible for your wounds

The word "healing" can be translated with a verbal phrase. Alternate translation: "No one is able to heal your wounds"

On whom has your wickedness not trodden continually?

The writer either 1) speaks of wickedness as if it were a person who steps on other people while he goes from one place to another or 2) uses "wickedness" as a metonym for the people who commit it and "trodden" as a metaphor for committing wickedness. This rhetorical question emphasizes the negative answer that it anticipates. Alternate translation: "Your wickedness has continually trodden on everyone." or "There is no one to whom you have not continually done wickedness."
