

## *NAHUM*

The name Nahum means "consolation" or "comfort. Like Obadiah, Nahum announced the downfall of Assyria and its capital, Nineveh. The site of Elkosh, the place from which Nahum came is unknown though very likely it was located in Judah. In the 16th century the village of Elkosh, 27 miles north of Mosul, Iraq was declared by tradition to be the location of Nahum's tomb. Elkosh, a town in SW Judea between Beit Jibrin and Gaza has been presumed to be identified as the Elkosh of Nahum. Other scholars have sought to make a case for other locations. Jerome had a village in Galilee pointed out to him by a guide prior to 420 CE. Nothing is known about the life of the prophet.

Based on 3:8 Thebes had apparently already been sacked. This took place under Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 663 BCE. Shortly thereafter the Assyrian empire also fell. The Medes and Persians destroyed Nineveh in 612 BCE. Nahum, based on this information, apparently proclaimed his oracles between 633 and 612 BCE. It is generally assumed that Nahum's messages were early in that time period.

Under Jonah the judgment against Assyria is suspended. Now, however, when Nahum arrives on the scene Assyria and its capitol, Nineveh, are ripe for ruin. The tolerance of God has reached its limit. Just judgment will befall Assyria because of its harsh dealings with others. The time of plundering, conquest, exploitation and tyranny has come to an end.

Nahum seems to have been the last of the great classical poets among the Hebrew people. As a poet Nahum ranks highest in the Hebrew canon for his poetic ability.

The acrostic poem: 1:2-10 begins an alphabetic acrostic hymn describing a theophany. Unfortunately the text has not come down to us in good condition. Only the first half of the Hebrew alphabet, from Aleph a to Koph k exist. 1. Possibly the poem was never completed by Nahum; 2. the last portion has been altered so that it can not be reconstructed, 3. or it has been lost. Scholars have sought to reconstruct the verses 11-15 to recover the remainder of the poem as an acrostic but have not been successful.

For several other problematic texts there is no clear understanding and agreement by scholars though attempts to recover the original text are ongoing.

Nahum is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls: 4QpNahum. This is a commentary on the book of Nahum.

# NAHUM

## <CHAPTER 1>

### I Introduction 1:1

<sup>1</sup> An oracle (*or, message*) <sup>1</sup> concerning Nineveh. <sup>2</sup> A record <sup>3</sup> of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. <sup>4</sup>

### II The Acrostic Poem 1:2 - 10 The Lord's anger against Nineveh

Aleph <sup>2</sup> The Lord is jealous: an avenging God. <sup>5</sup>

The Lord is avenging and possesses wrath:

The Lord wreaks vengeance on his enemies (*or, adversaries*),  
and is watchful in his wrath against this foes.

<sup>3</sup> The Lord does not become angry easily,  
yet has great power. <sup>6</sup>

The Lord will by no means exonerate the guilty.

Beth His way is in the whirlwind and storm,  
and the clouds are stirred up by his feet.

Gimel g <sup>4</sup> He issues an order to rebuke the sea and it dries up. <sup>7</sup>  
All the rivers also become dry.

Daleth Bashan and Carmel languish. <sup>8</sup>

The flowers <sup>9</sup> of Lebanon <sup>10</sup> fade <sup>11</sup>

He <sup>5</sup> The mountains quake <sup>12</sup> in his presence,  
the hills dissolve (*or, melt*).

Waw The earth trembles <sup>13</sup> before him.  
The world and all who live in it are in turmoil.

Zain <sup>6</sup> Who can survive <sup>14</sup> his indignation?  
Who can endure (*or, resist*) his blazing anger?

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1 Literally: "burden."

2 The Assyrian capitol.

3 Literally: "The book."

4 Cf. the introduction for the meaning of Nahum and the possible location of Elkosh.

5 TEV: "tolerates no rivals." Hebrew also has the concept of being "zealous" in the word translated "jealous."

6 This is possibly a lost line that should follow verse 7 according to some scholars.

7 Hebrew unclear.

8 Bashan means "smooth sail", a high plain or table land east of the Sea of Galilee, noted for its wheat and cattle. Today it might be known as "the Golan heights." Carmel means "field, park, garden." It is the mountain that juts out into the Mediterranean.

9 Literally: "bud." Some scholars translate it as "fruit."

10 The name means: "white mountain." The territory corresponds roughly with present day Lebanon. All three locations are noted for their trees and flowers, the most fruitful parts of the area. Cf. Isaiah 33:9; 35:2.

11 The Hebrew word here translated "fade" is the same word that ends the previous stich, translated as "languish."

12 Literally: "heave up: or "lift up."

13 Hebrew uncertain. Possibly "heaves."

14 Literally: "stand before."

Heth His fury is poured out like a stream of fire  
and the rocks crumble <sup>15</sup> before him.

Teth <sup>7</sup> The Lord is good,  
a refuge in times of adversity.

Yodh He cares about those who take refuge in him.  
<sup>8</sup> But like a cataclysmic flood <sup>16</sup>

Koph he will completely destroy his adversaries. <sup>17</sup>  
and will pursue his enemies into darkness. <sup>18</sup>

To Judah Mem <sup>9</sup> What? Are you plotting against the Lord? <sup>19</sup>  
He will bring about your destruction  
Lamed No one opposes him a second time, <sup>20</sup> none.  
<sup>10</sup> His foes <sup>21</sup> are like those who are overcome by wine,  
entangled like dry thorn bushes, <sup>22</sup>  
like dry stubble.

*III A long poem 1:11 - 3:19*

*A The Vision of Nahum the Elkoshite 1:11-15 <sup>23</sup>*

To Assyria <sup>11</sup> Has not someone sprung up from among you  
who has plotted evil against the Lord,  
as a worthless counselor, giving wicked advice?

To Judah <sup>12</sup> This is what the Lord declares:  
"Even though they are strong and numerous <sup>24</sup>  
they will be destroyed (*or, mowed down*) and disappear.  
  
"Though I have made you suffer (*or, afflicted you*)  
I will not do it again.  
<sup>13</sup> Now I will free you from the yoke that is on you  
and snap apart your shackles."

To Nineveh <sup>14</sup> The Lord has given his decree about you: <sup>25</sup>  
"No descendant of yours will survive to carry on your name. <sup>26</sup>

15 Literally: "are torn down."

16 Thought by some scholars to be a marginal note since it does not fit well in the poetry.

17 Hebrew uncertain. The translation "adversaries" follows the LXX. τους επεχειρομενους α απο ανισταμενων.  
Hebrew: *mqwmwhh*. Some emend to read "to those who oppose him."

18 Generally thought of as a reference to the underworld Cf. Job. 18:18.

19 Hebrew unclear. Cf. LXX & Vulgate.

20 Hebrew unclear. So: LXX. Literally: "oppression will not arise a second time."

21 So: emended. Hebrew: "distress."

22 BDB declares the text is probably corrupt and the sense obscure. cf. p. 685. ICC says the text is unintelligible.

23 Some scholars would have this be prose. Some place verse 11 elsewhere in chapters 1 or 2. In the left column is a suggestion by some scholars as to who is being addressed in the various verses. Cf. also 1:9.

24 Hebrew uncertain. Hebrew: *mshl mwm rbnm*. LXX read the Hebrew as: καταρχων υδατων πολλων.

25 Hebrew: "him."

26 Hebrew uncertain.

I will destroy the idols and cast images  
that are in your temples.  
I will make your grave deserving of contempt (*or, mockery*).<sup>27</sup>

To Judah

15 [H2:1] Look! A messenger is coming over the mountains,  
who brings good news,  
and who proclaims peace.  
Celebrate your festivals, O Judah,  
fulfill your vows.

The wicked will come against you again,  
but they will be completely destroyed<sup>28</sup>

<CHAPTER 2>

B. The attack<sup>29</sup> 2:1 - 5

1 [H2:2] The destroyer<sup>30</sup> has come up against you!  
Guard the fortress (*or, ramparts*)!  
Watch the road!  
Brace yourselves (*or, Get ready to fight*)!  
Marshal all the forces!

2 [H3] (For the Lord is restoring (*or, has restored*) the majesty<sup>31</sup> of Jacob  
as the majesty of Israel,  
although marauders have stripped them  
and ravished their branches.)<sup>32</sup>

3 [H4] The shields of their warriors are red,  
their soldiers are clothed in crimson.  
[The metal on the chariots flashes<sup>33</sup> like flames.]<sup>34</sup>  
When they are ready to attack<sup>35</sup>

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27 Hebrew uncertain. Some scholars place 1:14 after 2:2.

28 Hebrew uncertain. LXX: σοντετελεσται A possible reading of the Hebrew is: *klh*. "nothing." Verse 2:2 would seem to be appropriate at this point.

29 It is possible that this attack took place in 612 BCE when the Babylonians and Medes attacked. Cf. II Kings 18-19.

30 Hebrew unclear. A hapax legomenon. Literally, based on the root word: "shatterer." NAB: "the Hammer." Some scholars feel the likely reference is to Cyaxares, a Median leader.

31 An emendation. Hebrew: "the vine" which would fit with stich 4.

32 Some scholars move this verse to the end of chapter 1. The Hebrew text uses a figure of speech, the vine. A possible translation could be:

The Lord is restoring the vine of Jacob  
and also the vine of Israel.  
Although marauders have stripped them  
and ruined their branches.

33 A hapax legomenon. So: emended.

34 Hebrew obscure. *bhiwm hkkigw*. BHS suggests it probably is a gloss that could be deleted.

35 Literally: "on the day of his preparation."

the war horses<sup>36</sup> impatiently prance.  
<sup>4</sup>[H5] The chariots race through the streets,  
they are racing to and fro through the market squares.<sup>37</sup>  
Gleaming like torches,  
they dart like bolts of lightning.  
<sup>5</sup>[H6] The officers (*or, the select troops*) are summoned.<sup>38</sup>  
They stumble<sup>39</sup> as they go.  
They<sup>40</sup> hasten to the wall,  
but the protective shield (*or, mantelet*) is set in position.<sup>41</sup>

*C. Flight and capture 2:6 - 10*

<sup>6</sup>[H7] The river<sup>42</sup> gates (*or, sluices*) are opened,  
and terror floods the palace,  
(*or, the palace is overrun*)!<sup>43</sup>  
<sup>7</sup>[H8] The queen<sup>44</sup> is stripped, she is carried into exile.  
(*or, the queen is dishonored and made a captive*).  
Her maid servants are lamenting.<sup>45</sup>  
[Mourning like doves,]<sup>46</sup>  
and beating their breasts,<sup>47</sup> they demonstrate sorrow.  
<sup>8</sup>[H9] Nineveh is like a reservoir  
whose water<sup>48</sup> escapes (*or, drains away*).  
"Stop! Stop!" they cry;  
but no one turns (*it*) back.  
<sup>9</sup>[H10] 'Plunder the silver!  
Plunder the gold!  
There are endless (*or, unlimited*) treasures;  
a hoard<sup>49</sup> of valuables.  
<sup>10</sup>[H11] Desolation, devastation and destruction!<sup>50</sup>

36 So: emended to compare with LXX & Syriac. Hebrew: "cypresses. This might imply spear shafts. An Arabic root word might read "mustered in array." Some scholars translate as "the cypress (or fir) spears (or arrows) are brandished."

37 Hebrew: "broad places."

38 Hebrew unclear. *iwkk*. Literally: "be remembered" LXX: καὶ μνησθησονται. "he remembers his nobles. They stumble."

39 Hebrew uncertain. *ikkshlww*. BHS suggests: *la ibshllww*. "not stumble."

40 I. e. the attackers.

41 Hebrew unclear. The reference is possibly to the mantelet which was a protective covering used by invaders during siege warfare.

42 Possibly the Hebrew word should be translated "bronze," a slight emendation.

43 Hebrew unclear. The thought might be that the sun dried bricks of the palace have dissolved causing the destruction of the palace.

44 Hebrew uncertain. Literally: "huzzah" a hapax legomenon.

45 The reference could be to the queen or it could be the chief idol Ishtar. The maid servants would be the temple prostitutes.

46 This stich is a possible gloss.

47 Literally: "hearts."

48 Hebrew uncertain. So emended to compare with LXX. Hebrew: "from the days that she has become, and they" The emendation is through the dropping of one letter: *y*. Cf. Joel 2:6.

49 LXX & Syriac: βεβαρυνται. Cf. ANET p. 304.

50 So: TAN. These three Hebrew words sound similar. An example in English might be: Nineveh has suffered destruction,

Hearts sink and knees buckle!  
Anguish is evident in everyone;  
all faces are drained of color.<sup>51</sup>

*D. Nineveh's crimes 2:11 - 13*

11 [H12] What has become of (*that city that was like*) a lion's den;  
the lair of the young lions;  
where the lion brought its prey,  
where his cubs were, with no one to disturb them?  
12 [H13] The lion has torn enough of its prey for its cubs,  
and strangled its prey for his lioness.  
He filled his lair with prey  
and his den with mangled flesh.

13 [H14] The Lord of hosts declares:

"Listen! I am against you and I will burn your chariots<sup>52</sup> in  
smoking fire and the sword will devour your young lions; I  
will stop your plundering, and the voice of your messengers  
will be heard no more.<sup>53</sup>

<CHAPTER 3>

*E. Woe to the bloody city 3:1 - 4*

1 Woe, city of bloodshed (*or, bloodthirsty city, city of murderers*);<sup>54</sup>  
filled with deceit and looting,  
and continual plunder!<sup>55</sup>  
2 Hear the crack of whips and the rattle of wheels,<sup>56</sup>  
galloping<sup>57</sup> steeds and lurching<sup>58</sup> chariots.  
3 Cavalry charging!<sup>59</sup>  
Flashing (*or, flaming*) swords and glittering spears!  
Piles of slain!  
Corpses piled high!  
Countless numbers are slain!<sup>60</sup>  
Tripping over the bodies!  
4 And because of the prostitute's countless debaucheries,

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desertion and desolation.

51 Possibly: "ashes cover their faces."

52 By transforming 2 letters the Hebrew word can be translated: "your hordes". LXX: *πληθος σου*. BHS offers several possible alternatives.

53 Hebrew uncertain.

54 Literally: "causing blood shed."

55 In Hebrew the root word is the same as the one for "prey." Some scholars place verse 4 at this point in chapter 3.

56 In Hebrew there is a play on words in this stich.

57 A hapax legomenon. Possibly: "rearing."

58 Literally: "skipping."

59 Literally: "somersaulting horses."

60 Literally: "there is no end to."

charming, as the mistress of sorcery,<sup>61</sup>  
who enchanted<sup>62</sup> nations with her debaucheries,  
and enslaved people<sup>63</sup> with her sorceries.

*F. The fall 3:5-19*

5 The Lord of Hosts declares:

"Be assured! I will deal with you!<sup>64</sup>

I will expose your nakedness<sup>65</sup>

and I will display your nakedness to the nations;  
your shame to the kingdoms.

6 I will throw filth<sup>66</sup> on you (*making you a horrible sight*),  
and treat you with contempt;<sup>67</sup>

and make you to be a spectacle (*or, vile*).<sup>68</sup>

7 All who stare at you will recoil<sup>69</sup> from you, and say:

'Nineveh has been ravaged (*or, devastated*)!

Who will console her?

Where will one look for someone to console her?'<sup>70</sup>

8 "Where you better than Thebes<sup>71</sup>

which was located along the Nile,

surrounded by water,

her rampart being the river,<sup>72</sup>

and water comprising her defensive wall?

9 Ethiopia<sup>73</sup> was her strength,<sup>74</sup> also Egypt.

There was no limit to her power.

Put<sup>75</sup> and the Libyans were her<sup>76</sup> helpers (*or, on her side*).<sup>77</sup>

10 "Yet she (*Thebes?*) was carried away into exile.

She went into captivity.

Her babies were dashed to pieces

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61 Literally: "priestess of charms" with an evil implication.

62 Hebrew uncertain.

63 Literally: "families."

64 Literally: "I am unto you."

65 Literally: "uncover your skirts over your face." Cf. Jeremiah 13:26; Ezekiel 16:36-38; Hosea 2:10.

66 Literally: "detestable things."

67 TAN: "and disfigure you."

68 Possibly Koph veritatis in Hebrew.

69 Literally: "flee."

70 Hebrew: "you."

71 Hebrew: "No-ammon." Cf. ANET pg. 8, 380. The city of Amon or Thebes. The Assyrians sacked Thebes in 663 BCE. No was the Egyptian name for the city. Amon was the tutelary god.

72 Hebrew has "sea." In 663 Ashurbanipal extended the Assyrian Empire, capturing Thebes, the capitol of Egypt.

73 The Hebrew name for Ethiopia was "Cush."

74 LXX: η ισχυς αυτης. So also Syriac & Targums. Hebrew: *aitsmhh*.

75 Possibly Somaliland or parts of Sudan

76 So: LXX. Hebrew: "your."

77 LXX: βοηθοι αυτης. So also Syriac.

at every <sup>78</sup> street corner.  
 Lots were cast for her nobles,  
 and all her dignitaries were bound in chains. <sup>79</sup>  
 11 You also will be drunken,  
 you will be dazed; <sup>80</sup>  
 you will seek  
 a refuge from the enemy.  
*(or, In your drunken stupor  
 you will look for a place to hide,  
 where you will be safe  
 from your enemies.)*  
 12 All your strongholds are like fig trees,  
 with the first ripe figs ---  
 the trees are shaken --- the figs fall  
 into the mouths of the devourers. <sup>81</sup>  
 13 Be aware! Your troops  
 truly are all effeminate. <sup>82</sup>  
 The gates of your land  
 have been flung open;  
 fire has devoured the bars of your gates. <sup>83</sup>  
  
 14 "Draw water for the siege  
*(or, Store up a supply of water for a siege)! <sup>84</sup>*  
 Strengthen your fortifications!  
 Tread the clay!  
 Trample the mortar!  
 Grasp the brick mold! <sup>85</sup>  
*(or, trample the clay which you use,  
 make strong bricks and prepare  
 the brick mold.)*  
 15 No matter what you do, fire will cause your death *(or, destruction)!*  
 The sword will put an end to *(or, finish)* you!  
 You will be wiped out *(or, destroyed)* like the young locust. <sup>86</sup>  
  
 "You multiply like the locust, <sup>87</sup>

78 LXX: πάντα.

79 I. e. lots were cast to determine who would own the nobility, now enslaved.

80 This could properly be translated: "stagger like a drunk."

81 Some scholars emend this verse to read: "Your troops are shaken to the point of falling into the mouths of devourers."

82 LXX: ως γυναικες.

83 The equivalent in that day of the portcullis in later times.

84 An ironic exhortation to prepare for a siege. Such preparation would be hopeless.

85 Hebrew uncertain. Possibly "make the brick kiln strong."

86 There are four possible translations: 1. The sword will devour you as does the locust. 2. The sword will devour you as the locust devours the crops. 3. The fire will devour you as it devours the locust. 4. The fire will devour you as the locust devours the crops.

87 Locusts are not the 17 year locust we are acquainted with but rather a kind of grasshopper.



multiply like aged locusts.<sup>88</sup>

16 You increased the number of traders,  
 more numerous than the stars of the heavens,  
 but the locusts are the ones who strip the land and fly away.<sup>89</sup>

17 Your guards (*or, officials*) were like a swarm of locusts,  
 your civil servants (*or, scribes, marshals*) like a cloud<sup>90</sup> of locusts  
 settling on the stone fences  
 on a chilly day.<sup>91</sup>

Yet the sun rises (*or, warms them*) and they fly away,  
 no one knows where they have gone.

18 "Your rulers (*or, shepherds*)<sup>92</sup> are asleep,  
 O king of Assyria;  
 your nobles slumber,<sup>93</sup>

Your people are scattered on the mountains,  
 and there is no one to gather them  
 (*or, and leadership has failed*).

19 There is no one to heal your injuries,  
 your wound is mortal.

All who hear the news about you  
 clap their hands over you.

Who has not suffered  
 from your endless cruelty?"

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88 Hebrew unclear. Another ironic but futile exhortation.

89 I.e. in spite of all Nineveh did all is lost. Hebrew: *ilq*.

90 Hebrew uncertain. Possibly "swarm."

91 Cf. ANET p. 144 a.

92 It is not unusual to speak in Hebrew of a ruler as a shepherd.

93 Literally: "dwelling." Emended "asleep." This is usually understood as the posture of death.