

Introduction to Nahum

1. Nahum – A Prophet from Galilee and an Echo of Jonah

In John chapter 7, some opponents of Jesus dismiss Him by saying, “Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52, NKJV). They were wrong. At least two prophets came from that region: Jonah and Nahum.

The name “Capernaum” literally means “village of Nahum” (Kfar Nahum). We cannot say with certainty that it was named after this particular prophet, but it reminds us that God raised up more than one voice from Galilee long before Jesus’ ministry there.

Both Jonah and Nahum were sent to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire:

- Jonah: sent with a warning that led to repentance and mercy.
- Nahum: sent with a warning that judgment was now certain and near.

Jonah preached, and much to his frustration, Nineveh repented. From the king down to the common people, they humbled themselves, and God spared them. Jonah announced, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4, NKJV). The people “repented on speculation,” so to speak: they turned from their evil ways hoping God might relent—and He did. Nineveh had a window of grace that lasted about a century.

But repentance is not a one-time moment; it is a way of life. In time, Nineveh drifted back into its old patterns of violence, cruelty, and pride. By Nahum’s day, the city was again notorious for bloodshed and oppression. So God sent Nahum, not with a message of “repent or else,” but with a message that the “or else” had come: their time was up.

Nahum’s prophecy is a comfort to Judah and a warning to every nation and person who imagines that God will never call them to account.

2. Nineveh and Assyria – A Brutal Superpower

The first biblical mention of Nineveh is in Genesis chapter 10. There we read about Nimrod, a mighty hunter who established several cities, including Nineveh (Genesis 10:8–12). From very early times, Nineveh was associated with power, empire, and defiance against God.

Centuries later, Nineveh became the capital of the Assyrian Empire—the dominant world power of its day. Assyria was:

- Militarily powerful – its armies were feared across the ancient Near East.
- Enormously wealthy – plundering cities, collecting tribute, and controlling trade.
- Fortified and impressive – ancient sources describe its walls as so wide that chariots could ride on top, with massive towers and strong defenses.
- Notoriously cruel – Assyrian kings boasted in their inscriptions of flaying enemies, piling up severed heads, and filling the land with terror.

Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Around 722 B.C., Samaria fell, and many Israelites were deported and scattered across the empire (see Second Kings chapters 17 and 18). The Assyrians deliberately mixed peoples to break their national identity.

At the same time, many faithful from all twelve tribes had already migrated south to Judah because that was where the temple stood and where it was still possible to worship the Lord properly (see Second Chronicles chapter 11). So the idea of “ten lost tribes” is mostly a popular myth; God knew where His people were, and many from every tribe were in Judah.

Later, the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah. Jerusalem was surrounded, and humanly speaking, there was no way out. But God had made a promise.

“Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:

‘He shall not come into this city,

Nor shoot an arrow there,

Nor come before it with shield,

Nor build a siege mound against it.

By the way that he came,

By the same shall he return;

And he shall not come into this city,’

Says the Lord.

‘For I will defend this city, to save it

For My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.’” (Second Kings 19:32–34, NKJV)

That night, *“the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead”* (Second Kings 19:35, NKJV).

Assyria could crush nations, but it could not overturn God’s covenant with David. That background is important for Nahum: Judah needs to know that God sees Assyria’s cruelty and will not let it stand forever.