Historical and Theological Themes

Nahum is a sequel to the book of Jonah – written approximately 100 years after Jonah – evidently Nineveh turned to God for 100-150 years but then returned to her pagan ways – Nahum is a prophecy of judgment against Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire – not one word of comfort – this is not a call for repentance – it is the obituary of a nation – God punishes them because of their vial, wicked ways – pictures total shame and defeat by Nabopolassar, king of Babylon who stormed the city and destroyed them three years later in 612 B.C. – Nahum 1:8 - the site of Nineveh was obliterated in 612 B.C. – Nahum predicted she would be hidden – “You too will become drunk, You will be hidden…” – not rediscovered until 1842 A.D.

Date – no mention of any kings or historical markers – Nahum’s portrayal of Nineveh suggests a time before her fall in 612 B.C. and possibly before the fall of Ashurbanipal in 626 B.C. – this would place the timing of Nahum as mid-seventh century B.C. during the reign of Manasseh (695–642 B.C. – 2 Kings 21:1–18).

Timing – century after Jonah preached to them – Nineveh had evidently turned to God at Jonah’s preaching, but now had returned to her wicked ways (Nahum 3:1-4) – she had recovered from Sennacherib’s defeat at Jerusalem in 701 B.C. when 185,000 were struck dead after Sennacherib threatened Israel (Isaiah 37:36-38) - Esarhaddon had recently transplanted conquered peoples into Samaria and Galilee in 670 B.C. (2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:2), leaving Syria and Palestine very weak – but they continued to lose power and influence – eventually conquered by Babylon’s king Nabopolassar and his son, Nebuchadnezzar in 612 B.C.

Alternate outline

I. Superscription (Nahum 1:1)
II. Destruction of Nineveh Declared (Nahum 1:2–15)
   A. God’s Power Illustrated (Nahum 1:2–8)
   B. God’s Punishment Stated (Nahum 1:9–15)
III. Destruction of Nineveh Detailed (Nahum 2:1–13)
   A. The City is Assaulted (Nahum 2:1–10)
   B. The City is Discredited (Nahum 2:11–13)
IV. Destruction of Nineveh Demanded (Nahum 3:1–19)
   A. The First Charge (Nahum 3:1–3)
   B. The Second Charge (Nahum 3:4–7)
   C. The Third Charge (Nahum 3:8–19)

God was going to cut them off and bury them because of their wickedness. The fall of Assyria prophesied by Nahum, came true

Ironic twist - the capital - Nineveh - 150 years after the prophet Jonah brought Nineveh to repentance. Now - Nahum 2:8-13; 3:1-4 - Nineveh is "...completely full of lies and pillage. . .horsemen charging, Swords flashing, spears gleaming. Many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies - They stumble over the dead bodies! All because of the many harlotries of the harlot. . ."

Although there had been a form of godliness and no doubt genuine repentance in Jonah's time - now there was nothing but evil and destruction. God delayed judgment for 150 years but now it came - swift and sure.

Nahum = "comfort"
- Native of Galilee - born in Elkosh, near Capernaum, which means "village of Nahum"
- Lived during time of good King Hezekiah and Isaiah
- Escaped to southern kingdom when cruel Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom
Seven years later, in Jerusalem, he witnessed the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, King of Assyria

People wonder how he could live up to the name "comforter" when the theme of the book is judgment - if judgment is on your enemy, one who dominates you and does wickedness - then judgment is a comfort.

I. THE GOD OF JUDGMENT

A. The wrath of God

Nahum 1:2 – "A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies."

Jealous - "a very strong emotion whereby some quality or possession of the object is desired by the subject." What does God want from us? - our single hearted devotion, not idolatry, chasing after other gods. He doesn't want you playing around with worldly philosophy, occult information, new age, etc.

God expects man to return His love. But love is not just an emotion - it is an action seen in obedience. Thus, jealousy denotes a passionate, consuming zeal focused on God which results in doing His will and maintaining His honor. Examples - Phinehas - Numbers 25:11

Just like us - we are jealous – like a jilted husband, God is jealous of his wife messing with another lover! – God takes doctrinal impurity seriously – He calls it spiritual adultery!

Vengeance - complete vindication

Appears wrong - but Deuteronomy 32:35 - "...Vengeance is Mine, and retribution..." – quoted in Romans 12:19 – "...Vengeance is Mine, I will repay says the Lord." – Deuteronomy 32:43 continues, “Rejoice, O nations, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land and His people.”

Vengeance is getting even - without going too far - our law -

- Can't use a bat on someone who calls you a name
- Can use a bat in self-defense in a knife attack

Exodus 21:23-25 - "eye for an eye" - Lex Talionis - Jesus taught this was not to be applied privately because vengeance privately can be overdone.

That's why God is the only one who can exact perfect vengeance.

Wrath - over 60 times in the Old Testament - in KJV - "furious, fury" - from the verb yaham - "to be hot" - can mean "wrath, rage, or fury" - this is not shallow anger which abates with time. It is anger, which, when pushed to a certain degree must have satisfaction of some kind to be turned aside.

Exodus Phinehas in Numbers 25 - Israelite man brought in Midianite woman - adultery or prostitution - in front of Moses and the whole congregation right after God had told them to execute all their leaders who had led them to worship Baal-Peor. Phinehas rises up and kills them both with a spear - thus averting God's wrath for the whole congregation.

God isn't finished with His wrath - John 3:36 - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Ephesians 5 lists immorality, greed, filthiness, silly talk, coarse jesting, covetousness, idolatry, etc. – Ephesians 5:6 - "...because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”
Revelation - the wrath of God poured on the world in judgment.

Only ones saved from the wrath of God are those in Christ Jesus- 1 Thessalonians 5:9 - "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Judges the wicked – Nahum 1:3 - "...The Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished..."
Hebrews 9:27 - "...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. . ."

Judgment continues as the theme of the end times:

1. Judgment seat of Christ - 2 Corinthians 5:10 - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." - cf. 1 Corinthians 3 - each believer will be judged by wood, hay, and straw or gold, silver, and precious stones - tested by fire – 1 Corinthians 3:15 - "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss (of reward); but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

2. Great White Throne Judgment - Revelation 20:11-15!! Romans 14:12 - "...each one of us will give an account of himself to God. . ." - Luke 12:2, 3 - "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." – the standard is perfection – we won't make it without Jesus.

Indignant – Nahum 1:6 - "Who can stand against His indignation?" – the word expresses intense anger that is seen in the denunciation of its accusers

C.S. Lewis story - bus trip from hell to heaven - "be back at 4:00 to return home." All came back - couldn't stand being in heaven with their sins unforgiven. That’s like being in a wedding in your dirty clothes.

B. The goodness of God

Nahum 1:3 - "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

Slow to anger - he had waited 150 years to punish Nineveh - they couldn't say He was too hasty – it’s the same with you.

Great in power - in this context - power to control the events of the world - to exalt the righteous and punish the wicked.

Good – Nahum 1:7 - five meanings for ‘good’ in the Old Testament:

1. Practical, economic, or material good
2. Abstract goodness - desirability, pleasantness, and beauty
3. Quality or expense
4. Moral goodness
5. Philosophical goodness

God is good - not "goody, goody" - but good - the goal of life in each of the above categories.

Strong – Nahum 1:7 - "...A stronghold in the day of trouble..." – never changing due to politics, war, technology, philosophy, etc.

Knows His own

That's why Jesus said "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to
them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.” - John 10:27, 28 - Who can match these claims? Why wander to another master?

C. The reason for judgment

Nahum 1:9 – “Whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it.” – Nahum 1:11 – “From you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the Lord, A wicked counselor.” – they had seen the hand of God personally for over 100 years – their return to their wicked ways only increased their judgment

II. THE CONTEXT OF JUDGMENT

Nahum 2:8 - “Though Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days, now they are fleeing...”

A. The past

Background - for 300 years Assyria had been the dominant power - Northern Kingdom of Israel fell in 722 B.C. - God used them as an instrument of judgment for His own people. Now the time had come for judgment for their wickedness.

- Hezekiah, godly king led rebellion against Assyria by
  > Opening Temple closed by his father
  > Reinstated the priesthood
  > Made sacrifices
  > Destroyed the high places, images, and pagan altars
- Prompted Sennacharib to threaten to destroy them
- Hezekiah prepared for war - built "Hezekiah's Tunnel - 1700 feet long through solid rock from the Spring of Gihon outside the walls to the Pool of Siloam inside the walls
- Sent Rabshakeh to bully them
- 2 Kings 19:35 - the miraculous destruction of 185,000 of Sennacharib's troops in one night by the Angel of the Lord

Everyone has a past

B. The present

1. They trusted in their physical prowess – Nahum 2:1 - "...Man the fortress, watch the road; Strengthen your back, summon all your strength...” Nineveh was an impregnable fortress:
   - Jonah indicates city of almost 250,000
   - Walls 100 feet high - wide enough for four chariots
   - 1500 towers on wall - 200 feet high
   - Moat 140 feet wide - 60 feet deep
   - Circumference of eight miles across city

2. They were a harsh, cruel people – Nahum 3:1 - "Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; Her prey never departs." Cruel in war, pillaged many other cities, bloodthirsty for more.

3. Filled with the occult – Nahum 3:4 - Nineveh called "...The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries." – witchcraft, horoscopes, etc.

4. They had grown complacent – Nahum 3:17-18

Everyone has a present - what are you trusting in?

C. The future
Prophecies of Nahum 2-3 came true in 6-7 B.C. when Medes and Babylonians overthrew her.

Nahum 2:6 - *The gates of the rivers are opened, And the palace is dissolved.* City walls ran along the Tigris River for 2 1/2 miles - at flood stage the river undermined this section of the wall.

Nahum 1:14 - "...Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image From the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, For you are contemptible."

God buried them so bad:
- When Alexander the Great fought the battle of Arbela nearby in 331 B.C. - he didn't even know of the existence of Nineveh
- When Xenophon and his army of 10,000 passed by 200 years later, he thought the mounds of dirt was the remnant of some Parthian city
- Later Napoleon was camped near the site and didn't know of the existence of Nineveh
- Not until 1820 - Englishman Claude James Rich thought the mounds across from the Tigris might be Nineveh - but all the world thought Nineveh was only a mythical city.
- 1845 - Layard uncovered the ruins of fabulous Nineveh

Jesus did not say, "I am the answer." He said, "...I am the way, and the truth, and the life..." John 14:6

Lessons to learn:
1. God's judgment is sure – Ezekiel 24:14 - "I, the Lord, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity, and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you,' declares the Lord God."

2. All will be judged - Philippians 2:10-11 - "...that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

3. Only two choices - John 5:28-29 - "...for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

cf. Revelation 20:11-15

Mickey Mantle - hero - wasted life - the party's over - eternally gone.

2 Peter 3:9-10 - "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."