

## Day 203

### Nahum's Prophecy Against Nineveh

Nahum 1.1 – 3.19

Following the miraculous defeat of Sennacherib around 700BC described in 2 Kings 19, Judah continues as a tributary of Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh. We have seen how in 681BC, Sennacherib is assassinated by his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, and followed on the throne by Esar-Haddon. He rules eleven years, dying in 669BC, and is succeeded by Ashurbanipal, who is cruel and warfaring. In 663BC, he takes the Assyrian armies through Israelite territory and into Egypt, to destroy the Egyptian city of Thebes, with disgusting levels of inhumanity and violence. The repentance of the Nineveh which heard Jonah's words over a century before is a forgotten memory.

During the era of Manasseh, and probably after his release from Assyrian captivity, the prophet Nahum arises, around 650BC, and delivers a word of judgment against the marauding Assyrians who are causing such havoc in the Middle East.

In the original Hebrew of chapter 1.2-10 there are the evidences of an attempt at acrostic poetry, that is, each line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but only 15 out of the 22 letters are used, and some are out of order.

It is also worth noting that Nahum, unlike the other prophets, does not take issue with Judah's record. The word is against the imperial power; this also ties into the increasing realisation on the part of the Jews that the Lord their God is about more than just being a local deity for a small nation. He is the Lord of creation, the Lord of the globe and its peoples.

Nahum 1.1 Nahum is from a village called Elkosh (perhaps from roots meaning *God's bow*) although it is unclear where this is exactly. Some favour the location as being in the Galilee, not far from the Lebanese border, but other scholars link it to a village in Assyria, on the Tigris river, near modern day Mosul. I would favour the former, since the location of such a prophet of the Lord would be more likely on Israelite territory, especially as his references are to Israelite places.

1.2 – 8 Through these opening verses there is an interweaving of the declaration of God's power revealed in His anger with a reminder of His faithful nature, recalling the revelation of the Lord's name to Moses in Ex.34.6-7. Thus, He is announced as a jealous and vengeful God, yet one who also is slow to anger. His attribute of not calling the guilty innocent is mentioned in v.3 (Heb **וְיִנְקֶה לֹא יִנְקֶה** *ve-naqeh lo yenaqeh*) as well as the fearsome power of His presence, causing the earth to react.

God's goodness is asserted (v.7) and His ability to shelter those who rely on Him, but for Nineveh, it is time for the reckoning for their cruelty and oppression.

- 1.9-14 The case is clear; Nineveh is headed for destruction, because it is 'vile'. The Lord will deliver Judah from Assyria's stranglehold, when He executes His sentence on the idols in their temples.
- 1.15 This will be good news for Judah, who will be free to celebrate the feasts without fear of attack.
2. 1 – 10 Israel's restoration will come as a result of the collapse of the Assyrian capital, a collapse which will be total and extensive. The place will be plundered and pillaged, its people taken into exile, as they have done to others.
- 11 – 13 The Lion was a frequently used symbol of Assyrian power, and thus the prophet uses it to taunt the defeated nation. Their equipment of war will be destroyed and the messengers who normally brought news of victories to Nineveh will have no more news to bring.
3. 1 – 7 The prophet builds up here a vivid picture of the bloody chaos of a dying city, whips and wheels, swords and spears, corpses everywhere, and confusion, people falling over the dead, because of the lust of the Assyrians for power. There may be a reference here to Ishtar, the main goddess of Assyria, in whose name the troops would have gone out. She is depicted as the great prostitute. She will be disgraced, stripped and pilloried, with no one regretting her demise.
- 8 – 11 The prophet recalls the Assyrians' harrowing of Egyptian Thebes (called in the original *No-Amon*, Heb. נֹאֲמֹן ) which, despite her African allies, from Libya and Ethiopia, was unable to withstand the Assyrian siege and destruction. Nineveh will suffer the same fate, drinking from the cup of God's vengeance.
- 12 – 17 Assyria is ripe for attack. It often appears that imperial powers at the zenith of their power relax their guard and rest on their laurels, making them more vulnerable to being undermined. Thus the Assyrians are depicted by Nahum as easy prey. He warns them to prepare for a siege, at the end of which, the multitudes of their 'womanly' troops will scatter without trace in the downfall of the city.
- 18-19 The closing verses are addressed to King Ashurbanipal, highlighting this laxity in the defences of the city. This is a wounded animal, in its death throes, an animal which itself has been a killer, and thus its destruction will be celebrated throughout the region.
- Nineveh did indeed fall to the Babylonians in 612BC, around forty years after Nahum's words.

## Day 204

### Manasseh (d 641BC), Amon (d639BC) and Josiah, Kings of Judah

2 Kings 21.17 – 18a; 2 Chron.33.18-20a; 2 Kings 21.18b,19; 2 Chron. 33.22-23; 2 Kings 21.25, 23,26a; 2 Kings 21.24; 2 Kings 22.1; 2 Kings 22.2 & 23.25 - 27

2 Kings 21.17 – 18a; 2 Chron.33.18-20a **Manasseh Dies** Records were made of this transformed King's reign, including his idolatry before his capture by Assyria, and his conversion and Godly action after his miraculous release. He is buried in the garden of palace.

2 Kings 21.18b,19 (mirrored in 2 Chron.33.20b,21) At age 22, Amon his son comes to the throne, his reign lasting just two years.

2 Chron. 33.22-23 (mirrored in 2 Kings 21.20-22) Amon pursues his father's pre-capture tradition, and becomes a multi-theist, offering sacrifice to all his father's old idols, against the will of the Lord.

2 Kings 21.25, 23,26a (mirrored in 2 Chron. 33.24) Amon is killed by a group of conspirators from his staff team, and buried in the same ground as his father, Amon.

2 Kings 21.24 (mirrored in 2 Chron.34.1) However, there is general loathing of the murder of Amon, and the conspirators are rounded up and executed. This leaves Amon's eight-year-old son Josiah to rule instead.

2 Kings 22.1 (mirrored in 2 Chron.34.1) Thus in 639BC, a child king ascends the throne and ruled for thirty-one years.

2 Kings 22.2 & 23.25 – 27 (mirrored in 2 Chron. 34.2) Josiah has wise counsellors and regents, for he leads the nation of Judah back into the ways of the Lord, in the footsteps of David. He is described as unique for the way in which he brings Judah to the Lord, with all his heart, soul and strength. However, this turn about is not enough to change the Lord's mind about His decision to remove Judah from the map, as He has with Israel. Jerusalem and the Temple will be rejected and the glory of the Lord will remove from it.

## Day 205

### Zephaniah's Prophecy (c. 630BC), Josiah's Reform (c 627BC)

Zephaniah 1.1 - 3.20 ; 2 Chron. 34.3-7

1.1 Zephaniah is placed quite specifically in the time scale of the story, in that he is a distant cousin of King Josiah, like him descended from King Hezekiah, their common great-great-grandfather. The theme of Zephaniah's word is the coming Day of the Lord, the *Yom Adonai* (YHWH) (Heb יוֹם־יְהוָה), a decisive and cataclysmic event in history, which will sweep away evil in its path.

1. 2- 13 The day of reckoning for the idolatry of the nations is coming. Just as in the days of Noah, there was a wholesale deliverance of the earth from the verminous stain of evil, so in the next phase of the story, there will be an end put to the false gods of the Canaanites and the other nations around.

The judgement of God will have a specific effect in Jerusalem, affecting every strata of society, every sphere of life. Business and home life, farming and house-building will all be touched by the cleansing of God.

1.14 – 18 The Day of the Lord, the *Yom Adonai* (Heb יְיָ-יָהּ) is near, bringing turmoil and chaos, blood and poverty.

2.1 – 3 Perhaps, however, there is a chance of averting or mitigating the terrible effects of this coming time by seeking the Lord's face and calling for his deliverance, but it needs to be from a heart of humility and straight dealings.

2.4 – 7 Other nations will be affected by the day of the Lord; Philistia, which is a surviving root of old Canaan, never removed, will be taken from the Philistines, and given to Judah as their possession, when He restores them to the land.

2.8-11 To the east, Ammon and Moab will be repaid for their assaults on Judah, becoming like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose blasted, salted site they can look down on from their hill country beside the Dead Sea. Again, Judah will be given the land left by them.

2.12- 15 And the great nations of Ethiopia and Assyria will be caught up in the whirlwind of God's retribution, with the Assyrian capital Nineveh being destroyed, as Nahum has also predicted. Nineveh has become complacent and self-indulgent, and as such, is vulnerable to attack.

3.1 – 7 Attention turns to Judah, and her waywardness and rebellion. She is distant from the Lord, her prophets are arrogant, the Temple is profaned, despite the fact that the Lord's faithfulness and justice are in her midst. She is a disgrace to the Lord's name, and will be purged.

3.8- 20 But the Lord is not intent on annihilation for His people. Rather, this is a purifying process, to cleanse out the evil strain. There will be a gathering of the exiles back to Judah, as a humbled people, dependent on the Lord (YHWH) and living straight and secure.

This will be a cause for celebration for this child of the Lord, this prodigal daughter who is brought home as the delight of the Lord. In verse 17, the picture is of a Father singing and rejoicing over his returned child, a beautiful image.

The promise is for a restoration and a gathering together, with a promise that the earth will see and be moved by this love of the Lord to his wayward daughter.

### **Josiah's Reforms**

2 Chron.34.3-7 Perhaps moved by Zephaniah's words, Josiah takes action to seek the Lord, and like his predecessors Manasseh and Hezekiah, he has all traces of idols

removed. Just as the prophet prophesied, the idol priests' bones are burned to desecrate the idol altars, and the poles and stones crushed to dust, before his return to Jerusalem. In a short while, the discovery of the book of the Law will have great repercussions for this monarch's reign.

## Day 206

### Jeremiah's Call (c626BC)

Jeremiah 1.1 – 3.5

1.1-3 We are given a time and location for the prophet Jeremiah (Heb יִרְמְיָהוּ? *Yirmeyahu*, meaning 'The Lord will arise') He is the son of Hilkiah, a priest (and therefore of the tribe of Levi) living in Anathoth, a fortified settlement, a priestly city of refuge (see Joshua 21.18) in the Benjamite territories 3 miles to the north-east of Jerusalem, near enough for his father to get easily to duties at the Temple. It is worth bearing this family link in mind, as we go on, for Jeremiah is about to live through unbearable tragedy for his tiny nation, as he prophesies the succeeding reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah of Judah and through the period of the deportation of the people and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC.

John Paterson, in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, points out how personally involved Jeremiah becomes in his message. Many of the prophets seem to stand, disengaged from their hearers, speaking on God's behalf as His voice. But Jeremiah weeps for the people, and feels himself the pain of God's judgement.

1.4-5 Jeremiah, as a Levite, would have been predestined to be set apart for God from birth. His tribe was already taken by God as replacement for all the firstborn of Israel. But Jeremiah's call is to be a prophet (Heb נָבִיא *Nabhi*) and not just to Israel, but to the nations, the gentile *goyim* (Heb גוֹיִם ) This perhaps echoes Isaiah's calling to look beyond the borders of his homeland. After all, this was a time of events of hypernational significance – Assyria's empire was on the wane, to collapse and give way to the Babylonians in 612BC, Scythian hordes were wreaking havoc throughout the Middle East, although Judah escaped their scourge. Thus Jeremiah's message will have wider implications than just for Judah.

1.6-8 Jeremiah pleads his unsuitability for the task before him; like Moses and Gideon, he realises his incapacity to achieve anything alone that God calls him to. But the Lord corrects him, and reminds him that He is with the prophet, and will rescue him (and Jeremiah will need rescued many times in the future ministry!)

1.9-12 The Lord speaks to Jeremiah that He is calling him to a ministry of words to many nations, for building up and knocking down. There is a pictorial element to God's word, and even a word-play in this first vision. The Lord asks Jeremiah, 'What do you see?', and Jeremiah responds that he sees the branch of an almond tree. The word for almond in Hebrew is *Shaqed* (Heb שָׂקֵד ) which is from a root

word meaning to be vigilant, and thus the Lord confides in Jeremiah that He will be watchful over His purposes to complete them.

1.13 – 19 Jeremiah then sees a boiling pot, pouring out over the land. This is a sign of the retribution coming on Judah for her idolatry under Manasseh. Jeremiah is encouraged not to be afraid, for the Lord is fortifying him against the coming opposition he will face from the religious and political forces who want to silence him. The Lord will be his deliverer.

### **Judah the Unfaithful Bride**

2.1 – 9 Employing the image of the bride, which the Lord has taken before to speak to His people, Jeremiah reminds the people of the *chesed*-obligation which they adhered to formerly (v.2) when they were led by the Lord through the desert.

But once in the land, the people were led astray by the false idols, leaving their deliverer and ignoring His life-rule. Instead, they pursued the Ba'alim.

2.10-12 The Lord calls the skies for a witness against Israel, for they have exchanged their God, the gravity of His glory, for piffling images that have no significance.

2.13-19 The Lord uses the picture of water supply to example the unfaithfulness of Israel. They have walked away from the fresh, flowing water, the living water of the Lord's life to go and build their own water-capture tanks, which have no ability to hold water, because they are cracked. So, they then go to Egypt and Assyria, the very powers who attacked them, to find relief. This is a great shame to them.

2.20-25 Israel has behaved like an adulterous woman, leaving her husband to go off and behave like an animal in heat with any man who will have her. Jeremiah uses a familiar picture, of the vine turned wild, to show her corruption. Even though she protests her innocence and tries to cleanse herself, she is at the same time addicted to her promiscuity with the false gods.

2.26- 35 The people of Israel have been addressing their prayers to blocks of dumb wood and stone, who cannot save them, while ignoring the One who cares for them, and who has brought punishment upon her for her idolatry. But like a child refusing to accept responsibility, still Israel insists she has done nothing wrong.

2.36 – 37 The supposed allies, Egypt and Assyria, will be of no help to Israel when trouble comes, and exile ensues.

3.1-5 Perhaps Jeremiah is aware of the reforms of Josiah as he gives these words of correction to a Judah which is seeking to mend its ways. Having gone after so many gods, now Judah comes back to ask pardon of the Lord, particularly because the harvest has failed. But the Lord sees past the front being put on, to the heart of a prostituted people who are fickle.

## Day 207

### A Call to Return to the Lord

Jeremiah 3.6 – 5.13

Jer.3.6 – 11 While Josiah's reforms are going on, the Lord speaks to Jeremiah about northern Israel's past, and the judgement brought upon her. As a result, she has been removed from the land. But Judah, her sister, has been going the same way, even though she has seen the havoc wrought on Israel by their sinful rebellion. There is a shocking conclusion here by the Lord that Israel is deemed more righteous than unfaithful Judah.

3.12-22a There is a call to Israel, the deported northern kingdom to return to the Lord, who will be *chasid* (Heb **חַסִּיד**), that is, true to His covenant to them(v.12), as a husband calling his adulterous wife back, like Hosea calling Gomer, to be reunited with Judah and the Lord. And rather than their dependence being on the ark of the covenant, the Lord Himself will be in their midst, so that there will be no need of this box any more.

The Lord wants to be as a Father, but His people persist in unfaithfulness.

3. 22b – 25 Israel is heard to confess her sin among the deceptive idols, and promises to return wholeheartedly to the Lord.

4. 1 – 2 If Israel returns to the Lord, and ceases their idol-worship, they still have the opportunity to be the vehicle of the Lord's embrace on all the nations of the earth.

4.3-4 To Judah, the call is the same, to circumcise the heart, to remove the covering of sin from them, to escape the fire of God's anger coming.

4.5 – 9 The cataclysm of deportation and destruction is on the horizon, and it will be terrifying for every strata of society.

4.10- 12 Here, Jeremiah shows his own feelings about what God is saying. He is not standing unmoved by these words, but he actually lifts his voice in complaint to the Lord, and intercedes for his people. He accuses God of deceiving the people by promising them peace, when God means them harm. The Lord responds that indeed there will be judgement, but there will be a future reconciliation.

4.13 – 17 An enemy is approaching from the north, that will besiege the city.

4.18-22 But this is not a pleasure to the Lord; indeed, it is bitter to Him, and causes Him turmoil. He is grieved over his wayward children who are delinquents and reprobates.

4.23-29 The outcome of this judgement will be terrible and wholesale, the land of milk and honey will be a land of ruin and darkness.

4.30 – 31 Judah's appeals to her false idols will be no use, and her pathetic pleas will be ignored by them.

- 5.1- 2 In an echo of Abraham's prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah, in Genesis 18, the Lord is saying that even if He finds one person who deals truthfully, he will rescind His judgement on the city. Yet, even as they swear by the Lord, their hearts are unfaithful.
- 5.3 – 6 Jeremiah joins in amazement with the Lord at the state of the people; thinking they are ignorant of God's requirements, he goes and addresses the leaders, but finds that they actually are fully aware of what God asks of them but have rebelled against the Lord and refuse to follow him. The coming destruction is therefore fitting to the level of the rebellion they are in.
- 5.7- 11 The Lord complains through the prophet that His people's idolatry is shameful, given His provision for them in the past. Lust and immorality drive the sinfulness of the nation, inviting the Lord's vengeance. As a result, the vine, Judah, will be harshly pruned, though not destroyed totally.
- 5.12-13 This action will be a rebuttal to the false prophets who are saying that the Lord will not do anything unpleasant to them – their words are about to rebound on them.

## **Day 208**

### **Ignorance of the Story Will Destroy**

Jer.5.14 – 6.30

- 5.14 – 19 The marauding invader is set up to decimate the land. The reason is because the people of Judah have turned their backs on the Lord, and served the gods of other nations.
- 5.20 – 29 The people of Judah do not acknowledge the might and skill of the Creator, who has boundaried the sea to its limits. They do not realise that it is He, not the fickle fertility idols, who provides them with harvest and seed. In their prosperity, they have become corrupt and oppressive, out for their own gain. This is cause for the Lord to judge them.
- 5.30- 31 Even those meant to represent the Lord have corrupted His ways, and the people are happy with this state of affairs.
6. 1 – 8 The siege of Jerusalem is foretold by Jeremiah, which will end in destruction.
- 6.9- 12 Despite the coming storm, the people of Judah are ignoring Jeremiah. The Lord's anger will touch every generation, all the people bear some responsibility.
- 6.13 – 15 The aim of the priests and prophets is to keep everyone happy. They speak of easy things, of peace, but 'do not dress the wound', they do not see the danger the people are in. Instead of being ashamed, they are brazen, and for this they will suffer.
- 6.16 – 21 The remedy is to know the story, to ask for the ancient paths, the ways of God shown to them already. But the people are more interested in the latest incense

aromas and herbs. The Lord has no time for them, and for lack of roots, this people will perish.

6.22 – 30 The enemy will be ruthless and their means fearsome. But despite the purging fire of God's working with Judah, she remains like iron, impure and worth nothing, 'rejected silver' which is too tainted to be refined. What a terrible conclusion to draw over this favoured nation!

## **Day 209**

### **Religious Living Will Not Make Up For Faithfulness to God**

Jeremiah 7.1 – 9.26

7.1 – 15 There is something in the deceptive heart of man that convinces him that if he does enough religious things, it will earn him brownie points with God. The people of Judah believe that if they go to the Temple and pray there, and make sacrifice, that will keep them safe from God, even though they are still also doing homage to Ba'al and the other false gods. If God's rule of life is not guiding the ordinary, everyday actions of people, then their religious actions will be null and void. Just as the people of Shiloh, the place of God's Tent in Ephraim, have been taken captive in the northern Israelite expulsions by the Assyrians, so Jerusalem is going to undergo the same destiny.

7.16 – 26 The Lord tells Jeremiah it is not worth praying for Judah in their present state, for all the while they are offering God sacrifice at the Temple, they are also baking cakes for Astarte, the Queen-goddess of the pagan pantheon. The Lord is not looking for hollow ceremonies, but for consistent listening to His voice and following His ways.

7.27-29 Jeremiah's pain will be that even though he sees so clearly what the issues are, and hears the Lord, he will not be listened to. As a result, he will shave his head in mourning, and sing songs of sadness. Indeed, Jeremiah will record a song of deep mourning in the book of Lamentations, to come.

7.30 – 34 Where the Israelites are presently carrying out the disgusting practices, including child sacrifice, attached to worship of the false gods, they themselves will be killed and buried, in Topheth and Ben Hinnom valleys. They have also desecrated the Temple by installing idol images there.

8. 1 – 3 Even the graves of the dead will be broken open and defiled in the coming cataclysm, perhaps the ultimate disgrace.

8.4 – 13 Judah refuses to take responsibility for its sin; they are like people on the wrong road who don't acknowledge their mistake. They are committed to individualistic pursuit of evil, not knowing the Lord's ways. They are being led on in this by the Scribes of the law, who know what to do, yet don't do it. Jeremiah repeats the judgement upon them, because they promise all will be well, when it will not.

8.14-17 Even though they try to escape, Judah will experience the inevitable disaster of the invasion of the northern armies.

8.18 – 9.2 The weeping prophet, Jeremiah, takes time out to express his own pain at this state of affairs. He is crushed and terrified – there is something intensely human here about Jeremiah’s ability to suffer with God’s people. He mourns that there is no healing ointment in Gilead, in the eastern provinces, for they have already been taken. He wants to weep incessantly over the deep sin of Judah and Israel.

How compassionate should we be to those who are out of touch with the reality of Christ’s love, and weep that they have no hope apart from Him?

9.3 – 9 Continuing after his space of weeping, Jeremiah highlights the deception and fraud that are going on in the land, the lies and lack of trust. This is one of the things the Lord will deal with, removing this corruption.

9.10 – 16 The approaching wholesale devastation is down to one thing, that Israel has rejected the Lord’s wholesome rule of life, *Torah* and gone after the fertility gods. The result will be that the Jews will be scattered out into many nations, in *diaspora*.

9.17 – 22 The Lord is calling for professional mourners to come and start the wailing for the fall of Judah which is coming. These women must be ready and train their daughters, for they will have cause to cry and weep.

9.23 – 24 The nub of the whole issue is not about how clever, rich or strong men are; the key is that the Lord Himself is *known*, that is, that man is in *intimate relationship* with the Lord, which is the import of the Hebrew word *Yada’* (Heb יָדָע), for the Lord is the One who ‘does *chesed*, *mishpat* and *tzedaqah* (Heb מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה) that is, grace-obligation, right-wising and straight-action. When He is known in this way, life and right action follow.

9.25-26 Circumcision is no protection against judgement either, because what counts is not the outward mark, but the inward reality, which Israel and other nations are not living in. Much is made of this in the New Testament in Paul’s writings about the usefulness of circumcision in the call to follow Christ.