

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS - PART SEVEN - THE BOOK OF NAHUM

**THEME** What motivates a missionary, a witness of Christ? The name Nahum means 'compassionate' or 'comforter' which might seem strange for a writer whose book is almost all about judgement, but compassion is the clue to what moves us into witness to others; the compassion of Christ motivates us to warn those He loves of the bad news of judgement before it is too late, as well as the good news of how to escape it.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND** can be deduced indirectly although this is another book like Joel and Obadiah which does not date itself. The book is addressed to Ninevah, the capital of Assyria, which was finally taken and destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 BC. It refers to No-amon, (Nah.3:8) an Egyptian city, which was captured by the Assyrians themselves in 661 BC. Presumably the book was written between these dates, in which case II Chron.33-35 would be the Old Testament background. Manasseh was one of the worst kings Judah ever had, reigning for 55 years until his death in 642 BC. Amon, his son, lasted only 2 years and was no better. Josiah, Amon's son, came to the throne at the age of 8 and was one of the most godly kings in Judah's history. Habakkuk and Zephaniah were prophets during his reign and Jeremiah began his long ministry during this period. All of them may have had an influence on Josiah which would demonstrate what God can do through good teaching with those from difficult backgrounds even in royal palaces, if Christians dare to let the Lord use them. In Josiah's time the Bible was rediscovered in the temple, read and acted upon with profound effect upon the whole nation. The message of Jonah had already been forgotten by a new generation in Assyria. The lesson of Israel's defeat by Assyria had equally been forgotten by Judah. Nahum reminded them both.

**NEW TESTAMENT CLUES** Nah.1:15 is very similar to Romans 10:15 but both are quotations with minor variation from Isa.52:7. At that point in Isaiah the message is the good news of how the Lord would deliver His people, then from the Assyrians, and one day from His judgement, by the crucifixion.(Isa.53) Isaiah, Nahum and the other prophets were sent by the Lord with the message of Christ crucified and risen, to set men free. Isaiah describes so vividly the outpouring of God's love at Calvary, so that the love of God might be poured into our hearts as believers.(Rom.5:5) The effect of this on our readiness to share Christ with others is explained in II Cor.5:14, '...the love of Christ controls us,' Notice how often in the gospels mention is made of the Lord Jesus Christ feeling compassion, followed by the action He took.(Matt.9:36) It still is His compassion that gets action not just a committee meeting in response to human need.

**OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES** include mention of two places with special significance in Israel's history.

**BASHAN**(Nah.1:4) was the headquarters of King Og, described in Deut.3:11 as a giant with a bed 4 metres by 2 metres! We are not told how big the occupant of the bed was. He led an attack on Israel in Num.21 but was defeated by God. This incident was used by David in Ps.22:12 to picture the enemies that surrounded him in a time of trouble and would one day surround Christ on the cross; God defeated both by making David king and by raising Christ from the dead.

**CARMEL**(Nah.1:4) was the mountain top on which Elijah was also surrounded by his enemies, the false prophets, but where God demonstrated that He was God, and they were destroyed.(I Kings 18) Amos(1:2 & 9:3) had referred to Carmel for the same reason; despite all opposition, God will never be silenced. Carmel, which means 'fruitful field' and Bashan are linked in Mic.7:14 to illustrate the principle that when the Lord is allowed to possess our lives as King we, as His witnesses, will be protected and provided for even in the most threatening situation.

**AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK** might be as follows:

1:1 **INTRODUCTION** - the writer's name and address (Elkosh was possibly in Galilee) and the letter's destination.

1:2-8 **MOTIVATION** as witnesses of Christ begins with a true view of God, His holiness, the certainty of His victory, and His power to judge those who continue in rebellion against Him, in balance with His patience, goodness and love in saving those who trust Him.

1:9-14 **CONFIDENCE** as His witnesses depends on a true view of man and his condition, his evil, twisted mind and the two inevitable choices every man faces of being liberated or judged by God. 'They' in verse 12, 'his' in verse 13 and 'you' in verse 14 refer to the Ninevites. 'You' in verses 12 and 13 is Judah. Idols represent false teaching which puts a yoke on men's hearts, but the truth will break this yoke.(Matt.11:28-30)

1:15 **THEREFORE** get going with the good news that God and man can be at peace. Tell the truth about God and the truth about man.

2:1-2 **THE GREATER THE OPPOSITION**, the greater the challenge. The worse man behaves the more God's power will have to be demonstrated to restore man to normal. Take His strength and be prepared.

2:3-13 **DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED** by Assyria's show of strength and confidence now. The tables will be turned, their power will be shown to be nothing, and their false ideologies will be silenced. The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

3:1-7 **THOSE WHO OPPOSE US ARE DEFEATED ALREADY** because of their unfaithfulness to God and His word. Remember Hosea's wife, Gomer, who illustrated the same principle in his time. The Lord will expose their true condition to us if we trust Him. If, as His witnesses, we let Him, He will convince us of the utter wrongness and bankruptcy of those who oppose the gospel.

3:8-15 **NINEVAH** had failed to learn from history; their defences would fall. However hard they fought it would get them nowhere. All the flimsy excuses people make for not accepting the gospel will eventually be swept aside if we let the Lord speak through us.

3:15:19 **JUDGEMENT** will one day come as a complete surprise to those who have depended on their economic and military strength. As they have judged others, they will be judged.(Matt.7:1) There is no hope of salvation for them - unless Christians are moved by Christ's compassion into effective action.

### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What does 'Nahum' mean? Why was he appropriately named? How does this fit with the theme of the book of Nahum?
2. Assyria destroyed No-Amon(3:8) in 661 BC and was itself destroyed Babylon in 612 BC? Who therefore were the kings of Judah in Nahum's time and what was the spiritual condition of Judah? How would Nahum's message apply to Judah? If we have lived through difficult times as Nahum had, what effect does it have upon our expectation of what God can do?
3. Where does Nahum quote a passage from the Old Testament which is used in the New Testament also? How does this help us to see the central message of the book?
4. What is the chief reason for Christians knowing they should witness of Christ and yet not doing so? Does Nahum provide any answer to this problem?
5. What is the significance of Carmel and Bashan in the Old Testament generally, and in Nahum particularly?
6. What does Nahum teach us of Christ and His gospel?
7. Divide the book into sections according to whether Nahum is telling us the bad news or the good news, and give each a title. Why does God alternate in His message through Nahum between good news and bad news? Give examples of how Jesus did the same in the gospels. How should we also do this in our message to the world?
8. Sum up what Nahum teaches about why, how and when God judges. What should be our attitude to judgement of sin now and in eternity?
9. What does 'the Lord will restore the splendour of Jacob'(2:2) mean in our lives today?
10. Where does Nahum repeat ideas and illustrations used by earlier minor prophets? How does he build on their teaching?
11. Prepare a simple outline of the book of Nahum suitable for a teenage Bible class.