LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: NAHUM AS MASTER OF LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

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ABSTRACT

The book of Nahum reflects a time in the history of Judah when they were dominated by the Assyrians. The book displays oracles of a prophet named Nahum who encourages the people of Judah to put their trust in YHWH who would destroy their enemy and so secure their future. Several examples are highlighted to illustrate how the prophet uses language and imagery effectively for this purpose (Nahum 1:2-8; 9-15 [Heb. 1:9-2:1]; 2:1-13 [2:2-14]; and 3:1-17; 18-19). An attempt is further made to demonstrate how Nahum craftily uses language and images to create a reality check for the people of Judah and their enemy as to how pride will be turned to humiliation through the intervention of YHWH.

INTRODUCTION

The prophet Nahum was active in a time of crisis for the people of Judah. They were threatened and dominated by the Assyrians, the dominant world power. This dominance left the Judean people dismayed and discouraged. In this time of crisis Nahum addressed the people of Judah with a strong-worded message of encouragement and motivation. As a master of rhetoric and imagery, Nahum attempted to instil trust in YHWH as the sovereign power. He appealed to the imagination of the people to perceive the victory that YHWH would achieve on their behalf. Nahum further effectively used metaphors to create insight into the powerlessness of the Assyrians as opposing power to both YHWH and the people of Judah.

The content of Nahum is fascinating but at the same time disturbing. The

language, rhetoric and imagery grasp the attention of readers of the text. The text appeals not only to the imagination of the aggrieved and dominated people of Judah, but also to generations of readers and exegetes. The text of Nahum is also disturbing because of its vivid and graphic depiction of violent scenes and because of its derogatory language regarding women. Redditt (2008:285) states explicitly "Nahum is vindictive". A balanced engagement with the text of Nahum will have to deal with both of these prominent characteristics of the book.

The question this article addresses is whether it is possible to determine from the Nahum text how someone in a position of authority uses words and rhetoric to influence, persuade and guide an audience and later readers of the text. It will be argued that it is possible to illustrate how the prophet Nahum is able to impact the lives of people in crisis by the masterful use of language and imagery. This hypothesis rests on the following assumptions: that the book of Nahum regards the prophet by this name as the character responsible for the message of this book; that the book can be regarded as a relatively coherent literary document and that a suitable reading strategy can be suggested as a framework to accommodate the above-mentioned research question of this article. Although there might be many other viable solutions to unravel the text of Nahum, none of them, not even the one suggested in this article, addresses all the issues in this intriguing prophetic book.

NAHUM THE PROPHETIC BOOK

The book of Nahum is presented as an oracle against Nineveh, a symbol of power to the Assyrians, and consists of three chapters. What is of particular interest and importance is that Nahum is characterised as a written document (סֵפֶר). It is therefore clearly stated that the vision of the prophets is in written form. As Troxel (2012:108) observes, "This is the only book that identifies itself as a document." [1] This is very significant, since it allows the prophet-poet to compose an extraordinarily well-crafted artistic literary masterpiece which can be appreciated in the various textual units

[1] See also Wöhrle (2008:62).

throughout the three chapters. Many regard Nahum as one of the greatest poets of the Old Testament (Gowan 1998:85).A few of these sections will be highlighted in this article, keeping in mind the book as a whole.

From the outset it is clear that YHWH is the main character of the book. YHWH is portrayed as the sovereign power who acts against His enemies, but who also protects those who are His people. The other major power in the book is the Assyrians who were, for some time, the dominant world power, in particular affecting the lives of the people of Israel and Judah. The book of Nahum poses questions to researchers regarding the composition of the text, the historical context, as well as the nature of its content. This book raises ethical questions which cannot be ignored by readers and interpreters of the book.

Research into the literature of the Old Testament over centuries has shown general consensus that the various books that form the Hebrew Bible all have histories of composition. This is also true when it comes to the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible. Each prophetic book has a compositional history which can probably be traced over several centuries. This is probably also true of the book of Nahum (Schulz 1973),[2] but it is more difficult to determine the growth history of this prophetic book because of its brevity.[3] Many scholars argue that at least Nahum 1:2-8 was later added to the text as it is known in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Jeremias 1970:16-17; Seybold 1989:81-82), though from a more holistic view of the book, the placement of Nahum 1:2-8 in the book makes good sense (Rudolph 1975:144; Spronk 1997:5; McConville 2002:205) because it forms an apt introduction to the book as a whole. The final form of the text, however, displays a sense of unity and need not be subjected to a search for

[2] Schulz (1973) has written a monograph in detail addressing the redactional activity in the book of Nahum.

[3] In a detailed discussion of the redactional history of the book of Nahum, Wöhrle (2008:24-60) argues that the original text consisted of oracles against the people of Judah because of what he calls their "judäische Bündnispolitik" (2008:61) before the Babylonian exile of the Judean people. He then continues to argue that these oracles have later been reworked to form part of the "Fremdvölker" oracles against the people of Nineveh. This kind of argumentation works on the assumption that at some stage a person or persons had the need to change the assumed harsh repudiation of YHWS's people rather than to serve the purpose of the condemnation of other nations. It seems highly unlikely that this would be the case, though, admittedly, it is an assumption. However, this is perhaps too ambitious.

many layers of redactional activity for the purpose of this article (cf. Sweeney 1992:364-377). Exactly when the final edition of the Nahum text as a literary unit should be dated, is difficult to determine. Floyd (2000:4-9) provides an insightful discussion of the various views on the compositional history of the book of Nahum. Quite a number of scholars nowadays argue for the Persian period as the most likely time of the literal completion of prophetic books (cf. Ben Zvi 2009:15-26; O'Brien 2007:168-183). The argument presented is that the focus should be on the prophetic book as a literary genre and not so much on the prophets after which the books have been named. This article is, however, not the place to engage with this matter in detail.

Besides the compositional history of any particular prophetic book, it is also true that most of the books display a historical setting. One should therefore distinguish between the history of the prophetic book (compositional history) and the history presented in the book (cf. O' Brien 2010:114). This is also true when it comes to the book of Nahum. As mentioned before, the history in the book reflects a time when the Assyrian people were the most dominant power of the then known world. Both Israel and Judah suffered from domination and oppression at the hands of the Assyrians. It is against this background that the prophet Nahum acts as a representative of YHWH to guide and lead the people from a religious perspective.

Nineveh was situated on the east bank of the Tigris River near Mosul. Sennecharib (705-681 B.C.E.) made Nineveh his capital and it remained the capital also under his successors Esarhaddon (680- 669) and Ashurbanipal (668-627) (Baker 2012:560-561). Nineveh was finally destroyed in 621 B.C.E. by the Medes. As the enemy of Israel and Judah, Nineveh was also the enemy of YHWH.

With impressive rhetoric a dismayed Judah is challenged to imagine YHWH's victory over their powerful oppressor (Wessels 2005:55-73). Very little historical detail is available from the book itself. In Nahum 3:8-9 Thebes is mentioned, a city that was ransacked by the Assyrian forces in 667 B.C.E. The other historical reference is the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. The composition and unity of the book Nahum is also a contentious issue and has implications when dating the final text of the book (cf. Mason 1991:63, 74-75). Scholars who argue for a long process of growth of the book

would opt for a postexilic date for the final version of the document (cf. Schulz 1973; Roberts 1991:38-39; O'Brien 2002:14-15).

The content of the book of Nahum can be divided into several sections. The following literary units are proposed for the discussion of the content of the book Nahum: 1:2-8; 9-15 [Heb. 1:9-2:1]; 2:1-13 [2:2-14]; and 3:1-17; 18-19.

NAHUM THE PROPHET

As mentioned before the history in the book represents a time of Assyrian domination, in this case of the people of Judah. Although the trend today is to focus on the prophetic book rather than on the person of the prophet, the book of Nahum mentions a specific person by the name of Nahum. The book even provides detail about this particular prophet's origin. Whether Nahum was a real person or merely a literary character, is not all that important. Troxel (2012:109) shares this sentiment. The book wants readers to regard Nahum as a person holding a position of authority in the religious domain. This particular person, according to the book, was burdened with a specific message as a communication from YHWH to give guidance to the people of Judah during challenging times in their history. This article endeavours to investigate how the prophet Nahum is presented in the book as a leading figure giving guidance to the people of Judah during a time of turmoil. The focus will not only be on the content of the prophet's message, but also on the ways and means the prophet has applied to guide, influence, persuade, motivate and encourage the people of Judah.

From the book of Nahum very little is known about the author and his origin. Although Elkosh is designated as his town of origin, this place is unknown. Some regard Nahum as a cultic prophet or even a scribe, whilst others focus on his poetic abilities. The prophet acted in the seventh century, but that is not necessarily the date of the completion of Nahum as a literary work (cf. Redditt 2008:288).

The book under discussion is named after a person referred to as Nahum, the Elkoshite. This is the only occurrence of this name in the Old Testament. The name Nahum means "comforter" and in this sense corresponds with his message of comfort

to those on whose behalf YHWH acts against the enemy. Not too much should be read into this, however, because almost nothing is known about the person Nahum.

The reference to Elkosh is presumably a reference to Nahum's place of origin, but the location of this place remains a mystery. Some scholars have speculated about its location over the years, but it remains mere speculation. Some of the places mentioned are somewhere in Assyria, Galilee and Judea. Redditt (2008:286) agrees that it is difficult to locate Nahum's place of origin, but argues that Nahum 1:15 alludes to Jerusalem and that Nahum therefore most probably resided in Judah. This does not seem to be a strong argument and does not help to clarify the location dilemma. Another possibility to consider is the view proposed by O'Brien (2002:42-43) that Han (2011:18) mentions: "Elkosh is neither a place name nor a personal name, but an epithet of the prophet meaning 'fierce god' (*'l qšy*). Thus Nahum, as a gentle comforter (Heb. *nhm*), is an Elkoshite (*'l qšy*) sent by a ferocious God." This is an interesting proposal, but it rests on the interpretation of what the book entails. It should simply be regarded as a reference to a location, although unknown, in order to indicate that a person (fictitious or not) had received a vision that had serious consequences for Nineveh.

The book of Nahum does not call the person Nahum a prophet, but he is regarded as such by the Hebrew tradition and by its placement in the Book of the Twelve. The heading in 1:1 refers to the fact that the book contains a vision of Nahum. The noun חָזוֹן (ḥazôn) is often associated with prophetic activities (Edelman 2009:44). It can be assumed that the vision of Nahum that is captured in the book of Nahum has been regarded of significant value because of its inclusion in the prophetic corpus and the need to link it to a specific person regarded as a prophet of YHWH. In the next section a proposal will be made regarding how to read the literary work Nahum within a framework that does justice to the nature and content of the book.

A READING STRATEGY

There are several views on the genre of Nahum. Some regard it as a prophetic liturgy (Coggins 1985:9-10); a prophetic refutation speech; a prophetic historical exemplum (Floyd 2000:18); a propagandistic anti-Assyrian tract; non-violent resistance literature; songs of soldiers; and a type of city lament (cf. Huddlestun, 2011). In a very interesting article, Garber (2008:285-293) reads the book of Nahum as a text reflecting nationalistic rage stemming from experiences of trauma. Some scholars have pointed out that the text of Nahum shows strong resemblance to the so-called "oracles against the nations" that are prevalent in a number of the prophetic books. There is merit in most of these suggested readings of the text, but perhaps too little consideration is given to the oppressive context that the text reveals in combination with the remarkable poetic nature of the text.

A significant characteristic that should be considered when analysing Nahum is the poetic nature of the book with its use of rhetorical devices and imaginative language and images.

As argued before the book of Nahum projects a context of threat and oppression by the mighty Assyrians represented by the city Nineveh and her leadership. The question being posed here is what function or purpose would a skilfully-composed poetic text like the Nahum text serve within a context of violence and oppression? Furthermore, the Nahum text is characterised as an oracle (*maśśā*) from YHWH against Nineveh (Han 2011:15). From the commencement of the book, YHWH is presented as the sovereign power who will destroy His enemies and therefore the enemies of His people. He is depicted as the divine warrior who will take on the battle on behalf of His people. The people of Judah are invited to be "spectators", watching on while YHWH is taking the enemy to task. It is suggested that the text of Nahum be read as a call to the people to put their trust in YHWH in a time of crisis. The thesis of the article is that the leadership strategy of the prophet is to appeal to the imagination of the people to perceive the victory over their Assyrian enemy as a realised fact. By appealing to their imagination to "see" the victory in their mind's eye, YHWH's people should take courage and rise from their despondent and despairing attitude.

With this in mind the thesis is that the text of Nahum should be classified as a form of "resistance literature" or "resistance poetry" (Wessels 1998:615-628; Weigl 2001:102; O'Brien 2002:112-117; Huddlestun 2011:103). O'Brien (2008:115, 116, 121, 150; 2010:113) shows particular interest in the suggested approach, although she expresses concern that it might encourage or justify the use of violence if interpreted incorrectly. To use the text of Nahum to justify violence should be condemned in no uncertain terms. Dempsey (2000:145-146) also observes that the text seems to legitimise associating YHWH with violence, but then she expresses the view that "while the emphasis can shift from power and domination to power and liberation, it has not shifted far enough". The suggested reading should therefore not be seen to justify violence in YHWH's name or to condone the derogatory imagery in the text, but is an attempt to do justice to the nature of the well-crafted Nahum text. It is possible that people in oppressive societies would be able to relate to this kind of text that calls to the imagination the downfall of the oppressor. The danger, however, remains that encouragement to imagine the defeated enemy through YHWH's intervention might actually be taken literally with far-reaching consequences. It needs to be emphasised that the appreciation for the rhetoric and use of language and imagery in Nahum does not imply a glorification of the disturbingly violent content of the book, particularly in the violent context in which many people today are living.

Keeping in mind this particular reading strategy, this article will attempt to demonstrate how Nahum uses language and imagery masterfully to motivate, persuade and mobilise YHWH's people to show courage in times of crisis.

LEADERSHIP AND LANGUAGE

Before discussing some examples from the text of Nahum to illustrate how the prophet skilfully uses language and imagery to lead the people in a time of crisis, the effective use of language in contemporary leadership situations will briefly be discussed.

The interest of this article is to investigate how people in positions of authority or leadership behave within relationships to others. Leadership means to influence people

in order to persuade them to do certain things or to behave in a certain manner. People who exercise authority over other people do so to achieve certain goals, to motivate people to accomplish certain things and even to change their way of thinking and behaviour. True leaders aim to convince people of ideas, to motivate them to change and to follow the leader. As Gill (2011:276) says, "Outstanding leaders do influence and persuade people through inspirational language. This is perhaps the most obvious behavioural characteristic of an outstanding leader." The aim is to persuade people to see and follow a projected vision and to join in to change a vision or visions into reality.

It is no secret that to achieve this, people in positions of authority and leadership make use of the powerful tool of speech (DuBrin 2013:117).[4] When speaking to people in contact situations, leaders not only use language to communicate, but also facial expression, body language and passion (Gill 2011:275). When engaging ancient texts in order to determine how people of authority communicated in an attempt to persuade and motivate others to change their way of thinking, the text needs to be scrutinised for clues. Although the real-life context is not available, well-written texts communicate a great deal about the skill of a writer to convey ideas and to persuade people. MacArthur (see Gill 2011:277) is correct when he points out that speeches by inspirational leaders "articulate dreams, offer hope, stir hearts and minds, and offer their audiences visions of a better world". This is true about written texts as well and an attempt is made to illustrate this very fact by using the text of the book of Nahum.

Two concepts of particular importance for the discussion of using language in the process of exercising authority and leadership are what Gill (2011:279-285) refers to as framing language and speech and rhetorical crafting of language and speech. By framing language he means that the leader establishes a connection between the messages he or she wishes to convey and the needs of those people the leader wants to involve. This would imply that leaders such as the prophet Nahum should know the circumstances of their constituency to be able to communicate effectively the oracle of

[4] DuBrin (2013:117) highlights two particular aspects charismatic leaders use in communicating effectively: the use of metaphors and analogies and the gearing of language to fit different audiences.

YHWH to the people of Judah. By means of dialoguing with the people, framing language has to create a sense of understanding of the concerns and challenges the audience experiences and to communicate a shared fate. This implies that the leader should connect with the people by attracting their attention, show real concern, be authentic, share common interests, involve as many people as possible and create a shared vision of a favourable outcome (cf. Gill 2011:279-280, 282). It is believed that it is possible to construct a reasonably credible scenario in which the framing language of the prophet Nahum can be illustrated. In a time of crisis caused by Assyrian domination and oppression, Nahum exercises his authority as a prophet commissioned by YHWH to convey the message of hope that YHWH will destroy the enemy and therefore open up the possibility of a future of freedom.

The second concept referred to above is that of rhetorical crafting of language and speech (Gill 2011:282-285). This particular aspect is much easier to illustrate from a written text such as the book of Nahum. As was mentioned earlier, Nahum is presented as a written document containing the vision of the prophet. The focus will therefore be on the rhetoric the writer employs to involve and persuade his or her audience. Rhetoric is an art of using words and imagery to appeal to an audience in order to communicate effectively. This article argues that this particular characteristic of the book of Nahum is the most distinctive element of the book that should influence the way the book is approached in an attempt to understand it. Nahum uses the power of rhetoric to address a dismayed and despondent people to perceive a scenario of an already-destroyed enemy through the intervention of YHWH. The future of Israel and Judah is secure, because YHWH, the sovereign power, has come to their rescue by destroying Nineveh, the stronghold of the Assyrians and by incapacitating their leadership. The next section will illustrate some examples of the rhetorical mastery of Nahum to impact the lives of the people of Judah and to persuade them of the future which YHWH will secure on their behalf. The examples selected are Nahum 1:2, 7-8; 2:3-5, 10; and 3:19. These chosen sections and verses will be highlighted within the "storyline" of the book of Nahum as a comprehensive unit.

STRUCTURE AND RHETORIC OF NAHUM

The position taken here is that Nahum has an authoritative position as a prophet in his society who speaks on behalf of YHWH (cf. Grabbe 1995:82-84, 116-117; Blenkinsopp 1995:115-119; Wessels 2013:427, 439). In his role as a leader he conveys a message in order to guide the people in and through the time of crisis mentioned above. The content of the book of Nahum is presented to an implied audience, but it is clear from the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Nahum text that later readers could relate to the words from Nahum in their various contexts (cf. Coggins 1985:14-15; Han 2011:9-35). The argument presented here is that the book is strategically composed in such a manner first to attract and involve its audience and then to address needs and issues they have. The next few paragraphs will illustrate what Nahum's message entails and how he craftily conveys this message to reach a climactic conclusion at the end of the literary document.[5]

As mentioned before, Nahum's message is classified as an oracle, significantly referred to as a *maśśā*[6] (a burden). Edelman (2009:34-35) discusses the possible meanings of the term *maśśā* and expresses the view that the person who utters the oracle has received it within a cultic context under the influence of the deity. This implies a grave and burdensome message of oracular nature with far-reaching implications for Nineveh and the Assyrian people.

Nahum 1:2 and 7-8

What follows is the first example of how Nahum has effectively communicated to lead his people in a time of crisis. Right from the start Nahum's message focuses on YHWH as the Sovereign Power. The message concerns the people of Nineveh, but it is to be heard by the people of Judah as well. Knowing and understanding the dire

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5 Troxel (2012:110) agrees with the idea that "it is possible to trace a progression of thought".

6 Notice should also be taken of the view of Floyd (2000:14) who regards the genre of Nahum as a *maśśā*, defined as "a kind of revelation that serves to interpret the present applicability of a previous revelation". One should perhaps relate the oracle against Nineveh in Nahum with the proclamation of judgement against Nineveh in Zephaniah 2:13-15 (see Gowan 1998:86).

situation of the people of Judah, the prophet intentionally confronts the people with the reality of the nature of YHWH (Coggins 1985:20). Nahum 1:2 reads:

אֵ֣ל קַנָּ֗א וְנֹקֵם֙ יְהוָ֔ה נֹקֵ֥ם יְהוָ֖ה וּבַעַ֣ל חֵמָ֑ה
נֹקֵ֤ם יְהוָה֙ לְצָרָ֔יו וְנוֹטֵ֥ר הוּא֙ לְאֹיְבָֽיו׃

(Nahum 1:2 WTT)

> 'A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful;
> the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies.' (NRSV)[7]

The poetry in this verse is dramatic and provocative. The verse displays a chiastic structure (a bb a) followed by a synonymous parallelism (a b a b). The following presentation would make it more visible:

A. A God (אל) of jealousy
  B. The one who takes vengeance is YHWH (יהוה)
  B. The one who takes vengeance is YHWH (יהוה)
A. and a master (בעל) of wrath
  YHWH takes vengeance (a) against his adversaries (b)
  He rages (a) against his enemies (b)

God's jealousy in this verse is linked to His wrath, and furthermore His vengeance is related to His raging against His adversaries/enemies. The three different names referring to the divine should also not go unnoticed. Coggins (1985:21) remarks that the three different divine names in close proximity of each other in one poetic line is a "deliberate dramatic device". This opening verse of the poem in Nahum 1:2-8 is clearly aimed at setting the tone for what is to follow. This is in one way a disturbing reality with which the Assyrians and Judah are confronted, but at the same time also a comforting message from the prophet to YHWH's people (Floyd 2000:43). Gowan (1998:88) remarks that Nahum might be the first of the prophets to use a theophany to

[7] This verse has been analysed in more detail in a previous article in which the chiastic structure of the verse and its meaning have been highlighted (see Wessels 2005:62-63).

express wrath. He says, “He (Nahum) has used four of the synonyms for anger in these two verses, and the wrath of God appears elsewhere in theophanies only in Habakkuk 3 and Isaiah 13, both later than this book. Theophany has been moved to a new level in Nahum” (Gowan 1998:89).

Nahum 1:2-8 is a hymn about YHWH in the form of an incomplete acrostic. Not all scholars agree that 1:2-8 should be regarded as an acrostic (Floyd 1994:430-433), but many accept that these verses form a unit (Coggins 1985:7, 18-19; Becking 1996:4-7; Wöhrle 2008:54-60).[8] Petersen (2002:198) regards Nahum 1 as “a theological prolegomenon” to the book as a whole. The pericope concerns the nature and power of YHWH as the Sovereign Power. Three aspects of YHWH are highlighted in this short poem. First, His nature is described as jealous, avenging, slow to anger and great in power (vv. 2-3a). Secondly, what he does is emphasised (vv. 3b-6). His theophanic appearance impacts nature and shows His power . It is stated that His mighty presence will affect the wind, clouds, sea, rivers and mountains. His enemies should take note of His Sovereign Power over nature and people. Floyd (2000:43) remarks: “This text aims, first, to evoke in all who hear or read these words the realization that opposing Yahweh is as futile as opposing the power that orders creation out of chaos.” In the third instance YHWH is presented as both protector of His people and destroyer of His enemy (vv. 7-8):

7 טֹ֣וב יְהוָ֔ה לְמָעֹ֖וז בְּיֹ֣ום צָרָ֑ה וְיֹדֵ֖עַ חֹ֥סֵי בֹֽו׃

8 וּבְשֶׁ֣טֶף עֹבֵ֔ר כָּלָ֖ה יַעֲשֶׂ֣ה מְקֹומָ֑הּ וְאֹיְבָ֖יו יְרַדֶּף־חֹֽשֶׁךְ׃

[7] ‘The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble;

he knows those who take refuge in him,

[8] But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of her place (the adversaries- ESV),

and will pursue his enemies into darkness.’

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8 Rudolph (1975:150-157) regards Nahum 1:2-10 as a hymn concerning YHWH, though he states, “Der eigentliche Hymnus umfasst V. 2-8; V. 9f. ziehen daraus die Folgerung für die Hörer” (Rudolph 1975:153). Spronk (1997:19-58) treats Nahum 1:1-11 as a textual unit. Han (2011:18-26) gives an exposition of Nahum1:2-15 as a unit containing an oracle of deliverance for Judah.

Roberts (1991:45) and others suggest a slight change of the vocalisation to מְקוֹמָהּ to arrive at the meaning of "opposition" or as the ESV translates "adversaries", but Coggins (1985:26) retains the Masoretic Text (MT) and the translation "her place" as referring to the place of the gods that would be destroyed. Spronk (1997:50) is correct in stating that the MT be respected and should be seen as the intended parallel between the "offering of a shelter" in verse 7 and "YHWH destroying her place" in verse 8. On the one hand YHWH is described as good, a stronghold in times of trouble who knows the people who seek shelter in Him. Verse 8, on the other hand, states that He will annihilate His enemies and pursue them into darkness.

Although the message is addressed to Nineveh as representative of the Assyrian empire, Nahum's aim is first and foremost to instill in the people of Judah a trust in YHWH. The language reminds of the Psalms (cf. Ps 119; 46 for example; Rudolph 1975:156; Coggins 1985:26). The very nature of YHWH testifies to the people of Judah that YHWH will match and trump the power of their Assyrian enemy.

The poem in Nahum 1:2-8 is followed in 1:9-15 by a passage with an alternating pattern of doom for Nineveh (1:9-11; 14, 2:1) and deliverance for Judah (1:12-13; 15 [Heb. 2:1] and 2:2). In verses 9-11 the people of Judah are assured that the unknown enemy's plans will not succeed. Verse 10 applies a mix of several metaphors to create a vivid picture of the end result: Like fire devours thickets and stubble, so will the enemy be devoured. Nahum 1:12-13 confirms that YHWH's acts will favour His people. The strong enemy will be destroyed. Images of a yoke being broken and a band snapped are used to depict the destruction of the enemy. The doom proclamation directed against the enemy in 1:14 entails a threat of total extinction: their name will be wiped out, images of their gods will be destroyed and their death is a sure reality. Verse 15 [Heb. 2:1] is an appeal to Judah to celebrate YHWH's victory over the enemy and to show their loyalty to Him by keeping their vows. Nahum wants the people of Judah to know that he acknowledges that the threat of the Assyrians is real, but that they should also envision YHWH's victory over the enemy as a sure deal. Nahum wants the people to focus on YHWH first of all, then to acknowledge the threat of the enemy, but finally to envision the victory over the enemy.

Nahum 2:3-5 and 10 [2:4-6 and 11 in the MT][9]

The second example to be highlighted is Nahum 2:3-5 and 10. In Nahum 2:1-13 [MT 2:2-14] the focus shifts to the fate of Nineveh. Although the city is not named in the early verses, it soon becomes clear that the proclamation is in actual fact aimed at the city of Nineveh. Verse 1 alerts Judah's enemy of a scatterer that will pose a threat to them. This is followed in 2:1 with a word of encouragement that YHWH will restore His people. In the following verses a scene of a battlefield is painted at which Judah is a spectator, observing the downfall of the powerful Assyrian enemy. As Robertson (1990:87) comments, the poet uses four rapid-fire imperatives in verse 2 to call the Ninevites into action: "Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your loins; collect all your strength" (NRSV). This is once again an example of how Nahum aims to involve his audience in the message he wishes to bring across by skilfully applying imagery and rhetoric. Rogerson (2003:709) says what is described in this scene is not so much an 'ordered description' of how the battle progresses, but a "kaleidoscopic" depiction of the battle.

In 2:3-5 [MT 2:4-6] the siege of Nineveh is portrayed in such a crafty manner that the people of Judah and the readers of the text are drawn into the role of spectators or viewers of a battle scene. The text reads:

4 מָגֵ֨ן גִּבֹּרֵ֜יהוּ מְאָדָּ֗ם אַנְשֵׁי־חַ֙יִל֙ מְתֻלָּעִ֔ים בְּאֵשׁ־פְּלָד֥וֹת הָרֶ֖כֶב בְּי֣וֹם הֲכִינ֑וֹ
וְהַבְּרֹשִׁ֖ים הָרְעָֽלוּ׃
5 בַּחוּצוֹת֙ יִתְהוֹלְל֣וּ הָרֶ֔כֶב יִשְׁתַּקְשְׁק֖וּן בָּרְחֹב֑וֹת מַרְאֵיהֶן֙ כַּלַּפִּידִ֔ם כַּבְּרָקִ֖ים
יְרוֹצֵֽצוּ׃
6 יִזְכֹּר֙ אַדִּירָ֔יו יִכָּשְׁל֖וּ (בַּהֲלִכוֹתָם) [בַּהֲלִיכָתָ֑ם] יְמַהֲרוּ֙ חֽוֹמָתָ֔הּ וְהֻכַ֖ן הַסֹּכֵֽךְ׃

(Nah. 2:4-7 WTT)

3 The shields of his warriors are red;

his soldiers are clothed in crimson.

The metal on the chariots flashes on the day when he musters them;

9 Becking (1996:12) regards Nahum 2:4 - 3:19 as "The sack of Nineveh". He refers to Nahum 2:4-14 as a description of the assault of Nineveh.

the chargers prance.[10]

4 The chariots race madly through the streets,
the rush to and fro through the squares;
their appearance is like torches,
they dart like lightning.

5 He calls his officers;
they stumble as they come forward;
they hasten to the wall,
and the mantelet (siege tower-ESV) is set up.
(Nah. 2:3-5 - own structuring of the text)

The poetry of this section is striking and ensures the oppressed people that YHWH is taking action on their behalf by means of an enemy attacking the city of Nineveh. What are on display are soldiers dressed in uniforms brandishing their weaponry, shields and spears. The thought should be entertained that the reddish colour might not only be referring to the colour of the uniforms, but also suggesting the blood spilled on the battlefield (v. 3; cf. Rudolph 1975:170; Coggins 1985:37).[11] There are also chariots on the battle scene and their speedy movement is splendidly described in concise sentences (v. 4). Nahum 2:5 describes how confused the Assyrian soldiers react when called on, but that is in vain – the siege has already taken place. In this short passage the poet appeals to the senses of sight, hearing and emotion to achieve his communication goal of changing the attitudes and views of his implied audience. Han (2011:28) fittingly observes that "The poetic irony is that the Assyrians who used to attack their enemies with lightning quickness are now fleeing 'like lightning' as their attackers speedily assault Nineveh."

The depiction of the battle scene is followed in 2:6-8 with scenes depicting the

[10] There is a difference of opinion on the meaning of the word הַבְּרֹשִׁים and it is suggested that the ב should be replaced with פ referring then to horsemen (Coggins 1985:38). The NRSV follows this suggestion and translates it with "the chargers prance". This suggestion should perhaps be followed since there is too much speculation surrounding the specific word in the MT (e.g., "the cypress spears quiver").

[11] Han (2011:27-28) gives references to later interpretations of the association of the reddish colour.

emotional impact of the carnage on the citizens in the city. The image of a flooded city is presented in verse 6. Verse 7 is difficult,[12] but it seems that the Hebrew word הֻצַּב should be understood as "it is decreed" that the inhabitants of the city will be carried away, and slave girls will be lamenting the state of affairs of an empty city (Coggins 1985:41-42; Roberts 1991:65-66). According to verse 8 Nineveh is like a dam leaking its water, a metaphor for dwindling power. The plundering of the wealth of the city is described in staccato style (v. 9) and so too the tragic consequences of defeat:

בּוּקָה וּמְבוּקָה וּמְבֻלָּקָה

"Devastation, desolation, and destruction!

לֵב נָמֵס וּפֶק בִּרְכַּיִם וְחַלְחָלָה בְּכָל־מָתְנַיִם וּפְנֵי כֻלָּם קִבְּצוּ פָּארוּר׃

(Nahum 2:11 WTT).

Hearts faint and knees tremble, all loins quake, all faces grow pale!"

(2:10- NRSV).

Although the rhetoric is catching and concise, it depicts a world of information. First, there are three consecutive nouns expressing total destruction in verse 9. As Spronk (1997:102) says: "The many cases of alliteration and assonance in the book of Nahum find their summit in this verse".[13] The sound of the words contributes to dramatic presentation of the poetry (Han 2011:29) and is a ploy of the poet to draw the attention of his audience and readers. The audience and readers cannot miss the intensity of what the prophet is conveying. The second part of the sentence describes how the inhabitants of the city physically respond to the devastation they experience (cf. Rudolph 1975:173). It affects the heart, knees, loins and face – a description of the total body in shock (Coggins 1885:44). The fate of Nineveh is so vividly displayed that Judah should imagine it as real and as if it has already been accomplished (see Troxel 2012:110).

As if the fate of the city is not enough, the final nail in the coffin is the demise of the Assyrian king and his officials. Nahum 2:11-13 uses a metaphor of a lion that taunts the city, the king of Assyria and the nobles in their diminishing power. Rudolph

[12] Han (2011:28-29) discusses the problems this word has caused many translators and how choices of translating the word have influenced later interpretations for the New Testament.

[13] Cf. also Is 24:1 in this regard.

(1975:175) calls the section a "*Spottlied*". Assyrian kings have often associated themselves with the image of a lion. They take pride in hunting lions as a display of their power. In this brief passage Nahum illustrates how the lion's power will dwindle to such an extent that he will not even be able to take care of his lioness and cubs. Nahum uses the lion metaphor, a symbol of power, to subvert the power of the Assyrian leadership.[14] The chapter ends in verse 13 with a declaration that YHWH will totally destroy Nineveh and its leaders in war and leave Assyria powerless. Nahum wants the people of Judah to imagine first of all the defeat of the enemy on the battlefield, then the demise and fall of the city of Nineveh and finally the loss of power of the Assyrian king and his leadership. YHWH's power will trump the power of Assyria as the oppressive enemy (cf. Becking 1996:17). In this time of crisis the people of Judah are experiencing, Nahum, as a religious leader, who masterfully uses language, rhetoric and imagery to instil trust in YHWH and in the future.

Nahum 3:19 in context

Chapter 3 of the book also contains excellent examples of the rhetorical skill of Nahum as is displayed in verses 3:1-4, 5-7 and 19. This chapter consists of verses 1-17 and 18-19. Verses 1-17 can be subdivided in 3:1-7 and 8-17. This chapter will only be dealt with briefly due to the length constraint of the article.[15] Emphasis will only be placed on verse 19 as a climax to the prophet's effort to motivate his audience to respond positively to his vision of a possible victorious future.

Chapter 3 describes the demise and downfall of Nineveh. This city is regarded as a place of bloodshed (Han 2011:30). Nahum 3:1-7 is a threat against Nineveh which is labelled as an evil city. Again a scene of war and carnage is depicted showing the

[14] Cf. the article by Wessels in OTE 27/2, 2014:703-721 of the application of the lion metaphor to subvert the power of the Assyrian king, his officials and the city.

[15] This chapter in particular has caused uneasiness and outright rage because of the graphic content and offensive imagery of women. The seriousness of the issues raised in this chapter deserves treatment in a separate article. Important research has been done on this chapter for example by Julia O'Brien in all of her writing on the book of Nahum and is listed in the bibliography (see O'Brien 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010). See also Klopper (2003:616-624).

artistic skill of the poet. The rhetoric of the poetic section to follow has the emotional appeal of a lament, but the listing structure of the content is rhythmic and lively and will draw the audience into the conversation.

[1]Ah! City of bloodshed,
utterly deceitful,
full of booty –
no end to the plunder!
[2] The crack of whip and rumble of wheel,
galloping horse and bounding chariot!
[3] Horsemen charging,
flashing sword and glittering spear,
piles of dead,
heaps of corpses,
dead bodies without end—
they stumble over the bodies!
[4] Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery?

In these four verses the prophet sets the tone of a lament introduced by הָוֹי (Troxel 2012:111). Robertson (1990:100) has a slightly different view by regarding the outcry as an expression of pain and agony over what is happening to Nineveh. The fact is that it is a woeful situation that such a glorious city is perceived in such a negative light. Nineveh and her inhabitants are described as corrupt, dishonest and morally bankrupt. Judah should witness the devastating consequences of bloodshed and slaughter. All of this will be the result of Assyria's abuse and oppression of people. Judah can join in the lamentations of this corrupt city and her inhabitants. It is significant to highlight that Nahum again shows his artistic skill by engaging not only the sense of sight, but also that of hearing and feeling of emotions (Rudolph 1975:177). This technique is used to engage the oppressed people effectively on more than one level to assure them of victory and liberation.

In the next view verses the first person singular verbs refer to YHWH as the one who is acting.

[5] I am against you, says the LORD of hosts,
and will lift up your skirts over your face;
and I will let nations look on your nakedness
and kingdoms on your shame.
[6] I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle.
[7] Then all who see you will shrink from you and say,
"Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?" Where shall I seek comforters for you? (NRSV)

What is striking is that YHWH is the antagonist of this adulterous city, announcing that Nineveh will be humiliated as a female. In verses 8-17 the defencelessness of Nineveh is the subject. The city Thebes was found not to be invincible, on what grounds then can Nineveh claim to be better than Thebes? Verse 12 employs the simile of a ripe fig, shaken from a tree and falling into the mouth of an eater. The fig refers to Nineveh falling in the hands of her enemy (the eater). The powerlessness of Nineveh's army is again depicted by comparing it to a woman.[16] In the next verses (3:13-17) three ways are mentioned that will cause Nineveh's destruction: fire will devour the city, a sword will cut her off and an enemy will invade the city just as young locusts consume a field. The inhabitants of Nineveh can multiply like locusts, but this will still not prevent YHWH from destroying them.

In verses 18 and 19 Nahum's message comes to a dramatic and climactic conclusion. These verses are addressed to the king of Assyria, informing him that he can no longer rely on his officials to save the day. His situation is to be compared to an incurable wound; he can expect hardship in future. The reference to the incurability of the king's wound has overtones of curses similar to those found in Assyrian vassal treaties (Spronk 1997:143). If this is the case, this might be a deliberate reversal of the curse tradition with which the Assyrians are familiar. Whether this should be regarded

[16] See O'Brien (2008) on metaphors of prophets that are challenging to interpreters in our enlightened age.

as a curse or perhaps a wish is not certain, but whatever the case, Stulman and Kim (2010:220) say "the description of the empire's collapse is striking and powerful". On the one hand verse 19 reflects a dirge in which someone's death is mourned. In this instance the situation of the king of Assyria is as if his death is a reality. Verse 19, however, also resembles a lament because the dire situation of the king affects the people of Assyria as gravely as it affects him (Floyd 2000:77). On the other hand, the news of the powerlessness and deadly situation of the king of Assyria is good news and brings joy to the people he has oppressed and who have suffered his unceasing evil. Verse 19 reads:

אֵין־כֵּהָה לְשִׁבְרֶךָ נַחְלָה מַכָּתֶךָ כָּל־ שֹׁמְעֵי שִׁמְעֲךָ תָּקְעוּ כַף עָלֶיךָ כִּי עַל־מִי לֹא־ עָבְרָה רָעָתְךָ תָּמִיד׃

(Nah. 3:19 WTT)

"There is no assuaging (easing - ESV) your hurt, your wound is mortal.
All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you.
For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?" (NRSV).

Nahum ends his discourse on a climax inviting all people who have experienced the oppression and cruelty of the Assyrians to rejoice in the demise of their enemy. This is done in the form of asking a rhetorical question,[17] thereby creating the opportunity with all who have experienced the cruelty of the Assyrians to join in and rejoice the powerlessness of the Assyrians. Han (2011:33) sees this rhetorical question as an expression of sarcasm insinuating that justice is finally done. The end of the perceived oppression will be a joyous occasion for Judah.

CONCLUSION

It was argued in this article that the book of Nahum presents Nahum as a person who acted as a prophet of YHWH proclaiming judgment to the people of Nineveh. It was postulated that while the message was directed at the Assyrians, the aim was to

[17] Ending the book with a question resembles a similar situation also found at the end of the book Jonah that also concerns the Assyrians.

address the people of Judah in a time of oppression by the Assyrian forces. It was suggested that the text of Nahum should be read as a form of resistance literature with the aim of appealing to the imagination of the people of Judah to envisage the downfall of their enemy as a done deal. To achieve this the prophet used language as framing by first of all relating to their needs and frustrations, but also to overcome their despondency by urging them to imagine the reality of the eventual destruction of the enemy and victory. Nahum did this by directing their focus on YHWH as the sovereign power who will battle against their enemy and achieve the victory on their behalf. Nahum craftily used words and imagery to bring across his message of a perceivable victory over the enemy and to promise a future for the people of YHWH. Nahum displayed language of wrath, threat, destruction, taunt, humiliation and anger, but also language of trust, comfort and exuberant joy. To summarise, the text reflects a wide range of human emotions and passion. It therefore seems possible to determine from the Nahum text how someone in a position of authority is able to use words and rhetoric to influence, persuade and guide an audience and also subsequent readers of the Nahum text. Although the text of Nahum reflects a certain period in the history of the people of Judah, the book of Nahum has been used over centuries to encourage communities undergoing hardship and oppression to put their faith in YHWH as the sovereign power who will destroy the enemy of His people (O'Brien 2007:175-176; Han 2011:7-15).

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