

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Nahum the Prophet

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 1

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IN BRIEF

Saint Nahum the Prophet

Seventh of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible, who foretold the fall of Nineveh.

Feast day	December 1
Born	7th century BC, Elkosh
Era	7th century BC

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Nahum for Peace and the Oppressed

Novena to Saint Nahum the Prophet

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Nahum the Prophet

Saint Nahum is the seventh of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible. His short book, only three chapters long, announces the fall of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire that had crushed the peoples of the Near East for more than a century. His name means "comforter": for an oppressed people, his prophecy was first of all a consolation. The Church commemorates him on December 1.

Who was Saint Nahum?

Very little is known about his life. The book presents him only as "Nahum the Elkoshite," and no one knows for certain where Elkosh was. Some look for it in Galilee or in Judea; others identify it with Alqosh, in present-day northern Iraq, not far from the ruins of Nineveh. In that case, his family might have been among the Israelites deported to Assyria.

He preached in the kingdom of Judah in the seventh century before Christ. His book shows a poet of great power, able to describe in a few lines the thunder of chariots and the panic of a besieged city, and also to sing the goodness of God toward those who trust in him.



The prophet Nahum, eighteenth-century Russian icon (Kizhi).

Key dates of Nahum's time

- **722 BC**: Assyria destroys the northern kingdom of Israel; Judah becomes its vassal.
- **663 BC**: The Assyrians take the Egyptian city of Thebes, which the book mentions as a past event.
- **Between 663 and 612 BC**: The period of Nahum's preaching, probably under the long reign of King Manasseh.
- **612 BC**: Nineveh falls to the Babylonians and the Medes.

The fall of an empire

Assyria was then the leading power of the known world, notorious for the cruelty of its wars. Judah lived under its domination. King Manasseh, whom the Bible describes as one of the most unfaithful kings in its history, had

allowed idolatry to spread. It is in this setting that Nahum announces the unthinkable: great Nineveh will fall.

A hymn to the power and goodness of God

The first chapter is a hymn to the power of God, master of nature and of history, but also to his goodness: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (Nahum 1:7). The God of Nahum is slow to anger, but he does not leave injustice unpunished forever.

The siege of Nineveh

The next two chapters describe, in striking poetry, the assault on the city, its chariots racing through the streets, its fall and its plunder. The book ends with a question addressed to the king of Assyria: who has not suffered from your endless cruelty? It is the voice of all the peoples that the empire had oppressed.

The messenger who brings good news of peace

In the midst of these images of war shines a sentence of light: "Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" (Nahum 1:15, or 2:1 in some Bibles). The prophet Isaiah uses a similar image, and Saint Paul takes it up in the Letter to the Romans to speak of those who proclaim the Gospel.

For Christians, the consolation promised by Nahum goes beyond the end of one empire. It announces that violence does not have the last word, and that God hears the cry of the oppressed.

Why is Saint Nahum honored?

Nahum has no traditional patronage. He is honored as one of the prophets through whom God spoke to his people, and his book is part of the Scriptures shared by Jews and Christians. Because his message is one of comfort for those

crushed by violence, many believers turn to him in prayer for peoples suffering from war and oppression.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Nahum in art

- **A scroll**, like the other prophets, sometimes bearing a verse of his book.
- **The features of an old man with a white beard**, as in the Russian icons of the prophets.
- **A seated prophet among others**: Nicholas of Verdun represented him on the Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral.
- **A carved figure on a cathedral facade**: in the West, Nahum appears among the prophets sculpted on the great cathedrals, notably on the west front of Amiens Cathedral.

Where to pray to Saint Nahum

An ancient tradition places the tomb of Nahum at Alqosh, in Iraqi Kurdistan. For centuries, the Jews of the region venerated his burial place there and built a synagogue around it to welcome pilgrims. After the departure of the Jewish communities, the site fell into ruin; restoration work has been under way since 2018.

Other sites, in Galilee or near Jerusalem, have also claimed his tomb. The name of Capernaum, which means "village of Nahum," has sometimes been linked to the prophet, without proof. Wherever you are, you can pray with him by reading his short book, especially around December 1.

What his holiness teaches us

Nahum is the prophet of those who live under oppression and despair of ever seeing its end. He reminds us that powers that seem invincible pass away, and that God remains a refuge for those who trust in him. He can be prayed to for

peoples who are victims of war and for all who wait for peace. His commemoration on December 1, at the start of Advent, fits his message well: it is the season when the Church listens to the prophets who announced that God would come to console his people.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Nahum and the novena to Saint Nahum, prayed from November 22 to 30.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Nahum for Peace and the Oppressed

The prophet Nahum left no prayer of his own, but his book contains one of the most comforting verses of the Old Testament: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble." You will find it below with another verse to meditate on, followed by an original prayer to Saint Nahum for peoples suffering from war and oppression.

Words from the Book of Nahum to meditate on

> *"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him."*

Source: Book of Nahum, chapter 1, verse 7 (Saintspedia translation). A word of trust for anyone going through a dark time.

> *"Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace!"*

Source: Book of Nahum, chapter 1, verse 15, or chapter 2, verse 1 in some Bibles (Saintspedia translation). An image taken up by Isaiah and by Saint Paul for those who proclaim the Gospel.

Prayer to Saint Nahum for peace

Saint Nahum, whose name means "comforter," you who brought consolation to a people crushed by a cruel empire, comfort today all who live under oppression and violence.

Pray for the peoples at war, for families forced to flee their homes, for prisoners and for all who have lost hope of ever seeing the end of their suffering.

You who proclaimed that the Lord is a stronghold in the day of trouble, teach me to take refuge in him when I am afraid, and to trust that he knows me and does not forget me.

You who saw on the mountains the feet of the messenger of peace, make me a messenger of peace in my family, at work and wherever I am sent. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

May I never despair of God's justice, and may I believe that violence will not have the last word. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

The Church commemorates the prophet Nahum on December 1, at the beginning of Advent, a season when the Church listens to the prophets who announced consolation. You can also pray with him:

- for peoples suffering from war, dictatorship or persecution;
- when you feel crushed by a situation that seems to have no end;
- for the Christians and other communities of northern Iraq, the land of his traditional tomb;

- when you need to be reminded that God is a refuge in the day of trouble.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Nahum, and read the life of Saint Nahum.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Nahum the Prophet

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, built on the words of the prophet Nahum. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his commemoration, begin it on November 22 and pray the last day on November 30, so that you reach December 1 with him, at the threshold of Advent. Because Nahum is the prophet of consolation for the oppressed, this novena can also be prayed at any time for peace or for a people in distress.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the verses of the Book of Nahum it refers to. Then say the prayer of the day and an Our Father. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into your life. The book is only three chapters long, so you can read it through during these nine days. If you pray in a group, you can name together, each day, a country or a community that is suffering from violence.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: "Lord, through the intercession of the prophet Nahum, the comforter, I bring you this intention. Be my stronghold in the day of trouble, and make me a messenger of your peace. Amen."

Day 1: The comforter

Nahum's name means "comforter." Before he announces anything, his very name speaks of the God who consoles his people.

Prayer: Lord, comfort me in what weighs on me today, and make me a comfort for others. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Send a word of encouragement to someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 2: A forgotten prophet

We do not even know where Elkosh, his town, was. Nahum is almost unknown, yet God spoke through him. God does not need us to be famous.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve you without seeking to be noticed. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Thank someone whose work usually goes unnoticed.

Day 3: Slow to anger

"The Lord is slow to anger and great in power" (1:3). God's patience is not indifference: he waits, but he does not abandon justice.

Prayer: Lord, give me your patience toward others, and your love of justice. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Hold back a sharp word or reaction, and respond calmly.

Day 4: A stronghold in the day of trouble

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (1:7). This is the heart of Nahum's consolation.

Prayer: Lord, I take refuge in you. You know me, and you know what I am going through. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Learn this verse by heart and repeat it in a moment of worry.

Day 5: The messenger of peace

"Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" (1:15). In the middle of a book about war, the prophet sees the messenger of peace coming.

Prayer: Lord, make me a bearer of good news and of peace in my home. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Take the first step toward peace in a tense relationship.

Day 6: Empires pass away

Nineveh seemed invincible, yet it fell. Nahum reminds us that no human power is eternal, and that only God remains.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the fear of the powerful and from the desire for power. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Pray for those who govern your country, that they may serve justice and peace.

Day 7: The cry of the oppressed

The book ends with a question: who has not suffered from your cruelty? (3:19). Nahum gives a voice to all the victims of the empire.

Prayer: Lord, hear the cry of peoples crushed by war, slavery and violence. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Learn about a people suffering from war today and pray for them by name.

Day 8: The land of exile

Tradition places Nahum's tomb at Alqosh, in northern Iraq, where Jews long came on pilgrimage. Many communities of this land have known exile and persecution.

Prayer: Lord, protect the Christians and all the persecuted communities of the Middle East, and bring back peace to their land. Saint Nahum, pray for us.

Today: Support, by prayer or a gift, a work that helps Christians in the Middle East.

Day 9: Violence does not have the last word

For Christians, Nahum's consolation points to Christ, who conquered evil not by force but by the Cross. The last word belongs to God.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Nahum, give me a hope that does not give way. Amen.

Today: Spend a few minutes before a crucifix, entrusting to Christ a situation of violence or injustice.

Closing prayer

Saint Nahum, prophet of consolation, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have placed before you. Pray for all who suffer oppression and war, for refugees and for the persecuted, and for those who work for peace. Obtain for us the grace to take refuge in the Lord in the day of trouble and to become, wherever we are, messengers of his peace. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Nahum and pray the prayer to Saint Nahum.

CREDITS

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