




# The trauma of war: reflecting on aspects of fear, loss, but also disempowerment of the enemy (hope) in the Book of Nahum

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## Abstract

There should be no dispute that war causes trauma. In this article, the Nahum text serves as an example of how people suffering the threat of war experience trauma because of oppression, fear, and loss. To facilitate the discussion, a selection of texts was made and analysed to show how the Assyrian threat and invasion resulted in trauma for the people of Judah. A literary, contextual, and historical methodology was applied to analyse the selected text passages. Besides this analysis of the selected texts, affect theory in conjunction with a trauma approach was utilised as a framework to engage with these texts. This combined approach offered a new and exciting lens focussing on emotions. Affect theory is an emerging area of study where aspects such as emotion, culture, and textual bodies become important as impetus in the study of the Hebrew text (cf. Cottrill, 2014: 432). The exercise performed in this article not only enriched the engagement of the Nahum text but showed the relevance of the research for current situations of war and the resulting effects of trauma.

**Keywords:** The book of Nahum, Assyria, Judah, war, oppression, trauma, fear, loss, Affect theory, Trauma theory.

## Introduction

We live in a world that is scarred by traumatic events such as inter alia epidemics, inequality, violence, power abuse, and war, resulting in emotions of fear, loss, and trauma. The text of the Hebrew Bible is not strange to events of such a nature. One has to look no further than the book of Nahum which confronts readers with aspects of power abuse and the threat of war, loss, and resulting trauma. However, Nahum also gives glimpses of hope and encouragement. It also demonstrates that Yahweh cares profoundly about His people and will not permit their oppressors to go unpunished.

The book of Nahum makes disturbing reading since it contains a judgement prophecy on an enemy threatening the people of Yahweh. We acknowledge that the Masoretic Version (MT) of the Nahum probably had a history of formation before it became the book of Nahum (cf. Rudolph, 1975: 144-145; Floyd, 2000: 4-5; Troxel, 2012: 114), but this article is not so much interested in addressing the issue of its formation. Our interest is rather the issues in the sub-text to which this book is seen to respond to. Our approach is to view the Nahum text as a



reaction or response to a threat of war to the Judean people by the Assyrians, embodied by Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire. Whether this was a real response to the Assyrian threat or Assyria as an example of such threat to people at the time of the finalisation of the book of Nahum to serve as encouragement in their particular context, is not clear, and to debate. However, by looking at the underlying issues to which the text responds, it seems fair to address issues of fear and loss because of the threat the warring nation Assyria poses to the people of Yahweh.

To clarify our approach to the book of Nahum, we have the text of Nahum, the situation to which the text is presented as a response (referred to as the substructure or sub-text), and we (the authors) who respond to and interpret the Nahum text. Clines (2009: 24) correctly argues that the Nahum text's implied author and readers are "interested parties" with our ideologies.<sup>1</sup> There is, therefore, a subjective element involved in our view and interpretation of the text, but the endeavour is to illustrate the likelihood and the relevance of our presentation. The powerful diction of the Nahum text cannot but evoke emotions and varied responses from its readers.

We gather from the Nahum text a backdrop (setting) of war, as we will attempt to illustrate from the discussion of some passages, but also the emotions and consequences effected by war. Stulman and Kim (2010: 218) state, "The book of Nahum as a disaster text is full of rage, acrimony, and pain." The intention is to address passages in the book of Nahum that would indicate underlying issues of fear, loss, and resulting trauma. The text of Nahum also reveals some underlying ideological beliefs promoted by the prophet Nahum of the role of Yahweh in overcoming the threats of oppression and abuse of power the people of Yahweh experienced, the military might of the Assyrian forces, and the hubris of its leaders and city. Yahweh is promoted as a Divine Warrior, fighting a holy war, a tradition firmly founded in the history of the people of Israel and Judah (Ryken et al., 1998: 210-213; O'Brien, 2008: 102-109).<sup>2</sup> It is the ideological belief in Yahweh's role in the disempowerment of the enemy that gives rise to hope and encouragement not to despair. According to O'Brien (2008: 104) the "Prophetic Books focus on the role of the Warrior in (re-)establishing justice against all foes."

As readers of the Nahum text, we respond to it from our understanding and knowledge of threat, fear, and loss which accompanies war, oppression, fear, destruction, and trauma. In this sense, we can identify what the text of Nahum has to offer. It appeals to our senses of fear, loss, and trauma caused by aggression and war (Ukraine, for example). This way, the text of Nahum moves into the sphere of universal appeal and relevance. Interestingly, Stulman & Kim (2010: 218) also argue from a theological point of view for the universal relevance of the Nahum message by saying "The theological rhetoric of Nahum grows out of divine urgency to maintain the just workings of the universe in the light of horrific suffering."

When confronted with trauma texts, such as those presented in the Book of Nahum, we are provoked with the stark reality that much of the Hebrew Bible, and in particular the distressing text of Nahum, is written in response to trauma. Koosed (2019: 38) retorts by pointing out that the written and redacted scriptures are first-hand assault experiences foretold through verbal engagement or silent acknowledgments of various generations.

The sub-text in the Book of Nahum provides the scope to use Affect theory and a trauma approach as a valuable lens in understanding the complex text that we find in the Book of Nahum. Affect theory helps us understand the emotional dynamics and intensities portrayed

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<sup>1</sup> Clines (2009: 9-25) offers an insightful discussion of the ideology of writers and readers of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>2</sup> O'Brien (2008: 102-109) offers an important discussion on the stages of development die notion of Yahweh as a Divine Warrior went through in Israel's history.



in the text, including the range of emotions experienced by both the oppressors and the oppressed. It emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and processing these emotions for a deeper understanding of the narrative. A trauma approach allows us to examine the psychological and emotional impact of the trauma events described in Nahum, such as the disempowerment of the Assyrian enemy. The two separate fields in the inter-disciplinary approach, provide a unique space to understand the complex text of the Book of Nahum. It helps us understand the experiences of fear, loss, and trauma depicted in the text, as well as the potential for resilience and empowerment in the face of adversity. By employing affect theory and a trauma approach as reading lenses, we can gain insights into the emotional dimensions of the text, the impact of trauma on individuals and communities, and the processes of coping, healing, and meaning-making. A trauma approach in parallel combination with affect theory, creates an understanding that the body becomes highly responsive to the physical and emotional trauma presented in a traumatic event that subsequently presents a generative affect.<sup>3</sup> This combined perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of the affective experiences and trauma dynamics portrayed in the Book of Nahum.

The focus of this article is to address the mentioned issues within the framework of psychological theory as it pertains to situations of war and the consequences of war. We will argue that addressing these issues as they are underlying the textual response in Nahum, not only applies to what is relevant to the book of Nahum but to situations of war in general.

The approach is to investigate aspects of the text that reveal clues about the substructure of the text.

After briefly treating selected examples that reveal the ideological substructure, we will identify some issues that will be discussed from a universal psychological point of view. The choice of the passages selected will become clear from the discussion of these passages.

### **Nahum 1:7 in context**

Nahum 1:7 reads 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him,...' (NRSV).<sup>4</sup> This is a comforting message to Yahweh's people. The literary context is quite important. This verse forms part of the section Nahum 1:1 and 1:2-8. The placement of this incomplete acrostic Psalm seems deliberate by the final editors of the book to emphasise upfront who the major power in this "drama" is, namely Yahweh (Tuell, 2016: 22). Verse 1 announces an oracle against Nineveh, a strong word against the enemy of Yahweh's people. This introductory verse leads the reader to regard the enemy in the ensuing verses to be Nineveh, the capital city representative of the Assyrian empire (O'Brien, 2009: 430). Two words in verse 1 should not escape attention, namely *maśśā'*, indicating the "heaviness" or harshness of the message against the named enemy (O'Brien, 2009: 28-29) and the name of the prophet Nahum (*nāḥum*), alluding to "comfort" (Spronk, 1997: 32-33). This implies that the people can rely on Yahweh as their comforter in these threatening times. Aptly, verses 2-6 describe the mighty power of Yahweh, the "author" of the ominous announcement against the Assyrians. These verses have theophanic overtones (cf. Hab 3:6, 10). to describe how fearsome Yahweh is with the purpose to instil fear in the enemy, but also as a reminder to the people of Judah what the nature of Yahweh, their God is. Yahweh is portrayed as "jealous" when it comes to his people, a revenger, mighty, one who punishes his adversaries, and as verse 6 pronounces nobody can resist his anger that is burning like a fire, melting rocks. In stark contrast, verse 7 is described as good, as a safe haven in times of threat. More than that, he takes care of those who seek refuge in him (Tuell, 2016: 26). Verse

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<sup>3</sup> A more detailed discussion is done by Bessel van der Kolk (2014: 216), "The Body Keeps Score: Mind, Brain, and Body in the transformation of trauma."

<sup>4</sup> All Bible references are from the NRSV.



8 follows with a strong message to "her place," in the context of verse 1 and the book as a whole, a reference to Nineveh (Tuell, 2016: 27). Yahweh will destroy that city in its entirety, he will persecute his enemies even into the darkness (Stulman & Kim, 2010: 218).

If one asks the question concerning the sub-text of this passage, it seems clear that the powerful people in Nineveh are threatening the people of Yahweh, creating "angst" (fear) amongst the people of Judah. The prophet regards it as necessary to assure the people that there is a greater power than the power of the Assyrian empire. The people feel so threatened that the prophet assures them that they can bargain on Yahweh as a shelter and one who takes care of those who trust in Yahweh. War and threats of war make people anxious and instill fear, this is a universal tendency. We argue that this is not unique to the people of Judah, but to all people who are subjected to an aggressive, destructive, and invading enemy.

### **Nahum 1:13 in context**

The next selected verse for discussion is Nahum 1:13 which reads, "And now I will break off his yoke from you and snap the bonds that bind you." This verse forms part of section 1:9-14. Verses 9-10 again identify Yahweh as a formidable enemy that annihilates enemies. It is a futile exercise to oppose Yahweh (Floyd, 2000: 43). These verses set the tone of what is to follow in the next set of verses, 11, 12-13, and 14. Verse 11 probably refers to a male character retreating from a feminine subject. Identifying the feminine subject is problematic. Tuell (2016: 28) views the feminine subject to be Nineveh from which Assyrian kings depart, but it is also possible that Judah is in mind (see the feminine reference to Judah in 2:1, MT 2:2), or even Jerusalem (cities referred to in feminine form). Take note that the enemy is unnamed in this verse and as such provides language applicable to any form of rebellion against Yahweh (Tuell, 2016: 28). If the broader context of Chapter 1 is considered, verse 11 probably refers to the Assyrian commander departing from Judah or Jerusalem (O'Brien, 2009: 45-46). This again alludes to a situation of invasion by an enemy. It is important to understand that Yahweh regards the attack on Yahweh's people as a personal attack. In verse 12 Yahweh assures the people of Judah that even though the enemy has the numbers to oppress them, they will be destroyed. An assurance is given in verse 13 to the people of Judah that Yahweh will break the yoke of oppression by the enemy and set them free from bondage. The people of Judah should take comfort that they will be set free from political oppression (Dietrich, 2014: 49). Verse 14 ends with a threat of annihilation and no future for the oppressor (Tuell, 2016: 32).

We have argued in light of the context created by the heading in 1:1 and the book of Nahum as a whole, that Nineveh and her commander are implied by the references to the feminine singular and masculine singular pronouns. If one however prefers not to accept the proposed view and maintains that the female and masculine characters remain unidentified, then O'Brien's suggestion seems relevant. She states:

Whatever this masculine referent, he is against Yahweh's purposes and against whom the reader should stand. Only one character remains with whom the reader can identify. The reader should align with the feminine 'you' who, though once afflicted by Yahweh, is about to experience a positive change of fortunes" (O'Brien, 2009: 48).

We can gather from this passage that a situation of war is alluded to in the sub-text and that such a situation impacts the freedom of the people of Judah. One can only imagine the trauma caused by such an invasion, the fear caused by the overwhelming numbers of the enemy, and eventually oppression and bondage by the enemy. It is in this context that the author of the Nahum text assures them of Yahweh's power that should comfort them (cf. 1:1 the name Nahum alluding to comfort). War, invasion, and oppression are universal tendencies of causing fear and trauma to people. It is in such circumstances that people need hope and be encouraged to imagine a future beyond that current hardship. This seems to be the mission of the author of the Nahum text.



### War as the sub-text of the Nahum text

There is no doubt that war forms the sub-text of the Nahum text. As indicated already, the forces of Nineveh, the symbol of the Assyrian empire, are depicted as numerous and fearsome. One has only to look at the way the enemy of Judah is described. In Nahum 2:1 (Masoretic Text- MT- 2:2), it is said that an unidentified force, referred to as a scatterer (preferred translation "shatterer" in NRSV; cf. Tuell, 2016: 34) will battle against Nineveh (Coggins & Re'emi, 1985: 35). There is no doubt that Yahweh is the power behind this force, affecting the restoration of all Israel (Dietrich, 2014: 61; Tuell, 2016: 34-35). Both chapters 2 and 3 depict fascinating, though disturbing battle scenes. Sharp (2019: 204) describes the images of the overwhelmed city as "hypnotically terrifying." However, it is worthwhile reading Nahum 2:3-4 and 3:2-3 to appreciate the poetic artistry of how the author of Nahum portrays the battle scenes in these verses.

The shields of his warriors are red;  
his soldiers are clothed in crimson.  
The metal of the chariots flashes  
on the day when he musters them;  
the chargers prance.  
The chariots race madly through the streets,  
they rush to and fro through the squares;  
their appearance is like torches,  
the dart like lightning (Nahum 2:3-4).

The crack of whip and  
rumble of wheel,  
galloping horse and  
bounding chariot!  
Horsemen charging,  
flashing sword and glittering spear,  
piles of dead,  
heaps of corpses,  
dead bodies without end-  
they stumble over the bodies! (Nahum 3:2-3).

Despite the beauty of the poetic skill displayed by the author of these passages, we should not lose sight of the atrocious consequences of war. Chapter 3:1 depicts Nineveh as a city of bloodshed whose soldiers raided and plundered many a nation. War causes anxiety, fear, trauma, cruelty, injury, and loss of freedom and life. It is explicitly stated in Nahum 2:10 reading "Devastation, desolation, and destruction! Hearts faint and knees tremble, all loins quake, all faces grow pale!" and 3:3 "Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end- they stumble over the bodies!"

Although the descriptions of battle and its consequences in chapters 2 and 3 serve the purpose of showing the people of Judah what the fate of the enemy will be when Yahweh enters the battle on their behalf, the consequences of war remain the same. This applies to the people of Judah, the Assyrians, but also to enemy modern-day nations in situations of war and battle. Examples even today are numerous. We concur with Sharp (2019: 205) when she states, "Such rhetoric perpetuates a culture of brutality with pernicious effects..." and "I encourage you to consider how you might adopt a posture of resistance to this language, which is certainly the product of trauma but enacts new harm in its own way."

### Reversal of images and fate: a technique of both disempowerment and empowerment

In an attempt to empower the people of Judah, the author of the Nahum text uses the technique of reversal to illustrate the disempowerment of the enemy. We have already discussed the image of oppression in Nahum 1:13 where the subjugation and oppression of the people of Judah is depicted in the image of a yoke on them. However, it is stated that





Yahweh will break the yoke to pieces as an image of ending the stronghold of the enemy on Judah's people and setting them free.

A powerful display of the reversal of an image is Nahum 2:11-13. In this passage, the image of a lion is used to describe the brutality and fearsomeness of the Assyrian enemy.<sup>5</sup> The image of the enemy as a lion is that of brutal power, instilling fear in any prey or victim. We find many images of the Assyrian rulers depicted with images of lions (Dietrich, 2014: 69). It serves either as a symbol of their achievements of killing lions, meaning power over a fearsome enemy in nature, or a symbol of their power displayed in victories over nations. In the above-mentioned passage, the image of the powerful lion is reversed to depict the loss of power by the Assyrian nobles or the commander of the forces (Spronk, 1997: 109). Verse 13 refers to the lion's dominance of territory where he roamed undisturbed, providing food for the lionesses and cubs. Depicted in the image of a lion, the Assyrian commander has reigned supreme over territories, killing without opposition, and dominating territories at will. However, the author asks what has become of the lion's dominance and exercise of power over territory and victims. The once powerful ruler has become powerless because Yahweh has turned against the ruler and his mighty army equipped with chariots and brave young soldiers. He will render them powerless by burning their chariots, killing the young lions, and demolishing their forces. Messengers will not return to Nineveh where the emperor is located, announcing a message of victory (Nahum 2:13). Yahweh has disempowered the mighty ruler. Stulman & Kim (2010: 219) say in this regard "When the implied readers hear these taunting songs, they are reminded that the outcries of the downtrodden will not be ignored; justice and peace will appear even in the face of the foreboding forces." This also applies to readers today engaging the text of Nahum, there is hope, and justice will prevail.

Another example of the reversal of fate is the image of the destruction of Nineveh and the humiliation of the Assyrian soldiers taken captive. As mentioned already, Nahum 3:1-3 depicts a battle scene with heavy losses of life of the Assyrian forces. This in itself sets a scene of humiliation. To describe the further humiliation of the captives in war, 3:5 reveals an image where the nakedness of the captives is displayed in public as an image of powerlessness and humiliation- "I...will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let the nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame." Verse 6 elaborates further on this display of humiliation by saying "I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle." To conclude, verse 7 states that nobody will bemoan the demise of Nineveh or will comfort the city's ruler and inhabitants. This is a clear description of the disempowerment of a once-powerful empire.

Affect theory and a trauma approach provide valuable lenses for understanding the reversal of images both within the historical circumstances and the interpreting of the texts of Nahum 1:7 and 1:13-14 in both their historical context and their contemporary relevance. The applicable text with the lens of affect theory, allows us to delve into the emotional experiences and dynamics of the historical context surrounding the Book of Nahum. The text through vivid imagery grasps the intense emotions and affective responses of individuals and communities in times of war, oppression, and trauma. By considering the affective dimensions, the lived experiences of those who experienced these historical events, come to life through their suffering, fear, and pain. In Nahum 1:7 which states, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust him." A trauma approach breaks open a better understanding of how the concept of refuge and the assurance of Divine care provided comfort and solace to those who were experiencing the trauma of war and oppression.

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<sup>5</sup> In Nahum 2:11-13 the Assyrian conqueror, associated with the fearsome image of a lion, is ridiculed as powerless because of Yahweh's powerful interventions.



Similarly, in Nahum 1:13-14, which speaks of the disempowerment of the oppressors, a trauma approach invites us to consider the emotional dimensions of liberation and the relief felt by the oppressed community.

In interpreting these verses today, affect theory and a trauma approach enable the reader to make connections between the historical circumstances of the text and contemporary experiences, as we see in Ukraine today. We can recognize the enduring themes of human suffering, resilience, and the search for refuge in times of trouble. These lenses prompt us to consider the emotional impact of contemporary conflicts and oppressive systems and to reflect on the ways in which individuals and communities navigate and respond to trauma today.

### **Psychological reflection on aspects of fear, loss, and trauma caused by war**

We stated that the focus of this article is to address the mentioned issues within the framework of psychological theory as it pertains to situations of war and the consequences of war.

As biblical scholars, we are constantly trying to find ways to understand the complexity of the text of the Hebrew Bible and lately, biblical scholars have entertained the notion of secondary theories to understand the text of the Hebrew Bible. For the last few years, trauma theory has been the buzzword to read, examine, and understand complex texts in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Nahum is no stranger to this treatment of understanding. Affect theory in conjunction with a trauma approach, offers a new and exciting lens that focuses on emotions, and by examining these emotional experiences as depicted in the text, we can gain insights into the affective dimensions of the trauma and destruction described. According to Cottrill (2014: 432) affect theory is an emerging area of study and where the concept of emotion, culture, and textual bodies becomes an important impetus in the study of the Hebrew text. O'Donnell (2023: 5) assumes that trauma is often associated with power and powerlessness as is evident in the text of Nahum.

When considering the disempowerment of the enemy in the Book of Nahum from a trauma approach, affect theory sheds valuable light on the emotional dimensions of the process.

Firstly, affect theory recognizes the emotional experience of trauma in the centrality of the trauma experiences. By applying a trauma lens to the disempowerment of the enemy of Nahum, we can examine the emotional impact on both the victors and the vanquished. This includes exploring the intense emotions experienced by the victims of oppression, such as fear, grief, and despair, as well as the emotional responses of the victors, such as relief and vengeance. Arel writes (2016: 29) that the visceral experiences of affect can evoke a range of fundamental reactions that grow in intensity.

Affect theory also highlights the phenomenon of emotional resonance and empathy, where the emotional experiences depicted in a narrative can elicit empathic responses from the reader or interpreters. Through the disempowerment of the enemy in Nahum, affect theory can help us understand how the emotional portrayal of trauma evokes empathy and fosters a deeper connection between readers and the suffering individuals. Trauma narratives and meaning-making through affect theory acknowledge the role of the narratives in shaping emotional experiences. In the book of Nahum, disempowerment serves as a vehicle for processing traumatic events, establishing a sense of justice, and providing a framework for meaning-making for the community.

Affect theory, in conjunction with a trauma approach, can also illuminate the potential for vicarious resilience and empowerment. The disempowerment of the enemy in Nahum can inspire hope, resilience, and a sense of empowerment in the community. by witnessing the defeat of the oppressor, the community may experience a renewed sense of agency, strength, and collective identity.

Within the affect theory sphere, it is suggested that emotions can be contagious and spread within social interactions in the book of Nahum, the emotional experiences of the people of



Nineveh may influence and resonate with each other, creating a collective affective atmosphere. Graybill (2021: 23) rightly states that in disempowerment circumstances, affect theory nudges us to give name to sensations, feelings, and painful emotions. In this case, a collective trauma approach explores how collective identities, shared experiences, and collective memory are shaped by trauma. Applying it to the book of Nahum allows us to consider the following aspects. Trauma and the community are portrayed in the book of Nahum as collective trauma due to the impending destruction of Nineveh. Through a collective trauma approach, the transmission of trauma across generations within a community is highlighted.

In the Book of Nahum, the transmission of trauma can be observed through the storytelling and remembrance of the events, shaping the collective memory of the people of Nineveh. The processes of healing and recovery also become evitable through collective rituals, commemoration, and collective resilience that contribute to the recovery of trauma. In the Book of Nahum, the exploration of collective resilience and the potential of healing becomes evident as the people of Nineveh seek solace and restoration amidst devastation.

### **The purpose of the Nahum text**

The question is what did the author of Nahum want to achieve by this reversal of images and the fate of a powerful nation? The argument presented here is that the author of the Nahum text is encouraging the people of Judah, irrespective of how dire their situation might be and how devastating the effects of war on a people might be, that there is hope. The author is appealing to the oppressed and traumatised people not to despair but to imagine a time when their fortunes will change. The author (prophet) does so by appealing to them to take note of Yahweh as the powerful agent who will fight the battle on their behalf. Yahweh is presented as the supreme power, more powerful than the Assyrian empire with its forces (Pinker, 2005: 89). Once again Stulman & Kim (2010: 219) emphasise the universal implication of the Nahum text by saying "Indeed, Nahum speaks on behalf of all victims of cruel and repressive forces: geopolitical, socioeconomic, ecclesiastic, and even familial." They even refer to Nineveh as the "existential manifestation of evil" (2010: 219). Spronk (2018: 246) also remarks that the application of the symbolic description of Nineveh's destruction emphasises the basic message that "evil, no matter how powerful, will not remain unpunished."

To motivate the people of Judah not to despair, but to imagine victory and a future, the author of the Nahum text taps into an age-old tradition of Yahweh as a Warrior God. This implies that Yahweh as a warrior will fight the battle on behalf of the people of Judah and Israel to ensure victory. This reliance on the old-age tradition of Yahweh as the warrior god, fighting injustice on behalf of Yahweh's people, reveals the ideological framework of the prophet (author) Nahum. The question then begs whether this "ideology"<sup>6</sup> is still applicable in its current form or should be redefined in our current context. We should appreciate its value in the context of this ancient text, but we will have to rethink its value in our current context. The question however is, if one considers the power of such an "ideology" to appeal to the imagination of people or a person experiencing fear, loss, and trauma to envision hope despite situations that cause these psychological manifestations, what "ideology" can serve a similar function today to promote justice and hope. Perhaps it is wise to scrutinise our ideological views on war and

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<sup>6</sup> Different things are understood of what is meant by the concept of "ideology." The use here is to refer to an idea that was held by a particular group of people, in this regard the people of Israel and Judah, that influenced the thinking of the leaders and people in that society. Because this particular idea (Yahweh as Divine Warrior fighting a holy war) was transferred over many generations in Israel, it is labeled a tradition of that society.





violence, but also as O'Brien (2008: 124) suggests show the "willingness to critique even the theological formulations that the prophets and their interpreters hold most dear."<sup>7</sup>

Can a more sophisticated and refined form of faith in Yahweh serve a similar purpose today? What remains true is that the Nahum text confronts modern readers with the atrocities of war and the consequential psychological effects of war. But it also appeals to the readers not to despair but to be comforted that there is hope.

In the case of Nahum, hope was created for people of faith to shift their focus away from their misery and despair to an external source of hope. The author of Nahum encouraged the people of Judah to place their trust in Yahweh as the sovereign power.

Positive growth and resilience as a trauma approach, within the framework of affect theory, offer valuable insights when applied to the Book of Nahum. It showcases the potential for personal and collective transformation that can arise from trauma. Klein (2023: 318) adequately writes that in the Hebrew Bible, "the writings represent a resilience discourse that redrafts the foundations of belief." In the Book of Nahum, positive growth can be observed in the resilience and perseverance of oppressed people. Despite their suffering and oppression, there is a glimmer of hope and a vision of a better future. Nahum 1:15 says, 'Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!'. This verse suggests the possibility of positive change and the emergence of a new reality. In this context, resilience refers to the ability to bounce back and recover from adversity. In Nahum, resilience is evident in the determination of the oppressed to resist and overcome their oppressors. The book highlights the strength and resilience of the community as they navigate the trauma of war and destruction. This resilience is tangible through their refusal to be completely disempowered and their hope for a better future.

By applying the lens of positive growth and resilience as part of a trauma approach within the framework of affect theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the emotional dynamics within the Book of Nahum. We can appreciate the capacity of individuals and communities to find strength, hope, and new possibilities even during overwhelming adversity. This perspective enhances our interpretation of the text and underscores the themes of resilience, hope, and the potential for positive growth amidst trauma.

## Conclusion

In summation, we have argued that the sub-text that gave rise to the text of Nahum has revealed a response to war and its psychological impact on people. The Nahum text presents a case of war that the people of Judah experienced due to the threat and dominance of the Assyrian empire. The text of Nahum responds to aspects of fear, oppression, loss, and consequently trauma caused by threat and war. We have argued that what is depicted in the Nahum text is not restricted to the situation presented in the Nahum but is universally experienced by people in contexts of war and invasion. The revealed psychological effect of war transcends that of the Nahum context. Psychological intervention can also assist in helping people cope with fear, loss, and trauma and is not necessary in opposition to a faith perspective.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worthwhile reading the discussion offered by O'Brien (2008: 117-124) on another way of engaging Nahum and the importance of ideological criticism not only of the Nahum text but also our ideological views on matters of war, justice, and how we read Biblical texts.



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