NAHUM

A TRAUMA FOR A TRAUMA

Bob Becking

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Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
A Trauma Bible Commentary

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The Tomb of Nahum in Al-Qosh, Iraq,
after its destruction by the ISIS-militia in 2014
https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/
al-Qosh-biblical-prophet-nahum-shrine.jpg

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A Trauma for a Trauma

Bob Becking



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To Jona, our grandson
Born nine/eleven 2022
That he may grow up in a peaceful world
And live without trauma

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Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ABL	Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum
ADD	Assyrian Deeds and Documents
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
Ann.	Annals
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AsSt	Assyriological Studies
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BeO	Bibbia e Oriente
BEvTh	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BiThSt	Biblisch-Theologische Studiesn
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament
BM	Texts in the British Museum (with collection number)
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAbR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
CB OT	Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament
CBETh	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

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CeO	Classica et Orientalia
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
COS	*The Context of Scripture*
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
CTN	Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HAE	Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HBS	History of Biblical Studies
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herder theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEOL	*Jahrbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap. Ex oriente lux*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JESOT	*Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semtic Languages*
JSOTSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
ND	Texts from the excavations at Nimrud (with collection number)
NEB	Die Neue-Echter Bibel
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*

OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oud Testamentische Studiën
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PIA	Publications of the Institute of Archaeology
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
Rm.	Assurbanipal Rassam Cylinder
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	*State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBTh	Studies in Biblical Theology
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
StAT	Studien zu den Assur-Texten
TADAE	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
ThW	Theologische Wissenschaft
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UM	Tablets in the collection of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTE	Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (D.J. Wiseman)
VTSup	Supplementa to *Vetus Testamentum*
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WdO	Die Welt des Orients
WMANT	Wissenschaftlicher Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZabR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Preface

In 1957 my father died of cancer. Being a child of only six years old, I did not then understand the effect and consequences this event would have on my life. In those days, children were not supposed to grieve, but to go on with their life. Many years later, I started to realize the full impact of this bereavement. Writing a biography on the life of my father together with my two sisters was a comforting as well as a confronting experience (see Becking, Becking and Becking 2018).

In the early spring of 2020 the world was startled by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to this virus and its mutations, millions of people got seriously ill, and too many died. Hundreds of thousands of people were thrown back into solitude and loneliness. Politicians were struggling to find a balance between the various interests and only laboriously found a path to a better future. On February 22, 2022, the Russian army invaded the independent republic of Ukraine, which led to a horrible war with too many civilians dying, too many lives wrecked, and too many soldiers traumatized.

All these events have made me sensitive for the devastating role that trauma—of whatever origin and character—plays in the life of human beings. I also realized that trauma is a perennial problem of humankind and that literary texts—from the dawn of civilization up to the present day—reflect the fissures that have been imprinted on us (see Garber 2015; Frechette and Boase 2016: 10-12; Huber 2020; Huber 2023; Watters et al. 2023). In this connection, I am thinking about the way in which the Gilgamesh depicts the struggle for acceptance of the constraints and boundaries of human life (George 2003; Zhu and Zheng 2020; De Villiers 2020) and the representation of trauma in the ego document of Katherine May (2020).

In the summer and autumn of 1976, I wrote my *doctoraalscriptie* (MSc-thesis) for the Faculty of Theology of Utrecht University on the book of Nahum arguing that this small prophetic book was a literary and conceptual coherent text (Becking 1977). Throughout my academic life I returned to the three chapters of this prophetic book, its beautiful poetry, its appealing imagery, as well as its complex composition. These issues at the primary level of the text and the search for a coherent view on the

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discrepancies at the surface of the chapters disabled a wider view until I realized that the Book of Nahum could—or probably should—be read as a reflection to trauma.

While I was working on this book, our grandson Jona was born. May he grow up to be a dove of peace in times of trauma. To his future I dedicate this book.

The various dimensions of this book have been touched upon in a multitude of publications—more than the stars at night—on biblical studies, trauma studies, studies of the history of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, etc. It is impossible to quote each and every publication. I apologize to all those colleagues and friends who don't find themselves quoted.

1

The Unceasing Trauma

As have often been observed, the book of Nahum—like the book of Jonah—ends with a question:

> Over whom did not come your evil continually? (Nah. 3.19)

This concluding question evokes a few exegetical questions:

- To whom do the pronominal forms refer?
- Which people had suffered under the evil?
- Which person or nation was the source of this evil?
- Can anything be said about the character of this 'evil'?
- Can this 'evil' be classified as 'trauma'?

In my opinion, the answers to these questions need to be primarily sought in the literary context of the line in Nah. 3.19. In a second tier, the historical context might be helpful.

1.1 Who Suffered?

A first answer to this question can be found in the preceding line in Nahum that reads:

> All who hear the hearsay about you
> Will clap their hand on you. (Nah. 3.19)

The 'clapping of the hands' is a gesture of joy on the downfall of the city (see Fox 1995; Fabry 2006: 223-24; Hagedorn 2011: 63; see also Ps. 47.2). In this line the gesture expresses joy—for those who hear the news—as well as a wicked delight on the fate of those who brought the evil. Who were they? The text of Nah. 3.19 as such does not give an answer, but the book as a whole contains a few hints.

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