

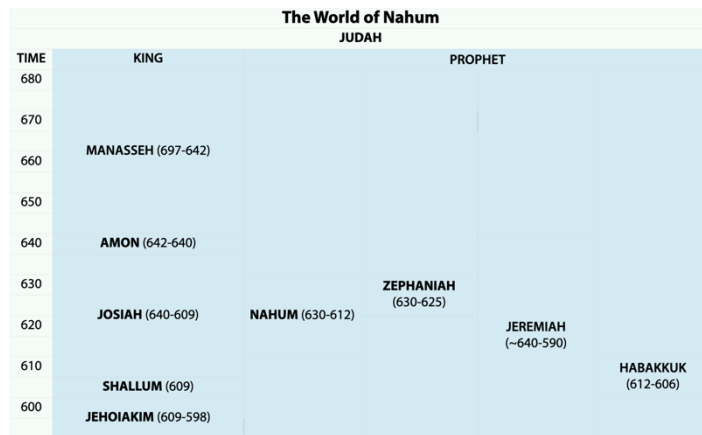
## Lesson 6

# Nahum: Judgment on Nineveh

## Introduction

**W**e know very little about the background of Nahum. His message is brief and highly concentrated on the doom of Assyria. Nahum is identified as an Elkoshite. Although there are many theories, there is not complete assurance on an exact location of Elkosh. Several theories are advanced, but it is safest to say that Nahum came from somewhere in Judah.

Some believe that Elkosh is the same as Belt-jebrein, which was in Judah. This area is near Moresheth, where Micah called home. Nahum's name is translated "consolation" or "consoler" in Hebrew. It was intended to give the people of Judah hope while dealing with Assyrian aggression.



The timing of the ministry of Nahum is difficult to pinpoint as well. No-amon is mentioned by Nahum in 3:8. Also known as Thebes, this Egyptian city fell to the Assyrians in 663 B.C. Nahum mentions the fall of this city as already having happened, so this means we can say with certainty that his writing did not occur before 663 B.C. The focus of this narrative is the fall of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, which fell in 612 B.C.

Some suggest that Nahum's writing occurred during the reign of Manasseh, 2 Chronicles 33:10-13. During this time, Manasseh rebelled against Assyria, and it is thought that Nahum's prophecy of the fall of Nineveh could have been what spurred Manasseh into the rebellion. This is speculation at best and this author finds it hard to believe someone so bent on evil as Manasseh would have paid attention to a prophet of the Lord.

Nahum's chief purpose was to bring a sense of hope to a people who had suffered at the hands of the Assyrians for decades. There is no mention of the societal conditions of Judah, their sins, or who the king is. The fall of Nineveh may have seemed impossible to many, but God is all powerful. He raises up one army and brings another down. This is all according to His purposes and desires. Those who practice evil will suffer the consequences.

## Why would the people be so interested in knowing that Nineveh and the Assyrians would fall?

The Assyrian people prided themselves on their brutality. They enjoyed carrying women and children into captivity. Women were raped with reckless abandon and children exploited. Men were plowed under with threshing tools and left to die in agony. If you read the passage out of 2 Chronicles that is

mentioned above, you read of how Manasseh was captured with hooks, bound with bronze chains, and taken to Babylon, 2 Chronicles 33:11. Their writing boasts of how they:

- ran out of space for the corpses.
- flung away the bodies of soldiers like clay.
- made pyramids of human heads.
- impaled “heaps of men” on stakes.
- cut off heads of kings and nailed them on walls and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities.
- covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs.<sup>1</sup>

The violence they enacted upon those they conquered would not go unpunished.

## Nahum 1 – God foretells the doom of Nineveh

While this book opens by announcing the vengeance and wrath of God upon the Assyrian people in Nineveh, it is important to note that Nahum is simply conveying the message of God. He (and God) is not joyous over the destruction of these people. So patient and loving is God that He holds out as long as possible longing for mankind to turn from sin. *The Lord is slow to anger and great in power*, 1:3. How amazing is the patience of God. But His patience has its limits. He will *by no means leave the guilty unpunished*, 1:3. God has power over all the earth. He will respond in a manner that justly deals out punishment to the wicked. In verses four and five, Nahum uses Old Testament language to describe the awesome power of God. He relates how the power of the sea, rivers, mountains, and even the earth are all subject to and tremble at the might of God’s power. When God pours out His judgment, *Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him*, 1:6. The application is that even the dreaded Assyria, with the most powerful, dominating, and cruel military in the world could not stand against the power of the Lord. But not only does God deal out justice to evil doers, Nahum testifies to the love and mercy of the Lord to those who take refuge in Him. God is a *stronghold in the day of trouble*, and a refuge for those He knows, 1:7. But Nineveh will not be a subject of His mercy. Nineveh will be brought to a complete end, 1:8. The Assyrian Empire would be destroyed.

Beginning in 1:9, God addresses Nineveh directly. Nineveh, deep in the Assyrian Empire, considered itself invincible. But the plans Nineveh sought to enact would be upended. The city would be *consumed as stubble, completely withered*, 1:10. God also says that they would be destroyed because *from you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the Lord*, 1:11. Who was this? Some speculate that this could be Sennacherib who in 701 B.C. was on the verge of destroying Jerusalem. This could also refer to the general “spirit” of the nation. It was a nation that was always aligned against the Lord and His ways.

In verse twelve, God speaks directly to the people of Judah. If one takes an early date to Nahum’s writing (before 630 B.C.), Assyria was experiencing the pinnacle of its power under Ashurbanipal. It would be hard for the people of Judah to imagine a time when Assyria would not be a world power. But God assures them that *Though they are at full strength and likewise many, even so, they will be cut off and pass away*, 1:12. The Assyrians had been used as a tool to chastise the Israelites for their continual digression

and rebellion against the Lord. God promises to break them free from the oppression and domination of the Assyrian nation. God then addresses the Assyrian king. He and his descendants would be killed, and his gods could not deliver him. At that time, God was digging his grave, *for [he was] contemptible*, 1:14. After the destruction of Nineveh, word would spread back to Judah. They could now rejoice in their ability to celebrate in their feasts and participate in true worship to God once again without fear of Assyrian reprisal. The Assyrians had been cut off completely.

## Nahum 2 – Details on the destruction of Nineveh

Now attention turns back to Nineveh itself. The Lord (*the one who scatters*) had come up against them. Though they would mount their best defenses, they would be powerless against the forces of the Lord. Although Israel had been emptied out by its oppressors, God promises to restore the splendor of Israel. God's people had been beaten down by these aggressors. For their actions, the people of Nineveh would be overrun by an enemy army. Verses four and five speak of the Chaldean army's onslaught against the city. In desperation, the king of Assyria calls out the nobles to fight. Untrained, they stumble in the rush of their preparations to fight. They set up the *mantelet*. This is thought to be a "small tower carried on four to six wheels, in which men were protected as they were brought to the walls of a city. Some were battering rams with covers under which men were protected."<sup>2</sup>

The Husur River ran through the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was located on the east side of the Tigris River. In 2:6, Nahum prophesies that the city would be flooded. *The gates of the river are opened and the palace is dissolved*, 2:6. This is confirmed by ancient literature. In verses seven through the end of the chapter, Nahum describes the destruction in Nineveh in detail:

- 2:7 – its inhabitants would be carried away.
- 2:8 – the Chaldean aggressors would exhibit no mercy on the city.
- 2:9-10 – the city would be emptied of all its silver, gold, and wealth.
- 2:11-13 – the Assyrian military would be destroyed.

So complete was the destruction of the city that its exact whereabouts were unknown until 1843 when its ruins were discovered by two explorers.

## Nahum 3 – Why Nineveh was destroyed

Nineveh had been a city built upon blood and violence. The usage of bloodshed and violence continued throughout its existence. They would be held accountable for their actions. Nahum does as good a job as any on describing the terrible conduct of these people. *Her prey never departs*, 3:1. Assyria was constantly at war, enlarging the borders of its empire. Verses two and three are exceptional in how they describe the reality of war. They had exacted these horrible scenes on most of the known world. The punishment they would receive was completely justified, 3:4.

God would humble this great nation. They would be brought to shame. Nineveh and Assyria were compared to a seductive harlot. As Assyria built up its power, they would entice nations to come into alliances with them. After a few years, they would take them over and subject these nations to pay extreme tribute. If the nations failed to cooperate, they would be taken over and captives would be

carried away to Nineveh. Now the proud and mighty Assyria would *set you up as a spectacle*, 3:6. There would be no one to come to their rescue. Just as the Assyrians had destroyed No-amon (3:8), so Nineveh would be destroyed. Egypt and Ethiopia had protected No-amon, but Assyria overpowered them with great cruelty. There was no mercy, even on small children. *Her small children were dashed into pieces*, 3:10. But there was a day coming when Nineveh would approach battle as a drunkard. There would be no place to hide. She would be ripe for the picking. An enemy would have no problem in destroying her. Nahum says Nineveh's defense forces would become as women. They would flee the city. The enemy would march in and burn the city.

In the final verses of the book, Nahum addresses the people of Nineveh directly. He advises them to prepare for war. They needed to strengthen their fortifications. This was a large endeavor. Hailey points out that the walls of the city were about eight miles long and one hundred feet tall. Some believe the walls of the city were fifty to one hundred feet thick. It is hard to imagine something so large being destroyed. Any fortifications to the walls would be made in vain. *There fire will consume you, the sword will cut you down; It will consume you as the locust does*, 3:15.

Even though Assyria had produced millions of merchants throughout the known world, the commerce produced by the nation would come to a grinding halt. The leaders of the nation would be powerless to stop the enemy, just as *grasshoppers settling in the stone walls on a cold day*, 3:17. As soon as they had the opportunity, they would flee the enemy. *The sun rises and they flee, And the place where they are is not known*, 3:17.

The last verses of the book take aim at the king of Assyria. Although he would survive the battle of Nineveh (612 B.C.), his power would be mortally wounded. The remnants of the Assyrian army would flee west from Nineveh, finally being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 609 B.C. Centuries of Assyrian domination and aggression would finally come to an end.

## For Discussion

1. Where was Nahum from?
2. In what time did Nahum write in? Who was the king?
3. Who was the dominant country on the world stage when Nahum used his pen?
4. Describe the brutality of the Assyrians.

5. Read 1:3-6. Describe the power of the Lord.
  
6. What are your thoughts on God using foreign nations “as a tool” to chastise His people for their rebellion? Are there any lessons for our generation?
  
7. What was a *mantelet*?
  
8. What rivers were in the vicinity of Nineveh? How did the enemy use the rivers to destroy the city?
  
9. Describe the conduct of the Assyrian army as seen in 3:1-4.
  
10. What was the point of Nahum reminding Nineveh about No-amon (3:8)?
  
11. Would there be any use to strengthen the fortifications of the Nineveh? How large were the walls of Nineveh?
  
12. Who would destroy Nineveh? When? When was the army and king destroyed? By Who? Where? When?