

NAHUM

WRITER

Nahum, the Elkoshite, was the writer of this book. What is known about Nahum is found only in this book. His name means “full of comfort.” He was from Elhush, the location of which is not known. Some have suggested that Elhush was a village about five kilometers south of Nineveh. Others have stated that this was a small village in Galilee, or possibly a village that was located somewhere in the south-western region of Judea.

The contemporary prophets of Nahum were Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Huldah and Josiah of Judah.

DATE

Led by Nebopolassar, a coalition of the Medes, Babylonians and Scythians conquered the city of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Some of the Assyrian leaders and army fled to Carchemish where they called on Egypt to join them in an alliance against the Babylonians. The Egyptians subsequently responded to the plea of the Assyrians. However, at the battle of Carchemish, the Assyrian/Egyptian alliance was defeated by the Medes and Babylonians under the commandment of Nebopolassar, thus ending the reign of terror by the Assyrians. Concerning the date of writing, Nahum mentions the destruction of Thebes in Egypt, which took place in 663 B.C. The city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was conquered in 612 B.C. Nahum, therefore, prophesied after the conquest of Thebes in 663 B.C. and prior to the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

BOOK

The book of Nahum is unique from the other books of the prophets. Within the book there is no prophecy against the people of God. The message of Nahum was exclusively directed toward Nineveh. In the message, there is no call for Nineveh to repent. The focus of the message is directed on the judgment of Nineveh. The city had already been judged by the spoken word of Nahum, and thus the book was written as a proclamation of doom of the coming destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire that it represented.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 663 B.C., the battle of Thebes in Egypt was decisive. The victory of Assyria in this battle affirmed the Assyrians as the dominant kingdom of the ancient Near

East world. Nimrod, or Nineveh, as an ancient city, was founded by Nimrod (Gn 10:8-11). Situated on the east bank of the Tigris River, Nineveh became the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was the capital of the Empire in 612 B.C. when it fell to the Babylonians.

The Assyrian Empire was an empire of fierce warriors. The principal god of the Assyrians was Asshur. Asshur was considered a cruel god who sanctioned the destruction of other kingdoms through rape, plunder and destruction. The Assyrian army was considered one of the most ferocious armies of the ancient world, being born out of a civilization that sought the destruction of other kingdoms as the empire expanded throughout the ancient world.

The Ninevites thought that their capital could not be conquered. The metropolitan area of Nineveh was at least 75 kilometers in circumference. The administrative area of the city was about ten kilometers in circumference. The administrative area was surrounded by a great wall with about 1,500 towers.

The Assyrians were used as God's proxy judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. Tiglath-pileser I (745-727 B.C.) was the first Assyrian king to invade the northern kingdom of Israel. He was the first to take Israelites into captivity. Archaeological discoveries of Assyrian texts confirm his initial campaign into Palestine. This campaign was followed by King Salmaneser IV (727-722 B.C.) who began a siege against Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. In 721 B.C. Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) took Samaria and carried the Israelites into captivity. At the same time, he imported people from other nations into Palestine in order to destroy the identity of Israel. Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) of Assyria later conquered the rural territory of the southern kingdom, Judah. He intended to take the city of Jerusalem, but was stopped by God with the death of 185,000 of his soldiers outside the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kg 18:13 – 19:37). Sennacherib was followed to the throne of the Assyrian Empire by Esarhaddon (681-625 B.C.). It is believed that Esarhaddon was reigning as king of Assyria when Nahum prophesied against the city of Nineveh. His prophecies came true in 612 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered Nineveh.

There have been several great archaeological discoveries of the city of Nineveh. It has probably been one of the most excavated cities of the ancient world. Portions of the royal palace of Nineveh have been excavated. Sculptured reliefs that depict Sennacherib's campaigns, specifically his defeat of Lachish in 701 B.C. (2 Kg 18:14,17), line the walls of the royal palace. It has been discovered that there were numerous parks and water gardens in the city (See Nh 2:8). Sennacherib left a written account of his campaign into Judah in 701 B.C. and his effort to take Jerusalem (See 2 Kg 18:13 – 19:36). His records mention King Hezekiah. Other archaeological discoveries mention Manasseh, king of Judah, who supplied building materials for Esarhaddon's royal palace in Nineveh. One of the greatest discoveries was

the library of Ashurbanipal that contained over 1,500 different texts concerning Assyrian history and life (See *Encyclopedic Study Guide*, History of the Bible, Archaeology and the Bible, “The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III,” “The Annals of Sargon II,” “Hezekiah’s Tunnel,” “Sennacherib’s Prism”).

Judgment Poured Out On Nineveh

(1:1 – 3:19)

Outline: (1) Nineveh’s destruction (1:1-15), (2) Nineveh’s judgment (2:1-13), (3) Vindication of God’s judgment (3:1-19)

Chapter 1

NINEVEH’S DESTRUCTION

1:1-6 *Burden:* This word can be translated “oracle.” It was a word that was used by the prophets to denote a message from God to the people. In this case, it was a message of doom delivered to Nineveh. ***Vision:*** In order to validate the message, Nahum here affirmed that the message was from God, for the term “vision” was used in reference to the means by which the message came to God’s prophets. ***God is jealous:*** God does not wish to compete with the imaginations of His creation who seek to create gods after their own imagination in order to do according to their own desires. If one would seek to please God, he must know God and His revelation to man. Therefore, the only access to know the one true and living God is His written revelation. Any who would seek to understand God apart from the revelation of His word are creating a god in their minds after their own imagination. ***Vengeance on His adversaries:*** In this case, the adversary was the Assyrian Empire. God had used the Assyrians to discipline

the northern kingdom of Israel for their apostasy. However, the Assyrians saw their conquest of Israel simply as an effort against another people in order to destroy it. They thus worked against God’s plan through Israel to bring the Savior into the world through the seedline of Abraham. Though God allowed the Assyrian conquest of Israel, judgment was to come upon them because of their savage treatment of His people and their efforts to destroy the identity of Israel. ***Slow to anger:*** God is patient in order to bring about His eternal plan. ***Great in power:*** When God is stirred, He changes history in order to bring to pass His eternal plan. He does such by working in the affairs of the nations. When nations go wrong, He is not idle in bringing about their demise for the sake of His people. Regardless of the schemes of man, or the power of the nations, God will have His way in the affairs of the world that He created (See Rm 2:3-5). He works in the affairs of men with the power to affect the rise and fall of empires. ***The mountains quake:*** God is the master of His creation. And since man is a part of His creation, He is the master of the affairs of man. Once God has determined to pour out His judgment upon those who become enemies of His purposes, then His enemies must suffer the consequences of His judgment.

1:7,8 The fierceness of God that was described in the previous verses would bring comfort to the people of God. Since God is in control of all things, then He is in control of the affairs of those who would persecute His people. Therefore, God is a stronghold for the righteous (See comments Rm 8:28). He is the One to whom the righteous go to take refuge from the trials of life. **He knows those who trust in Him:** When one feels forgotten by God in times of trial and persecution, he should remember that God has not forgotten him. God knows those who trust in Him because they are the ones who have determined to walk by faith and the direction of His word (See comments Rm 3:28). **Overflowing flood:** Reference could be to the overwhelming death of Sennacherib's army when he surrounded Jerusalem and sought to conquer the city. The death of 185,000 of his soldiers terminated his plans (2:5-7; Is 37:33,34). However, reference is probably to the overflowing of armies that were led by the Babylonians that brought an end to Nineveh in 612 B.C. **End of its place:** Reference here is to Nineveh. Nineveh represented a great empire of fierce warriors who dealt cruelly with everyone they conquered. The Israelites were a small kingdom of people who had no chance of survival against such a kingdom. Nevertheless, when God works for His people, there is no power on earth that can overcome His purposes. The enemies of God can find no hiding place from His vengeance.

1:9-11 The message of these verses is directed specifically to the Ninevites.

What do you imagine: This is a statement of the prophet's derision against the Ninevites who thought to work against the plans of God. In this case, Nahum mocked them for thinking that they could do anything to change their destiny of doom. **Second time:** God's judgment of Nineveh would be so complete that there would be no need for a second outpouring of judgment. **Drunken as drunkards:** The Ninevites may have thought that they were secure behind the defenses of their walls and towers, and thus carried on with a senseless regard for impending danger. **Devoured as dry stubble:** Regardless of their strength as a great warrior nation, God would bring them down quickly as dry stubble is quickly burned by fire. **There is one who comes:** This is probably a reference to Sennacherib who thought to conquer Jerusalem. No greater illustration could be used for the downfall of Nineveh. When Sennacherib sought to destroy Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah, God's conquest of the Assyrian army was overwhelming. God brought down 185,000 Assyrians in one night of death (2 Kg 18). This doom of the Assyrian army illustrated the doom that was coming upon the Assyrians once again.

1:12,13 These were words of comfort to those who were oppressed by their fear of the Assyrians. When God passes through the camp of the enemy, He brings them down (2 Kg 18:29-35). Though the Israelites would be taken into captivity, God would eventually break the yoke of bondage of their captors.

1:14,15 *No longer be remembered:*

Verse 14 was God's direct message to the Ninevites. Though Nineveh was great, it would be brought to a total end. The city would be destroyed to the point that centuries would pass before men discovered its ancient ruins. **Good news:** There was certainly good news that was proclaimed after the death of the army of Sennacherib who sought to destroy Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign (2 Kg 18). However, reference here was to the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. It was the seat of the terror of the world, and thus the world rejoiced over its fall. The Assyrians would no longer pass through the people of God racking havoc. Assyria would no longer be a threat to other nations of the world.

Chapter 2

NINEVEH'S JUDGMENT

2:1,2 The city of Nineveh fell through the leadership of Nebopolassar who led a coalition of armies of the Medes, Babylonians and Scythians against the city. The Babylonian Tablet briefly states the fall of the city, which fall took place in 612 B.C. In the brief statement of the Babylonian Tablet it is stated that the city fell in two and a half months (June to the middle of August). It has been speculated that a great rain occurred in the previous two months. The Tigris River rose so much that it washed away a large portion of the wall of the city (see 1:8), thus making it possible for Nebopolassar to take the city. In this prophecy Nahum pictures the city as fallen because God was working to restore His people to honor among the

nations. Though the restoration of Israel did not take place until 586 B.C. when the Medo-Persians overthrew the Babylonians, the fall of Nineveh was the beginning of the end of the captivity of Israel.

2:3,4 The picture here of the invaders of Nineveh is of a terrifying attack against the cruel Assyrians. They would reap what they had sown throughout their history of international terror. The attackers were dressed in scarlet, brandishing their polished swords, and having shields that were dyed red. Chariots ran through the streets of the city causing destruction and slaughter.

2:5-7 Nineveh was first attacked in its suburbs, and then the troops of the Medo/Babylonian army was set against the walls of the administrative capital. Battering rams were prepared and set against the walls. The waterworks of the city were diverted in order to make possible an approach to the walls. It is not known if natural floods made a breach in the walls, or the watercourse through the city was changed in order to run against the foundations of the walls. Whatever the case, the flow of waters undermined the foundations of the walls, and a breach was made for attack. **Beating their breasts:** All the horrors that the Assyrians had heaped upon other people had come upon them. Their sense of security that they had placed in the fortifications of the city was gone when the walls of the city were breached.

2:8-10 **Flee away:** Though their commanders would cry out to take a stand against the invaders, no soldier would

even look back as he fled from the downfall. When Nineveh fell, a remnant of the Assyrian forces fled to Carchemish. It was there in 609 B.C. that the Babylonians made a final assault against an Assyrian/Egyptian coalition. The end of the Assyrian Empire came when this coalition was defeated. **Spoil:** All of Nineveh's great treasures were taken. That which she had taken from all the nations she had defeated was taken from her as plunder.

2:11-13 Desolation and destruction will overtake the Assyrians. With the fall of the great leaders (lions), all the people would grow pale in defeat. The Assyrian army had brought captives to its people in order that they feed upon the oppressed captives. But now the great Assyrian army is destroyed, and thus the whelps were scattered. The lion army of the Assyrians was cut off, and the Empire fell.

Chapter 3 VINDICATION OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

3:1-4 This chapter explains why the Assyrian Empire had to fall. Nineveh represented an evil empire, and thus God could not allow her to continue as an empire among the nations. Assyria was an empire whose goal was to plunder other nations. It was thus an empire of destruction that influenced the world through its wickedness. The Assyrians were a culture that could not dwell among the nations. The discovery of the chronicles of Ashurbanipal II (885-860 B.C.) reveals the cruelty with which the Assyrian lead-

ers dealt with their conquered enemies. Ashurbanipal skinned some of the leaders and covered pillars and walls with the skins. He impaled some on pointed poles to be displayed before the people. The Assyrians were a cruel culture of barbarians that God could no longer allow to exist. Nineveh was truly a city that was built on the blood of conquered nations. She was as a well-favored harlot who enticed other nations to ruin with her promises and charms of seduction. The nation was a culture that thrived on the conquest of other nations, and thus could never peacefully coexist with other nations of the world.

3:5-7 Nineveh, as a charming harlot, would be embarrassed before the world. She would be shamed before all for her seductive manner by which she lured the nations of the world into her control. Nineveh had played the harlot before the nations, and thus she must suffer the shame of a harlot (See Ez 16:37-39; Hs 2:3). Because of what she had done to the nations, no one would feel sorrow for her when she fell. No nation would be found who would grieve over her downfall.

3:8-11 *No Amon:* Ashurbanipal had conquered the great populous city of No Amon (Thebes, the Egyptian capital). *The sea:* Reference is to the Nile River that was the means by which the Egyptians existed. But as the Nile did not lead to the salvation of Egypt from the Assyrians, so the Tigris River would not aid in the salvation of Nineveh. In fact, it would be the waters of the Tigris that would be used to bring down Nineveh (vss 7,8).

Though Thebes was a great city that was brought down by Ashurbanipal, God would bring down Nineveh. As Ashurbanipal took great plunder from Thebes, so great plunder would be taken from Nineveh. All the treasures of Thebes, therefore, eventually ended up in the hands of the Babylonians when they conquered Nineveh in 612 B.C. There irony in history when Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. At the time, some of the Assyrian army fled to Carchemish. These refugees then sent to Egypt in order to establish an alliance with the Egyptians against the Babylonians in a last-stand encounter at Carchemish. However, in 609 B.C. the Babylonians dealt a crushing blow to the Assyrian/Egyptian force at the battle of Carchemish. Those in whom the Assyrians took so much pride in conquering, the Egyptians, could not in their last hour help save them from the judgment of God that came through the Babylonian army.

3:12-17 All your strongholds: All the outlying fortresses of Nineveh first fell to the invaders. They fell with little resistance. **Women:** Once the strongholds fell without much resistance, the inhabitants of Nineveh were stricken with

terror as helpless women. **Fortify:** They must make every effort to fortify themselves against the invading Babylonians. However, their efforts would be futile. Regardless of how strong they made the defenses of the city, the city would fall. Once God mandated the fall of the city, no human fortification could stop its fall. And though they increased their army as locusts, no great number of soldiers could stand against an army that was used by God to bring down a civilization. **They flee away:** The remnants of the nobles of Nineveh fled to Carchemish, but they were pursued and overcome by the Babylonians.

3:18,19 When Nineveh fell, the rest of the nations rejoiced. Those the Assyrians had afflicted throughout their history rejoiced over the calamity that came upon them. Nahum prophesied that the nation would cease as an empire, never to rise again. As a nation, it reaped what it had sown among the nations. Nineveh was destroyed never to rise again. The empire vanished from history, never more to terrorize the nations of the world. God's judgment on the Ninevites had been fulfilled.