

2019

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Nahum**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

The role of the prophets was to give God's message to God's people, about *their* lives. But Jonah and Nahum gave God's message about Nineveh. Everyone has heard of **Jonah**; however **Nahum** is almost unknown.

One of the reasons is that he is not mentioned in other parts of Scripture. In his book, the only personal information is that he is connected with Elkosh. This could either be a small town in the nation of Judah or it could be a family clan. Because he does not mention the name of any king, we do not automatically know the time of his ministry. However he does give historical clues.

First of all in 1:1 he says his message is about Nineveh. That was the capital of the Assyrian empire. In verse 12 he says Assyria is strong. *This is what the Lord says, altho they are unscathed and numerous, they **will be** cut down and pass away.*

In verse 13 we have information about the nation of **Judah**. *Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away.*

Judah is under the control of Assyria.

Chapter 2, the last phrase of the last verse once again emphasizes the strength and control of Assyria.

The voices of your messengers or envoys, will no longer be heard. The messengers are the tax collectors that Assyria sends thruout the empire - IRS agents. Historical records say that Assyria collected taxes from 22 different countries and kings. Nahum says tho they are strong now, they will become weak.

Chapter 3 describes a major city in Egypt that had been defeated. Chapter 3:8,

Are you better than Thebes, or No-Ammon, situated on the Nile with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall. Verse 10 Yet she was taken captive and went into exile.

Thebes was the Greek name, No-Ammon was the Hebrew name. It was the capital of southern Egypt, but at this point she had been destroyed. (See map on page 5)

From these chapters we have 3 historical clues.

First of all, Nahum is writing when the Assyrian empire is strong and powerful.

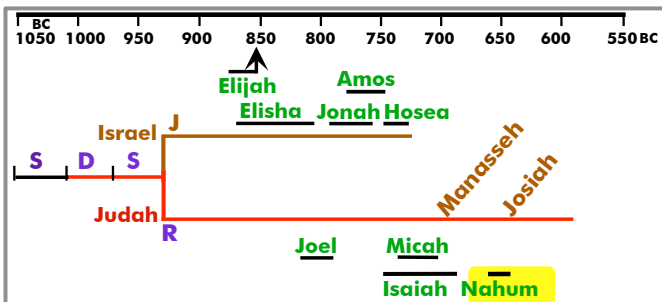
This could be anytime between 885 and 626 BC - a period of some 250 years.

The 2nd clue narrows this time period. Nahum says he is writing when the nation of Judah is under the control of Assyria.

The only time this was true was in the 600's - between 680 and 640 BC when Manasseh was their king - a period of 40 years.

The 3rd clue is that the city of Thebes, the capital of southern Egypt had been destroyed.

Secular history tells us **that** happened in 663 BC. We also know that by 645 it was completely rebuilt and independent. Nahum is making the point that if Thebes can be destroyed, Nineveh can be destroyed. The example is useless if Thebes is once again thriving and powerful. So the time period is narrowed even further - after Thebes is destroyed, but before it was rebuilt. This gives us a period of 18 years be



885 ← **Nineveh strong** → **626**
BC

Judah under Assyria

Thebes destroyed
663 645 BC

On the basis of these historical clues we have the approximate time when Nahum writes his book - c. 648 BC.

Date of book
648 BC

His ministry is some 25 years after Isaiah's death, from around 655-635 BC. His ministry lasted some 20 years.

This gives us the **POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND** of that time.

First of all in **Assyria**

Politically, the empire has been expanding for the last 200 years, since 885 BC.

In the 650's, during the life of Nahum, Assyria is in control of all the Middle East, including the nation of Judah. With nothing more to conquer and with his power secure, king Ashur-banipal spends his time in the capital of Nineveh. He builds more palaces. He develops a library with over 10,000 volumes. There are dictionaries as well as books about math, botany, chemistry and folklore. The Assyrian empire is known everywhere for its greatness, power and splendor.



Spiritually, we associate Nineveh with the prophet **Jonah**. He lived in the 700's BC, 100 years before Nahum.

When he gave his message in the city, the king and people repented. But as time passed and the city gained power under new kings, attitudes changed. The leaders and people became arrogant.

Now in the 600's in the days of Nahum, Nineveh is boasting of her strength and security. She is once again involved in cruelty and inhumanity. So over the years, the **spiritual condition** in Nineveh has changed from **repentance to wickedness**. This is the background of **Assyria**.

We have the background of **Judah** in 648 BC from 2 Chronicles 33:10-19.

Politically and **spiritually**, the nation of Judah has been thru some very difficult times.

Forty nine years earlier, Manasseh had come to power. 697-642 BC Since he was named king at 12 years old, his guardians ruled for him during his first 6 years. But during the next 40 years, he became the worst king Judah ever had. He killed his own people by the thousands, especially if they followed God. Believing Jews, including **Isaiah**, went into hiding – the underground. After 10 years, Isaiah was found and killed. As punishment, God sent the Assyrian king who demanded the nation pay him heavy taxes.

In the underground, six years after Isaiah died, **Nahum** was born. He spent all his growing up years and even the first 3 years of his ministry in hiding. King Manasseh, after 40 years of extreme cruelty, is then taken by the Assyrian king and put in an Assyrian prison. Judah is now completely under the control of Assyria. That is the bad news. But the good news is that after 40 years, believing Jews are finally able to come out of hiding.

During the 4 years Manasseh is prisoner, he genuinely repents and God forgives him. God then intervenes and has the Assyrians set Manasseh free. He returns to Jerusalem as king, but under the authority of Assyria. During the year he has been back, 649 BC, Manasseh has gotten rid of all the idols and told the people of Judah to worship only Yahweh God. (His final years as king were from 649-642).

Because of this, God gives Judah a message of consolation: *I see your repentance. Even tho you are under Assyria now, I will take action to set you free.* The person God uses to give this message is the prophet **Nahum**, whose name means *comfort, consolation*.

Notice the contrast of **spiritual conditions** in the days of Nahum.

Judah has changed from **wickedness to repentance**.

Nineveh has changed from **repentance to great wickedness**.

This is why God is going to destroy Nineveh and the Assyrian empire.

THEME of Nahum – downfall of Nineveh (the Assyrian empire).

OUTLINE

- | | |
|--|---|
| The fact - Nineveh, the capital and empire will fall | 1 |
| The method - how she will fall | 2 |
| The reason - why she will fall | 3 |

In chapter 1, Nahum says Nineveh will fall - it will be destroyed and it is God who will do it. So the chapter is all about God. *The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. The Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on His foes and maintains His wrath against His enemies.* 1:2

Taken at face value, the average person would never want anything to do with a God like that.

However the problem is not with God. The problem is that we are reading a book written with Jewish thinking and writing style. This is why it is so important to understand the meaning of the words and how they were used.

First of all, Nahum says the Lord is a **jealous** God.

Over the years our English language has changed. One hundred years ago, the word *jealous* had 2 meanings - positive as well as negative. Today it only has a negative meaning. The positive meaning has changed to the word, *zealous*. But hardly anyone uses that word. A word we can use in it's place is - **committed**.

God is **jealous** means **He is committed to what is right**
He is committed to what is fair and good

Nahum also talks about *God's vengeance* and **wrath**.

Again, let me remind you of the Jewish writing style. They use extreme words for non-extreme meanings.

Anger is a God-given emotion. It produces energy so we can respond to things that are wrong.

In the gospels we are told that Jesus was angry - He was responding to a situation that was very wrong.

Paul says in the book of Ephesians, *be angry and do not sin*.

Anger is an emotion **from** God, but what we **do** when we are angry is not always **of** God.

God's **anger** or **wrath** means **God's response to evil, injustice or disobedience**
It means **His judgment**
The word **vengeance** means **justice** when used in the Bible

When people see cruelty and injustice, they ask, *How can a loving God let this happen?* We want *justice*.

The Western way to express this, is to say we want God's **intervention**. The Jewish way to express it, is to ask for God's **anger**, **wrath** or **vengeance** to come over the situation or person. It is why the psalmist and the prophets pray for God's *vengeance*. They are asking God to take the things that are so wrong in the world and make them right. Even in the New Testament, the Greek word for *vengeance* means *that which brings justice*.

Let's look at 1:2 again, using these definitions.

The Lord is committed to what is right. He is a just God. The Lord bring justice and responds to disobedience. The Lord brings justice on His foes and responds to the evil of His enemies.

How important to explain the definitions of these words and the culture of the Middle East so others will have a true picture of God.

Nahum says that God is going to bring justice to a world filled with injustice. But when this justice means people or a nation will be destroyed, God always gives them time and opportunity to change. *The Lord is slow to bring judgment.* 1:3

God had done this with Nineveh. He sent Jonah to warn them. When they repented, God spared them. But within 40 years they went back to their inhumanity and cruelty. God did not immediately jump on them. He has given them 70 more years to change. He is slow to bring judgment.

But, reading the rest of verse 3, *The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished*.

Under **Jonah**, Nineveh had learned of **God's love and mercy**.

But she took advantage of that love. She took the attitude, *since God forgives, we can go back to the old ways. It does not matter what we do or how we live, because God is love.*

Now under **Nahum**, Nineveh learns of **God's justice and holiness**.

Their sin of inhumanity and cruelty cannot continue to go unpunished.

In **chapter 1**, after talking about God's justice, Nahum describes **God's power** and how He displays it thru nature. Beginning with the last part of verse 3.

His way is in the whirlwind and storm and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before Him; the hills melt; The earth heaves before Him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can withstand His justice? Who can endure His fierce response to evil? His justice is poured out like fire; the rocks are broken into pieces by Him. 1:3c - 6

God's power can be seen in nature - in the whirlwind, drought, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Nineveh believes her empire is absolutely secure. Nahum argues, *if God can control nature, then certainly He can control people and empires using nature.*

God's justice - God's power. Now **God's destruction.**

Verse 10 is talking about the people of Nineveh. *They will be entangled among thorns and drunk from their wine; they will be consumed like dry stubble.*

In the Middle East, when people cooked outside and wanted a hot fire as quickly as possible, they put dry thorns or straw in the fire, under the cooking pot. It burned instantly and completely. Nahum uses this illustration to show how quickly and completely God's judgment will come. In spite of Assyria's strength and security, she will be destroyed in one day.

Finally, chapter 1 tells of **God's consolation.** The first part of verse 12 is about Nineveh.

*Tho **they** are unscathed and numerous, **they** will be cut down and pass away.*

In the last part of verse 12 and into verse 13 God says to Judah,

*Tho I have afflicted or humbled **you**, O Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from **your** neck and tear **your** shackles away.*

God consoles and assures Judah - she will be freed and Nineveh will be destroyed.

Chapter 1 - the fall of Nineveh is based on **God** - His justice, power, destruction and consolation.

News of victories and defeats in those days, always came by means of a runner.

One day a runner, traveling over mountain roads, would arrive in Jerusalem and say, *Assyria has fallen; Nineveh is destroyed.* When that happened, people would say, *Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace. Celebrate your festivals O Judah. 1:15*

When the Jews get news their enemy is defeated, there will be a sense of relief and of joy.

The war is over. We can live in freedom and peace once again.

Nahum has said, *Nineveh is going to be defeated.*

But how could this be possible when she has such power and security? Nahum answers these questions.

Chapter 2 - the method of Nineveh's defeat - **how** she will fall. And he is writing this 36 years before it happens.

The city of Nineveh was built on the east bank of a branch of the Tigris River. She was surrounded by a wall 8 miles around and 50 feet high. The wall was so wide that 3 chariots could ride side by side along the top of the wall. There were 15 gates leading into the city. A branch of the river ran thru the middle of the city and was controlled by means of river gates.

Outside the wall were moats - deep, wide trenches, 150 feet wide, filled with water with narrow bridges across them that could easily be defended. Humanly speaking, the city of Nineveh was absolutely secure. There was no way of crossing the water to even get near the wall. Yet Nahum begins chapter 2 with a description of how it will happen.

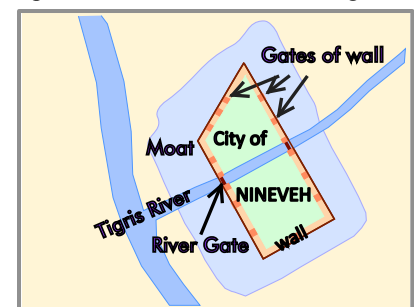
The shields of his soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of pine are brandished. The chariots storm thru the streets rushing back and forth thru the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightening. 2:3-4

Nineveh is going to be attacked by soldiers with red shields, dressed in red jackets, using chariots. According to ancient historians, **Babylonian** soldiers painted their shields red, wore red jackets and dyed their skin red in order to give themselves a psychological advantage. With all the red, the enemy would never be able to see any blood. They would think the Babylonian soldiers never got wounded.

As Nahum is speaking, this description seems impossible.

Babylon is one of the **Assyrian** capitals. The Babylonian people are under Assyrian control.

There is no Babylonian army so they have not even thought of any battle tactics.



However, God knows the future and He gives the details to Nahum.
Thirty-six years later when Babylon conquers Nineveh, this is precisely what they did.

But how? How do these people dressed in red, manage to get across the canals and over the wall?

2:6 *The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses.* Verse 13, *I am against you declares the Lord Almighty. I will burn up the Assyrian chariots in smoke.*

Nahum says the river gates that control the Tigris River will open.

The chariots of the Assyrian army will be burned. This same thought is emphasized in 3:15 *There the fire will devour you; the sword will cut you down.*

When the enemy does take the city, they will be interested in 2 things.

Plunder the silver; plunder the gold. The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures. 2:9

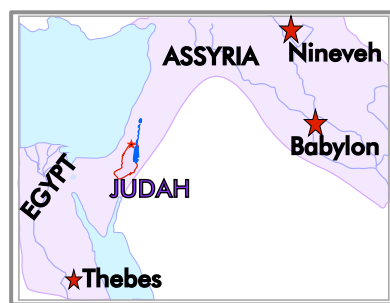
During the days of Nahum, Ashurbanipal is king of Assyria. Lion-hunting is one of his favorite sports. Many carvings of this are found on the stone walls of the palace. To all the cultures of that day, the lion was a symbol of strength and power. Assyria considered herself to be the strongest and greatest empire like a lion. So Nahum uses this picture in verse 11 when he asks, *Where now is the lion's den?*

Nahum is comparing the capital to a den and the people or leaders to lions. He asks, *Where is Nineveh? What happened to it?*



Ashurbanipal - Lion-hunting British Museum

Nahum writes this while he is living in the nation of Judah. Since the Jews are under the control of Assyria, the king has representatives living in the country to make sure Judah does not rebel. When these representatives hear Nahum talking of Assyria's defeat, they would have traveled to Nineveh, to tell the king. But he and his leaders would have laughed. This was impossible. Nineveh and the Assyrian empire is at its greatest power and glory.



So to be more convincing, Nahum gives the example of Thebes or No-Ammon, the capital of southern Egypt.

*Are you, Ashur-banipal, better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall. Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies. Yet **she** was taken captive and went into exile* 3:8-10

Thebes had been on the east bank of the Nile River, surrounded by 25 miles of wall. On the outside of her wall were moats and canals. It was considered so protected that it had been called the *city of the gods*. And yet early in his career, Ashur-banipal had led the Assyrian armies and defeated her. Nahum uses this example to say, *King Ashur-banipal, you think you are secure because of your walls and waterways. But remember Thebes. She was just like you in her protection. She considered herself absolutely secure. Yet you defeated her. If you conquered **her**, then surely God is able to conquer **you**.*

Since he knows these words are going to be repeated, Nahum sarcastically continues in verse 14.

Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defenses. Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork.

In other words, Nineveh, your downfall is so sure, you better start now to prepare. Store up water. Be sure you have enough bricks and clay to repair the wall.

Chapter 3:17

Your guards are like locust, your officials like swarms of locust that settle in the walls on a cold day, but when the sun appears, they fly away and no one knows where.

When the wings of locusts or grasshoppers are cold, they are unable to fly. So they get on a tree or a wall where they can wait for the sun's warmth and then with the heat, they fly away and disappear. Even if Ashur-banipal gets more Assyrian guards to protect the city, it will do him no good. The guards may be numerous as locust, but they will also have the characteristics of locust - as soon as the heat is on, in the heat of battle, they will disappear.

According to chapters 2 and 3, this is how Nineveh will fall. An army with red shields and jackets will attack them in chariots. The river gates will be forced open with a flood; the city will be burned; the leaders will desert; silver and gold will be taken and Nineveh's location will remain unknown.

Altho the **Bible** does not give us any details of what eventually happened, **secular history** does.

Thirty-four years after Nahum writes this, the Medes and Babylonians rebel against Assyria. They put together an army and for 2 years surround or laid siege to Nineveh, beginning in 614 BC. But it has absolutely no effect. It looks as tho Nineveh really is invincible.

Then, the unexpected happens. We learn about it from a first century BC historian named Diodorus Siculus in Volume 1 of his work entitled, *Bibliotheca Historica*. Diodorus tells us that there was a prediction that Nineveh could never be defeated until the river became an **enemy** of the city.

Nineveh had been built on the Tigris river because of the natural protection it offered. The river had always been a friend or ally - that which protected the city. To say Nineveh would not be taken until the river becomes an **enemy**, is equivalent to our phrase, *until hell freezes over*. In other words, it is something that never could happen. With this in mind, now look at the words of Diodorus Siculus from Volume 1.

There was a prophecy - prediction - that Nineveh should not be taken until the river became an enemy of the city; and in the 3rd year of the siege, the river being swollen with continuous rains, overflowed every part of the city and broke down the wall for 20 furlongs – 2½ miles. Then the king, thinking that the oracle was fulfilled and the river had become an enemy to the city, the king built a large funeral pyre (fire) in the palace and collecting together all his wealth and his concubines and eunuchs, burnt himself and the palace with them all. And the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made and took the city.

According to secular history, Nineveh was defeated by fire and by flood, just as Nahum had said 36 years earlier. For hundreds of years, the water had protected the city. Never once had it flooded. But Nahum said God uses nature! All God did was to send extra rain. For the first time in history, the river flooded and did the unexpected. The power of the extra water forced the river gates open and knocked down 2 ½ miles of the wall. The city fell quickly like dry thorns or dry straw being burned.

When Nineveh fell, she was so totally destroyed that for over 2000 years her location was unknown - from 612 BC until 1843 AD. Thruout all that time people said Nineveh was myth and legend; she never existed. But then in 1843, a French archeologist found the ruins. Excavation continued into the 20th century. Today in the British Museum in London, England, there are 2 complete rooms with nothing but artifacts from the Assyrian empire. Most of them were found near the ruins of Nineveh.

As the archeologists searched thru the ruins, they found things of stone, marble, bronze and other precious metals but they never found silver or gold. It was the only thing the Babylonians took, just as Nahum had said. The silver and gold were plundered.

Chapter 3 tells us **why** God did this.

Chapter 3:1 *Woe to the city of blood.*

Nineveh was known for her **murder, bloodshed** and **warfare**. Secular history has said the Assyrians were the most cruel and sadistic nation that ever existed in ancient history. King Ashurbanipal himself, boasted of his violence and cruelty. After conquering people, the soldiers cut off their limbs or put out their eyes; they impaled them on poles, boiled them in tar, ripped out their tongues or literally skinned them alive. They would behead their enemies and pile the heads in pyramids as a monument of their victory.

Verse 1 continues: *full of lies* - Nineveh was known for her **broken promises and treaties**;
full of plunder - Assyria had become rich from her **stealing**, looting and taking by force.

God destroyed the Assyrian empire for her savagery and ruthlessness.

Another reason is mentioned in verse 4.

All because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.

Assyria was known for her **idolatry** and **immorality**.

Nahum then uses the literal fact as picture language of her **political and social seductions**.

Like a prostitute, Nineveh seduced nations into treaties for personal gain. When she was unable to conquer by force, she conquered thru seduction. **She promised people freedom, only to enslave them.**

She also seduced people to the city with the offer of **luxury, wealth and pleasure**. The people then become enslaved to the vices and sins in Nineveh.

Verse 19 describes the finality of her destruction *Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?*

Nineveh had turned from repentance and practiced endless cruelty for the last 70 years. God says her opportunity to repent has now ended. The capital of Nineveh as well as the empire will be totally destroyed. It happened 36 years later in 612 BC.

Whenever there is excessive evil, there will be chaos, destruction and sorrow that affects the lives of everyone.

We are living in the midst of evil in our days. And certainly there is chaos around us. Nationally, locally or in our personal lives, things seem to be speeding up. They are happening so fast. We barely resolve one problem and 2 more arise. Very quickly, life can become overwhelming. This is when Nahum's words can bring comfort and encouragement.

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in Him. 1:7

Nahum wants us to remember **3 FACTS ABOUT GOD**

God is good. My situation may be bad, but He is always good. In this context it means He cannot make a mistake; He knows our situation; He has the power to change it or take us thru it.

God is our refuge – our shelter in the time of storms.

No matter how bad the storm around me, He will meet my need.

He protects us from doubt or despair – from Satan's attacks.

He comforts us in our sorrow.

He gives us security and support when we feel absolutely helpless.

He pours out His love in our extreme loneliness.

As our refuge, God has everything we will ever need.

God cares.

He cares about our suffering
about the injustice we are going thru
about the turmoil all around us.

We can be assured He **will** respond.

He will always be there, even when we cannot feel His presence.

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in Him.

BIBLE DEFINITIONS

God is **jealous** means **He is committed to what is right**
He is committed to what is fair and good

God's **anger** or **wrath** means **God's response to evil, injustice and disobedience**
it means **His judgment**

God's **vengeance** means **justice** when used in the Bible

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

Historical reasons for Assyria's downfall

Shortage of funds to run the empire

Shortage of troops to maintain control

National fatigue of constant war

Unrest among the conquered Babylonians and Medes

Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal 669-627 BC - rebellion in Babylon by his brother in 652-648 BC

Thebes, destroyed in 663; rebuilt and thriving by 645 BC

King Manasseh in Judah 697 - 642 taken prisoner 552 BC by Ashur-banipal;

restored by 648 BC - 6 years of rebuilding, getting rid of idols

Nahum's ministry 655-635 BC

His book could only be written between 663 – 645 based on the political situation of Thebes.
The specific date of 648 BC most closely fits with the time of king Manasseh.