

NAHUM

Nahum 1:1-15

Prophet to the Southern Kingdom

Two Minor Prophets devote their entire message to the ancient city of Nineveh. The book of Nahum forms a sequel to the book of Jonah. Together the two books illustrate God's way of dealing with nations: The book of Jonah illustrates God's grace to those who repent, while the book of Nahum illustrates God's judgment and wrath poured out on the proud and unrepentant.

It had been about 150 years since Jonah reluctantly visited Nineveh to deliver a strong warning to the Ninevites to repent from their wicked ways. To Jonah's shock and dismay the king and all the people of Nineveh repented after hearing Jonah's message and the city was spared the terrible destruction that was promised in 40 days. (Read the book of Jonah for the whole story.) In the years that followed, the Assyrians reverted back to the errors of their evil ways and now time had run out for the wicked city!

Open Your Heart to the God of nations—to the God of history who still controls the world. May we experience afresh His love and His holy wrath as they coalesce in the prophecies of Nahum.

Getting Started

Reflect on "Points to Ponder" from Lesson 1—in light of your studies in Amos and Joel.

Review your observations concerning the book of Nahum from Lesson 1.

Locate Nahum and his contemporaries on the Timeline.

Locate the city of Nineveh on Map 1.

Read the Background for the Book of Nahum (a separate handout for this lesson).

Using the Timeline as a reference, what major historical event occurred between the prophecies of Joel and Nahum?

1. What do we learn about the book and the author from Nahum 1:1? Was this oracle written to or about Nineveh?

2. Explain what Nahum meant when he said his book was a *vision*.

Nahum's prophecy is an impressive poem comparable to that of Isaiah; a book of literary excellence and style. Nahum's keen intellect, his courage, and the rare gift of vivid presentation make him one of the outstanding figures in human history who have appeared only at rare

intervals. It is likely that Nahum delivered his message at the height of Nineveh's power when Assyria was threatening Judah's existence, sometime between 650 and 620 B. C.

The Meaning and Mystery of God's Wrath

Nahum's introductory psalm of triumph over the impending destruction of Nineveh (chapter 1), also presents us with a powerful and compelling portrait of God that is unsurpassed for its grandeur and majesty.

Read and meditate on Nahum 1:1-8.

3. List the expressive words or phrases Nahum used to disclose God's *nature* and *character* (1:1-8).

4. a. For what three reasons was God going to destroy the city of Nineveh according to the prophecy of Nahum 1:2?

Nahum 1:2 is a key verse that lays the foundation for the remainder of the book.

b. Look up the word "vengeance" in a dictionary and write out a brief definition below.

Read through the entire prophecy of Nahum to get a feel for the message as a whole. Against that backdrop reflect again on Nahum 1:2.

5. Give a brief interpretation of each statement in the second verse of Nahum's prophecy.

6. Could there be a sense in which the wrath of God is also beautiful? Consider Revelation 6:1-11.

7. How have you seen the truth of Nahum 1:3a displayed during our study of the Minor Prophets? Recall an example or two. ♥ **Store in your heart:** Nahum 1:3a and 1:7.

8. Notice how nature reacts in terrified awe to the presence of her creator (1:3b-6). Record your observations.

Some commentators view verse 4a as referring to the rolling back of the Red Sea (Exodus chapter 14) and the parting of the Jordan River (Joshua chapter 3).

9. Why do you think God might remind Judah of this aspect of their past at this point in time?

Ponder the awe-inspiring picture of God which is both *magnificent* and *frightening* (Nahum 1:1-8).

10. Comment on the ways God is using this vivid picture of the Almighty to speak to the current issues you are facing in your life.

While the main subject of the book of Nahum concerns the pronouncement of judgment on the great city of Nineveh for the destruction they brought to the northern kingdom of Israel and many other nations—*yet Nahum's book includes threads of hope—given in the form of promises to the people of Judah.*

Carefully **read** Nahum 1:9-11. Reflect on the promise in 1:9, especially the phrase: “trouble will not come a second time.”

11. How do you think the promise given to Judah in Nahum 1:9 relates to the astonishing scene in 2 Kings 19:32-37? (For further background read Isaiah chapters 36 and 37.)

When God speaks to Judah through Nahum in 1:12-15 his message is laced with tender words of comfort to Judah and brutal words of wrath to Nineveh. **Reread** and contemplate each word of this prophecy.

12. What three promises are made to Judah by the God of grace and comfort (verses 12-13)?

13. What three part verdict is issued to Nineveh by the God of wrath and vengeance (verse 14)?

Despite the gloom of this oracle, Nahum wraps up the opening portion of his prophecy with words of hope and anticipation.

14. What does Nahum foresee in 1:15? Compare with Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:13-15.

Nahum's prophecy in 1:15 was spoken to a profoundly depressed people who had long known the tyranny of oppression. In the same way the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ often comes to those who are oppressed and in despair. Yet the Gospel message is one of peace—not only from external despair, but an inner peace with God—a peace “that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

15. Ironically, the name Nahum means “comfort” or “consolation.” How would the words of Nahum's prophecy bring comfort to Judah at this desperate moment? In what ways are his words comforting to you?

16. Will you be the feet of those who bring good news to someone in despair this week? Spend some time in silent prayer asking God to direct you. Reflect on what it might cost you for that prayer to be answered. *In your group pray for one another as you seek to be obedient.*

Background for the Book of Nahum

Nahum is not an easy book to grasp in the tranquil atmosphere of study. The winds of war blow through its pages and its undertones are those of violence and vengeance. In order to understand its force and power one must first attempt to enter Nahum's world.

Of all the oppressive world powers that have marched across the pages of human history—from the past to the present—Assyria holds a place of supremacy among evil nations. The Nineveh to whom the book of Nahum was written was the center of evil, violence, torture, sorcery and idolatry. The small territories of Judah and Israel were amongst the many peoples who experienced Assyria's cruelty and ruthless methods of terror. *In Nahum's time Judah had already lived through almost a century of terror and oppression at the hands of Assyria.*

Most nations at that time were looters, building their states by robbing other nations. Assyria was the most ferocious of them all. Limitless wealth from the ends of the earth poured into their treasury. Their very name became a byword for cruelty and atrocity. They skinned their prisoners alive and cut off various body parts to inspire terror in their enemies. Nowhere are the pages of history bloodier than in the records of their wars. Cruel Assyrian monarchs had developed a formidable fighting machine that swept everything before them with ruthless cruelty.

Much has been learned about the great city of Nineveh through the archaeologist's spade. Situated along the eastern bank of the Tigris River, the city was a complex of four cities in one, making a huge square of 60 miles in circumference. The walls, which were the primary military defense in that day, were 100 feet high and fortified with 250 watch towers each 200 feet high! These walls were so thick that three chariots could be driven abreast along the top. It was the great King Sennacherib who turned Nineveh into a truly magnificent city, more glorious than any previously known. He filled his city with plazas, gardens and a large botanical and zoological park next to his palace. The citizens of Nineveh were given plots of land on which to plant orchards. An elaborate water system was put in place through the use of canals which watered the gardens, orchards and crops. *Sennacherib paid for all this at the expense of the nations he plundered. The nations Assyria had not yet conquered were blackmailed into sending tribute money to Nineveh.*

Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son, built the main arsenal at Nineveh. Any plans he had for more development ended when he died on the way to a campaign in Egypt. His son, Ashurbanipal was exceptionally cruel and boasted of all the atrocities he committed. Ashurbanipal became the last great king of Assyria and to him we owe a debt for the great library which was discovered at Nineveh.

Much of this information would not be available to us today except for an Englishman, Claude James Rich, who in 1820 began sketching the mounds across the Tigris from Mosul which he suspected were the ruins of Nineveh. In 1845 Henry Layard definitely identified the site and he and his successors uncovered the ruins of the magnificent palaces of the Assyrian kings, whose names have now become household words. Thousands of inscriptions of the history of Assyria, as the Assyrians wrote it, have been uncovered, and to a remarkable degree they confirm the Bible.