

Bible Study Notes and Questions on Nahum

Overview: Nahum was from Elkosh near the Sea of Galilee. His name means “comfort”. He was given a specific prophecy for Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria.

The date of the prophecy was somewhere between the fall of Thebes, also known as No-Ammon a great city in Egypt (**3:8**), that fell to the Assyrians in 663 BC and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Thebes was sacked by Ashurbanipal the last great ruler of Assyria, (669-627 BC). At that time Nineveh was one of the greatest cities in ancient times, built by Nimrod a mighty hunter (**Genesis 10:8-11**). This city was the capital of the flourishing Assyrian empire and the centre of trade and commerce of the world. During Ashurbanipal’s rule this city was at the height of its power, glory and greatness, but during that time the city became extremely wicked, brutal and proud. After Ashurbanipal’s death in 627 BC the power of Assyria declined leading to Nineveh’s destruction in 612 BC.

Whilst little is mentioned of Israel in this prophecy, in **1:15** there is evidence of Judah observing the feasts when the godly king Josiah brought reforms to Judah in 621 BC. Hence the prophecy could possibly be between 621 and 612 BC. The reigning king of Nineveh was Sin-Shur-Ishkum at that time which means the prophecy was addressed to him.

God had shown great mercy to Nineveh when the city had repented after hearing the prophet Jonah’s message in about 785 BC. There was no mercy this time from God. The city was completely destroyed by the Babylonians and the Medes in a prolonged siege from 612 to about 608 BC. It was not until the 19th century in 1845 that the ruins of Nineveh were discovered in detail.

There was great joy in the world at that time when Nineveh fell from 612 BC. Many nations had been mercilessly crushed by the Assyrians especially Israel. We must bear in mind Assyria had completely overrun the northern kingdom of Israel and much of the southern kingdom of Judah. However, God had intervened in about 721 BC during the reign of Hezekiah to hold back Sennacherib the Assyrian ruler who had to return to Nineveh, **2Kings 19:35-37**. 185000 Assyrian soldiers had been slain in one night by an angel sent from God. However, it appears Assyria continued as a world power for another 100 years until the fall of Nineveh.

A brief summary of the events has been given below:

Chapter 1: 1:1: The word of the Lord was given to Nahum the Elkosite.

1:2-15: The Lord will always do good to those who trust him (**1:7**) but he will bring great terror (**1:14**) and destruction to his enemies as seen in the complete ruin of Nineveh.

Chapter 2: There has been given a detailed description of Nineveh under siege eventually to be overrun by an alliance of Babylonians led by Nabopolassar and the Medes led by Cyaxares.

Chapter 3: Nineveh had become a place of great wickedness. God had brought justice in having Nineveh totally destroyed never to rise again. The city has remained as a ruin inhabited by wild beasts.

This short prophetic book has shown God will bring justice in removing all that is evil. He will fulfil his promise having said “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” (**Romans 12:19** quoting part of **Deuteronomy 32:35**). Hence the book of Nahum brings comfort to the godly that God will eventually remove all that is evil. J. Sidlow Baxter in his commentary “Explore the Book” p 202 Volume 4 has written: “The name of the prophet Nahum means “Comfort”; and let us frankly agree that in Nahum’s dirge there is very real comfort for the godly. It is the comfort of knowing that in the righteous government of God, the outrages of impenitent evil-doers against their fellow-humans are divinely requited. The desire for revenge is not Christian; but the appeal that God Himself shall avenge outraged justice, and vindicate the right against impenitent evil-doers,

is fully in accord with Christian principles. Note the fact that Nahum scarcely mentions his own nation. The reason for this is clear. He does not exult in Nineveh's downfall merely for Judah's sake, or for his own. Nineveh had sold whole peoples by her whoredoms and witchcrafts. Nahum voices the outraged conscience of mankind. Other than merely indulging revenge, he identifies himself with the government of God in its guarantee that such wrongs shall not go without redress."

Very little is known of Nahum. The prophet had been to Nineveh and never returned. It is believed that his tomb is on the west bank of the Tigris today. Arabs have recognised Nahum as a holy man of God.

Some commentators have said that Capernaum was named after Nahum being "village of Nahum"; whilst others believe it means the city of consolation/comfort. Like Nineveh it was condemned by Jesus for rejecting the word of God. Today Capernaum is a place of rubble.

There are scriptures elsewhere in other prophecies that have foretold the fall of Assyria such as **Zephaniah 2:13 & 15**: "And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, (and) dry like a wilderness... This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly that said in her heart, I (am), and (there) is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! Every one that passes by her shall hiss, (and) wag his hand."

Question on the Book of Nahum

Q.1) What is known of the prophet Nahum?

Q.2) Read through **1:2-8**. What can we understand of the vengeance of God?

Q.3) Describe the ways God will punish his enemies especially Nineveh. Read **1:9-15**.

Q.4) What does **chapter 1** reveal of Nineveh's pride? Look particularly at **1:3b-6, 9-12a, 14** and see also **Psalms 37:35-36**. It is helpful to read also **Isaiah 36:18-20; 37:23-29; Ezekiel 32:22-23; Zephaniah 2:15** that has revealed pride.

Q.5) Show that **1:7** is an illustration of what the Lord did for Hezekiah king of Judah in about 720 BC before Nahum's time. See **2Kings 18 & 19**. Can you give an illustration from your own experience of the Lord bringing you out of trouble?

Q.6) Read again **1:11**. Consider who is the wicked counsellor.

Q.7) Read **Chapter 2**. Try to describe the siege of Nineveh.

Q.8) Read **Chapter 3** and show why God had to bring judgment on Nineveh and describe the complete destruction of the city. What was significant about mentioning No Amon (Thebes) the great city in Egypt? See **3:8-10**.

Q.9) Read the entire book. Show what it reveals of who God is. See **1:2-9; 2:13; 3:5**.

Q.10) Consider carefully the prophecy of Nahum showing what has been fulfilled and what is yet to be fulfilled.

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