Supplemental Notes:  

The Book of Nahum

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Audio Listing

Nahum 1

Nahum, Nineveh’s Judge. The Lord’s Kindness and Sternness; Nineveh’s Overthrow and Judah’s Joy.

Nahum 2 - 3

Nineveh Besieged. Her Desolation Contrasted with Her Former Glory. Nineveh’s Sins and Her Doom.

Acknowledgments

These notes have been assembled from speaking notes and related materials which had been compiled from a number of classic and contemporary commentaries and other sources detailed in the bibliography, as well as other articles and publications of Koinonia House. While we have attempted to include relevant end notes and other references, we apologize for any errors or oversights.

The complete recordings of the sessions, as well as supporting diagrams, maps, etc., are also available in various audiovisual formats from the publisher.

- **Ashurbanipal** (669-612 B.C.) In 669 B.C. Ashurbanipal succeeded his father Esarhaddon as king of Assyria. He may have been the king who released Manasseh king of Judah (2 Chr 33:10-13). Ashurbanipal defeated Thebes in Egypt in 663 and brought treasures to Nineveh from Thebes, Babylon, and Susa. He established an extensive library at Nineveh. The city of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians in August 612 b.c.

**Chronological Summary**

- 903 B.C. Rise of Nineveh
- 759 B.C. The warning of Jonah
- 722 B.C. Destruction of Northern Kingdom
- 709 B.C. The Invasion of Sennacherib
- 663 B.C. The Prophecy of Nahum
- 625 B.C. The Destruction of Assyria

This book was written in Jerusalem (soon after 709 B.C.) where Nahum witnessed the invasion of Sennacherib and the destruction of his host (2 Kgs19:35). It is believed to have been written between 663 – 612 (cf. 3:8).

The subject of this prophecy is the approaching complete and final destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the great and, at that time, flourishing Assyrian empire. Assur-bani-pal was at the height of his glory. Nineveh was a city of vast extent, and was then the center of the civilization and commerce of the world, a “bloody city all full of lies and robbery” (Nahum 3:1) for it had robbed and plundered all the neighboring nations. It was strongly fortified on every side, bidding defiance to every enemy; yet it was to be utterly destroyed as a punishment for the great wickedness of its inhabitants.

Jonah had already uttered his message of warning, and Nahum was followed by Zephaniah, who also predicted (Zeph 2:4-15) the destruction of the city, predictions which were remarkably fulfilled (625 B.C.) when Nineveh was destroyed—apparently by fire—and the Assyrian empire came to an end, an event which changed the face of Asia.
Nineveh, the “Great” City

The city of Nineveh was located on the east side of the Tigris River, about 550 miles northeast of Samaria. That distance required a journey of more than a month, if one traveled the normal distance of 15-20 miles a day. The great city was second in size only to Babylon.

- “great city” Jonah 1:2; 3:2; 4:11
- “great storm” 1:12
- “greatly feared” 1:16
- “greatly displeased” 4:1
- “very [‘greatly’] happy” 4:6

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which dominated Palestine and much of the ancient world from around 930 to 612 B.C., counterbalanced in the south by Egypt. It was this people who, in 722 B.C., swept down on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians battered down the walls of Samaria, Israel’s capital, and took the people away, resettling them away from the Promised Land.

The Bible has much to say about this terrible, warlike pagan nation. Isaiah particularly contains many passages that foretell Assyria’s doom (cf. Isa 10:5-19; 17:12-14; 18:4-6; 30:27-33; 37:21-35; Hos 4:14. (Cf Hosea Can You See Briefing Package.) It was destroyed by the Medes and Persians in 612 B.C.

Nineveh means “the residence of Ninus,” that is, Nimrod (Gen 10:11, where the translation ought to be, “He (Nimrod) went forth into Assyria and builded Nineveh.”) Nineveh was large and, like Babylon, was protected by an outer wall and an inner wall: the inner wall was 50 feet wide and 100 feet high; three chariots abreast raced on top. It had 1200 towers, each 200 ft high. It was 60 miles in circumference and the population of 600,000 was supported by internally grown crops. (See map, next page.)

Nineveh: Awful City!

Nineveh was well known in the ancient Near East for the brutal atrocities it inflicted on its war captives. The Assyrian king acknowledged that his people’s ways were “evil” and characterized by “violence” (Jonah 3:8), and they were “carefree,” thinking themselves invincible (Zeph 2:15).

Prophecies Fulfilled

1) The Assyrian fortresses surrounding the city would be easily captured (Nahum 3:12). The fortified towns in Nineveh’s environs began to fall in 614 B.C., including Tabris, present-day Sharif-Khan, a few miles NW of Nineveh. (Babylonian Chronicle.)

2) The besieged Ninevites would prepare bricks and mortar for emergency defense walls (Nahum 3:14). “To the south of the gate, the moat is still filled with fragments of stone and mud bricks from the walls, heaped up when they were breached.” [A.T. Olmstead History of Assyria, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951, p.637.]

3) The city gates would be destroyed (Nahum 3:13). “The main attack was directed from the northwest and the brunt fell upon the Hatamti gate at this corner…within the gate are traces of the counterwall raised by the inhabitants in their last extremity.” [A.T. Olmstead History of Assyria, Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1951, p.637.]

4) In the final hours of the attack the Ninevites would be drunk (Nahum 1:10; 3:11). “The Assyrian king…distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions…while the whole army was thus acrousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy’s camp and made an unexpected attack by night” [Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca Historia 2.26.4.]

5) Nineveh would be destroyed by a flood (Nahum 1:8; 2:6, 8). In the third year of the siege, heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood part of the city and break art of the Walls [Bibliotheca Historia 2.26.9; 2.27.13.] Xenophon referred to terrifying thunder (presumably with a storm) associated with the city’s capture [Xenophon Anabasis, 3.4.12.] Also the Khosr River, entering the city from the NW at the Ninlil Gate and running through the city in a SW direction.
Nahum 1

The Comfort to Judah

The coming judgment on Nineveh (in return for her terrible atrocities on various nations including Israel, the Northern Kingdom, in 722 b.c.) would bring great comfort to the afflicted Judah (1:12). Judah had felt the threat of the Assyrian Empire breathing down her neck. In fact, Assyria had defeated much of Judah and had even surrounded Jerusalem in 701 b.c. And during much of Manasseh’s reign Judah had to pay tribute to Assyria.

The purpose of Nahum’s book is to announce the fall of Nineveh and thereby comfort Judah with the assurance that God is in control.

1] The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.
2] God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

“Nahum” = “consolation” or “comfort,” appropriate for his ministry to Judah.

“Elkoshite”: His hometown was Elkosh, but is unknown. Jerome said it was in Galilee; some, Capernaum [“village of Nahum”?]

“...Jealous”: “exacting exclusive devotion.” (Websters) Cf. Ex 20:3-6 (avengeth, not “revengeth.”)

3] The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

4] He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth.

5] The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.

God is the moral ruler of the universe; and He is a righteous judge. Penalties must be paid…

6] Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

7] The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

8] But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

9] When Nineveh would be captured its people would try to escape (Nahum 2:8). “Sardanapalus (another name for King Sin-shar-ishkun) sent away his three sons and two daughters with much treasure into Paphlagonia, to the governor of Kattos, the most loyal of his subjects.” [Diodorus, Bibliotheca Historia, 2.26.6-7.]


12] Nineveh’s destruction would be final (Nahum 1:9,14). Many cities of the ancient Near East were rebuilt after being destroyed (e.g., Samaria & Jerusalem) but not Nineveh.

may have flooded because of heavy rains, or the enemy may have destroyed its sluice gate.

6] Nineveh would be destroyed by fire (Nahum 1:10; 2:13; 3:15). Archeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood, charcoal, and ashes. “There was no question about the clear traces of burning of the temple (as also in the palace of Sennacherib), for a layer of ash about two inches thick lay clearly defined in places on the southeast side about the level of the Sargon pavement.” [R. Campbell Thompson and R. V. Hutchinson, A Century of Exploration at Nineveh, London, 1929.]

7] The city’s capture would be attended by a great massacre of people (Nahum 3:3). “In two battles fought on the plain before the city the rebels defeated the Assyrians… So great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream, mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance.” [Diodorus, Bibliotheca Historia, 2.26.6-7.]

8] Plundering and pillaging would accompany the overthrow of the city (Nahum 2:9-10). Babylonian Chronicle: “Great quantities of the spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off. The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap” [Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, 2.420.]


12] Nineveh’s destruction would be final (Nahum 1:9,14). Many cities of the ancient Near East were rebuilt after being destroyed (e.g., Samaria & Jerusalem) but not Nineveh.
6) Senecherib’s invasion is mentioned 3 times in Scripture (2 Kgs 18-29; 2 Chr 32, Isa 36-37). What was the result and how was it achieved?

**Discussion Questions**

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

1) What does it mean that God is “jealous”? (Ex 20:3-6)
2) Should husbands and wives be jealous?
3) Contrast the messages and contexts of Jonah and Nahum.

**Candidate Research Projects**

(For the truly dedicated.)

Compile other prophecies of Gentile nations and their fulfillment in confirmed (archeological and other) history.

**Preparation for the Next Session:**

Read Nahum Chapters 2 and 3.

**Nahum 2**

The Judgment upon Nineveh

1] He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.
2] Thus saith the LORD; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more.
3] For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder.
4] And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile.
5] Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee, he is utterly cut off.

“...feet of him...”: cf: Isa 52:7; Rom 10:13-15

**Study Questions**

(For the diligent student.)

1) Construct a rough time line which includes
   a) the rise of Nineveh,
   b) the warning of Jonah,
   c) the destruction of the Northern Kingdom,
   d) the attempted invasion of the Southern Kingdom,
   e) the prophecy of Nahum, and
   f) the final destruction of Assyria.
2) What were the military and strategic advantages of Nineveh? The weaknesses?
3) List 12 prophecies of Nahum that were fulfilled from the known history of Nineveh.
4) Nahum means “comfort.” To whom and how?
5) Why can’t a righteous judge let a guilty person “off the hook”?
6) Senecherib’s invasion is mentioned 3 times in Scripture (2 Kgs 18-29; 2 Chr 32, Isa 36-37). What was the result and how was it achieved?

The Tigris overflowed, took out a section of the wall, and the city became like a pool of water... 2 ½ miles of wall were along the Tigris.
And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts.

But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back.

Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.

She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness.

Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?

The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.

Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

Nahum 3

The Reasons Why

God loved Nineveh: it was His closing comments to Jonah. But both individuals and nations can cross a line too far…

1] Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not;
2] The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the pransing horses, and of the jumping chariots.
3] The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: No wonder Nahum called Nineveh “the city of blood” (3:1), a city noted for its “cruelty”! (3:19).

Violence & Cruelty

- Shalmaneser II (859-824 B.C.) boasted of his cruelties after one of his campaigns: “A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames”
- Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) wrote of his enemies, “I cut their throats like lambs, I cut off their precious lives [as one cuts] a string. Like the many waters of a storm I made [the contents of] their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth… Their hands I cut off”
- Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.C.) described his treatment of a captured leader in these words: “I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw… I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy... a kennel”
- In his campaign against Egypt, Ashurbanipal also boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses “on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city wall(s) with them”

4] Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleet nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.
5] Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame.
6] And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock.
7] And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?
8] Art thou better than populous No [Amon], that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea?

In 3:8 ff the prophet speaks of the capture and destruction of No-amon, the Egyptian Thebes, as an accomplished fact. The expedition of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, against Egypt, which resulted in the fall of Thebes, occurred about 663 B.C. Hence, the activity of Nahum must be placed somewhere between 663 and 607 B.C.

9] Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers.
10] Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.
11] Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy.
12] All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater.
Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars.

Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln.

There shall be the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts.

Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away.

Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.

There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

Nineveh has come to a place where there is no healing for her people. There is a line that people—and nations—cannot cross without the inevitability of judgment…

A Measure of Distress

Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Deut 12:8; Judg 17:6; Judg 21:25; Prov 12:15; Prov 21:2

= Absolutely no fear of God.

Study Questions
(For the diligent student.)

1) Who ultimately defeated Assyria and how?
2) What were the attendant circumstances to the fall of Nineveh?
3) Which ones were beyond the control of either the attackers or defenders?
4) How did Nineveh “sell nations through her whoredoms and families through its witchcrafts”? (3:4)
5) How is the express comparison with Thebes (“No-Amon”) relevant?
6) Is America overdue for judgment? Why or why not.

Discussion Questions
(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

1) Why was Nineveh destroyed? Is there a parallel with America?
2) What does the repeated phrase, “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” mean, and how is it relevant to America today?
3) Why does America appear overdue for judgment? Why hasn’t it occurred? Will it? When?

Candidate Research Projects
(For the truly dedicated.)

Research various viewpoints on the following questions: Why does America appear overdue for judgment? Why hasn’t it occurred? Will it? When?

Preparation for the Next Session:

Read the Book of Obadiah.

Bibliography


Orelli, C.V., The Twelve Minor Prophets, Kock & Klock Christian Publisher, Minneapolis MN, 1897.


About The Cover Design
(on the tape cassette volumes)

The “Front” cover:

The Greek border: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).” The center design element symbolizes the Word of God Incarnate, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

The “Back” cover: (the “front” to the Jewish reader)

The Hebrew border: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (from the Sh’ma, Deut 6:4-5).”

The center design represents the Burning Bush, made up of Hebrew letters which proclaim “the Eternal One cannot lie.”

The Spine:

The spine includes a Menorah from the Old Testament, a Maranatha Dove suggesting the New Testament, and the Koinonia House logo at the base.

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