

WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



LESSON 6 (PART 2) – NAHUM

FACILITATOR'S

Note

In this lesson we will explore the prophecy of Nahum. Called a vision, Nahum's message is addressed solely to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, which had expanded its reach throughout much of the known world through violent and cruel military conquests. Nahum's message recounts the vision he received from God in which he witnessed Nineveh's downfall via a swift and violent attack from her enemies. Approximately 150 years earlier (circa 780-750 B.C.), God had sent the prophet Jonah to preach to the Ninevites and warn them of their impending destruction unless they repented. Nineveh responded, and God forgave them. Not so in Nahum. The vision is fully devoted to the announcement of Nineveh's doom, and comfort for Judah who will no longer be subject to Assyrian oppression. Nineveh's idolatry, violence and cruelty have pushed her past the point of no return; God's patience with her is at an end and His wrath will now be poured out on her until she is utterly destroyed, never to rise again.

Through this lesson we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

HEAD  **HEART**  **HANDS** 

We hope that by this study your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the "Living Word" to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this "Living Word" concept.

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for this lesson by digging into the Word and reading through the book of **Nahum**. We also encourage you to read/scan through **Genesis 10:8-12, Jonah (entire book), 2 Kings 15:17-20, 16:1-18, 17:1-28, 18:13-19:36, 2 Chronicles 33:10-13** as background to the book. As you move through **Nahum**, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.*

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PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Presentation of introductory material on the prophecy of Nahum.
- Understand that while God is slow to anger and abounding in love, He will not ignore sin but will, in just judgment, pour out His wrath.
- Acknowledge that God is sovereign over the nations and will destroy in judgment any nation that pursues a course of unrestrained wickedness.

DISCUSSION STARTERS



- God is sovereign over the nations. How do you think He feels about our nation, the United States of America?

KNOWLEDGE HEAD

From God's Word through Nahum

- **OVERVIEW**
 - **Author**
 - The author is identified as Nahum of Elkoshite
 - The location of Elkoshite is unknown.
 - Jerome said it was in Galilee (he wrote that the village of Elkosh was pointed out to him by a guide in Galilee)
 - Another source identified it as a town in Judah near Eleutheropolis, about 25 miles SW of Jerusalem
 - The name Capernaum literally means "village of Nahum" -- at least consistent with Jerome's claim that Nahum was from Galilee, though different from the village/area mentioned by Jerome
 - There is no real evidence to support any of these identifications
 - The name Nahum means "consolation" or "comfort"

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o **Date**

- Unclear – the guesses range from 663 B.C. down to 612 B.C.
- The reference to the capture of Thebes in Nahum 3:8 prevents the book from being earlier than 663 B.C., the time when Ashurbanipal defeated/destroyed Thebes in Egypt, after initially attacking/entering it a few years prior.
- The Assyrian empire basically came to an end in 612 B.C. when Nineveh fell to a coalition of Babylonians, Medes and Scythians, so the book was most likely written prior to 612 B.C. (Assyria persisted for a few more years as a rump state before fading entirely.)
- There are some who argue that the book was written after the fall of Nineveh, but the tone of the text seems otherwise and most agree the book's date was just before the fall.
- Given the range from 663 B.C. to 612 B.C., Nahum would have been a prophet who was a contemporary of Jeremiah (in his early career) and not too far removed from Zephaniah and Habakkuk who followed.

o **Key Theme(s)**

- God, though slow to anger and abounding in love, is a just God who will not acquit the guilty but will pour out his wrath on the godless/wicked
- God is sovereign over the nations of the world and a nation's wickedness can exceed the limit of His patience, ensuring the nation's destruction by His wrath
- God is a stronghold, one who delivers those who take refuge in Him
- **ASK:**
 - Do these themes still speak/apply to us today?

o **Metadata about the Book of Nahum**

- Nahum has no discussion regarding Judah's sins or her need to repent, and there are no promises to God's people of an age of peace and righteousness to come
- The book is entirely devoted to the downfall/annihilation of Nineveh:
 - It will be orchestrated by God, executed via the enemies of Assyria
 - It will occur and nothing can stop it as God's patience with Nineveh are at an end
 - Nineveh's sins are many and she is explicitly called out in the text for her atrocities, especially her idolatry, cruelty and violence (1:14, 2:12, 3:1, 3:4)
- The downfall is described in detail in Chapters two and three and reads like an eyewitness account
- The book ends with a rhetorical question, as does Jonah – no other books of the Bible do so
- Nahum is not quoted or cited in the New Testament (Romans 10:15 is considered an echo of Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7 rather than Nahum 1:15)

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○ Background regarding the Assyrian Empire and Nineveh

- Nineveh was an ancient city, first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:11-12, having been built by Nimrod, per Genesis 10:8-12
- God had delivered a message to Nineveh about 150 years earlier (during the reign of Ashur-dan III), through the prophet Jonah, threatening its destruction, but stayed His hand as the Ninevites repented; their repentance was short-lived, however, and they once again resumed their atrocities and vile practices
- By the time Nahum was written, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had already been destroyed and dispersed by the Assyrians, and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) was living under the continual threat of their violence (see the outline below of the interactions between Israel/Judah and Assyria)
- The initial capital city of Assyria was Asshur, approximately 50 miles south of Nineveh, but the capital was moved to Nineveh during the reign of Sennacherib, who conducted major building projects that included
 - Restoring its temples
 - Heavily fortifying the city's defenses
 - Two protective walls were constructed, an outer wall and then an inner wall
 - The inner wall was 100 feet high and 50 feet wide/deep, with 1200 towers, each about 200 feet high, distributed throughout the 60 miles of its circumference
 - Building a system of waterworks
 - The Khoser river ran through the city (entering through the walls) and a system of canals was constructed to feed water to points throughout (see Nahum 2:6)
 - Crops to help feed its inhabitants were grown internally (within the inner wall)
 - Constructing a large palace
- The interactions of Israel and Judah with Assyria span the time from Qarqar (853 B.C.) to Carchemish (606 B.C.)
 - Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.)
 - Made the city of Nineveh a base for military operations.
 - Fought the famous battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. against eleven allied kings, one of whom was Ahab, King of Israel.
 - Received tribute from Jehu, King of Israel, a son (descendant) of Omri
 - These events are not in the Bible.
 - The battle of Qarqar is described in Shalmaneser's inscription on the Kurkh Monolith.

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- Tribute from King Jehu is described on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser
- Ashur-dan III (772-754 B.C.)
 - Ruled when Jonah preached his message to the Ninevites.
- Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.)
 - Received tribute from Menahem, King of Israel (752-742 B.C.) for support (see 2 Kings 15:17-20)
 - In 731 B.C., made Ahaz, King of Judah (732 B.C-715 B.C.), his vassal, receiving tribute (gold and silver from the Temple) in exchange for support against Rezin, King of Aram, and Pekah, the King of Israel (see 2 Kings 16:7-9)
- Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.)
 - Began the initial siege of Samaria in 722 B.C., ushering in the end of the Northern Kingdom, deporting Israelites to various places in Assyria (2 Kings 17:3-6)
- Sargon II (722-705 B.C.)
 - Completed the destruction and deportation of the Israelites (Northern Kingdom) to various locations throughout Assyria
 - Resettled the land of Samaria with people from near and far lands – Hamath, Avva, Cuthah, Babylon – to replace the Israelites (2 Kings 17:24-28)
 - Threatened Judah in 711 B.C. (see Isaiah 20)
- Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.)
 - Turned Nineveh into a truly magnificent city via major construction projects, and made it the capital city of Assyria in place of Asshur
 - In 701 B.C., invaded Judah during Hezekiah’s reign
 - destroyed many towns and cities
 - Encircled Jerusalem and threatened its destruction but defied God, a serious mistake, as the Lord met his challenge, dispatching an angel who killed 185,000 of Sennacherib’s soldiers, forcing him to return home to a seriously weakened military (see 2 Kings 18:13-19:36)
- Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.)
 - Regarded Judah as a vassal kingdom per extra-biblical building inscriptions
- Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.)
 - Likely the king that released Manasseh, King of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 33:10-13)

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- Considered the last great ruler of Assyria, with the empire in its peak prior to his death
- Defeated/destroyed Thebes in Egypt in 663 B.C. and brought treasures to Nineveh from Thebes, Babylon and Susa
- Best known for his extensive library he established at Nineveh (the library is now at the British Museum)
- Following his death in 627 B.C., Assyria began a swift death spiral, descending into civil wars that lead to its downfall
- Sinsharishkun (627-612 B.C.)
 - Ruler during downfall of the empire, when Nineveh was destroyed by a coalition of Babylonians (under Nabopolassar), Medes (under Cyaxares), and Scythians
 - Likely killed in the battle that ended Nineveh
 - The fall of Nineveh is the fulfillment of Nahum's prophecy and one of Zephaniah's prophecies (see Zephaniah 2:13-15)
- Ashur-uballit (612-606 B.C.)
 - Final ruler of Assyria, which was only a rump state at Haran after the fall of Nineveh
 - Unable to restore Assyria, which met its end at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in the Battle of Carchemish in 606 B.C. where Josiah, King of Judah was also killed (see 2 Chronicles 35:20-25)
- **Violence & Cruelty of Assyria Per Historical Records**
 - The following excerpts from ancient records of Assyrian kings demonstrate their violent and vile practices (see Reference [2])
 - Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.)
 - "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool . . . The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire."
 - "I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city."
 - Shalmaneser II (859-824 B.C.)
 - "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.)
 - "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."

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- Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.)
 - “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.”
 - Of his campaign against Egypt, he boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses “on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city walls with them.”

- **THE TEXT**

- The text of Nahum can be divided into two major sections:
 - Section 1 – The Coming of the Lord’s Judgment on Nineveh and Deliverance of Judah (Chapter 1)
 - Section 2 – The Judgment/Fall of Nineveh (Chapters 2 and 3)
- **1:1-15 (Section 1)**
 - 1-8 – The Kindness and Severity of God
 - These verses speak generally of God’s attributes, making the point that:
 - though He is slow to anger and abounding in love, He is not indifferent to sin
 - He is great in power, and His indignation at unrestrained sin will bring forth His fierce wrath which none can withstand
 - for those who put their trust in Him, He is a stronghold and safe refuge (v7)
 - 9-15 – Nineveh’s Doom and Comfort for God’s People
 - God Himself decrees Nineveh’s end, there will be no second chance
 - 9: *He will make a complete end; trouble will not rise up a second time*
 - 10: *“... they are consumed like stubble fully dried.”* Fully dried stubble burns rapidly, leaving no remnant.
 - 14: *“... ‘No more shall your name be perpetuated; ... I will make your grave, for you are vile.’”*
 - 11: *“... one who plotted evil ... a worthless counselor.”*
 - could be a reference to the entire series of Assyrian Kings who ruled from Nineveh, from Sennacherib on
 - could be a specific king, likely, Sennacherib, given his defiance of God and God’s severe response in turn (which is mentioned in detail three times in the OT -- 2 Kings 18:13-19:36, Isaiah 36-37, and 2 Chronicles 32:1-21)
 - God promises Judah their oppression by Assyria/Nineveh is over

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- 12-13: God promises that though He used Assyria to punish Judah for their sins, their punishment is over. Assyria will now be destroyed and they will never bother Judah again
- 15: Nahum tells Judah to rejoice in the good news of God's promise
 - Peace is guaranteed, no more military oppression from wicked Assyria
 - Assyria will vanish, unable even to pass through Judah
- **ASK:**
 - Is the joy that Nahum expresses over the good news of Nineveh's fall (1:15) contrary to the Christian spirit? (Consider Proverbs 11:10 vs. Proverbs 24:17-18)
- **2:1-3:19 (Section 2)**
 - In these verses (the remainder of the book), Nahum describes the coming destruction of Nineveh in detail, providing an eyewitness account of what will occur
 - The text has a elegant meter to it, with short, action-oriented sentences that present the calamity very forcefully
 - **2:1-13**
 - 1: Nineveh is called to prepare for war because her enemies are upon her and the battle has begun. The enemies are not named, but consisted of a coalition of Babylonians (under Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father), Medes (under Cyaxares) and Scythians.
 - 2: God is restoring Judah, meaning their oppression under Assyria will end because Nineveh will be destroyed
 - 3-12 describes the forceful attack and frenzied, futile defense
 - 3: Soldiers brandish their spears (2:3)
 - 4: Chariots are dashing about (2:4)
 - 6: The city's palace is flooded by water through the river gates
 - The attacking coalition likely seized and closed the gates of the dams on the north side of the city that fed Nineveh's canal system, allowing the water level to drop
 - They could then reopen them later to release a large volume of water that crashed into the wall (where the water entered through openings at the bottom) damaging it and flooding the palace
 - 8: The call for Assyrian warriors to stand and fight is unheeded
 - 9: The spoil for the attackers is plentiful

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- 10: Nineveh is desolate, as its inhabitants flee, are captured or slain. Pridelul from their long, violent rule over others, the Assyrians are now overwhelmed with terror; the tables have turned.
- 11-12: The Assyrians, in particular, the royal house, are rebuked for their violent cruelty
 - The lion was the national symbol for Assyria (and in general, a symbol for kingship in the ancient Near East)
 - Assyrian kings referred to themselves as lions
 - The kings were well known for their ferocity, violence and cruelty in attacking and devouring other lands (see the notes above, Violence & Cruelty of Assyria Per Historical Records)
- 13: *Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts ...*
 - Nineveh's end comes at the hands of her enemies, but it is really God Himself who is the attacker
 - *I will burn your chariots in smoke ... I will cut off your prey from earth.*
 - His judgment is final, their annihilation is guaranteed: *the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard.*
- **ASK:**
 - God said He was the one attacking Nineveh (2:13) but we know from history that the city was overrun by a coalition of Babylonians, Medes and Scythians. So who really destroyed Nineveh? Explain.
 - If God destroys one nation by using a second, does that mean the second nation has His favor? Explain
- **3:1-19**
 - 1: Nahum's pronouncement of woe declares a major reason for Nineveh's downfall: Assyria's cruelty and violence toward all others
 - "Woe to the city of blood, ..., full of plunder, never without victims
 - Assyria was always on the attack, crushing nations, dealing with their people harshly
 - See the notes above, Violence & Cruelty of Assyria Per Historical Records)
 - 2-3: Nahum continues describing his vision, the sights and sound of battle – whips cracking, horses charging into battle, spears and swords flashing, chariots rattling, bodies of the slain piling up
 - 4: Nineveh is likened to a prostitute who seduced and betrayed the nations

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- 5-7: God repeats His judgment of 2:13: *Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, ...*
 - God will strip the prostitute Nineveh and throw filth at her
 - He is the attacker, and will shame her before the nations
- 8-13: Nineveh is no safer from defeat that was Thebes; she will fall
 - Thebes was an important, powerful city in southern Egypt, once considered an impenetrable fortress with its strong defensive position that included a natural outer wall formed by the Nile, and the canals and channels that were built to bring water from the river
 - Despite its strength and strategic advantages, Thebes fell to the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C., and the Egyptians were dealt with violently and cruelly -- an event well known in the Near East and certainly one of immense pride to the Assyrians
 - Nineveh is no better fortified, no more invincible; she is as secure as ripe figs on a fig tree when shaken
 - Her soldiers are compared to women, i.e., they are lacking in strength and force sufficient to resist the fierce enemy
- 14: The prophet taunts the Assyrians by calling for defense activity – draw water for the siege, start making bricks to shore up your defenses
- 15: Nahum indicates that fire and sword will devour the inhabitants, like locusts devour the land
 - Archaeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood, charcoal and a thick layer of ash, providing clear evidence of the burning of the temple
 - Nahum taunts the Assyrians to multiply like locusts, they will need that ability to counter the looming disaster
- 16: Nineveh's vast wealth, the result of much merchant activity, will do her no good. The enemy will devour all there is – slaughtering, plundering – and leave as quickly as they came
- 17: Likewise, her leading men – princes and scribes, prominent for a time – will flee quickly when trouble from the enemy appears
- 18-19: Nahum closes with a final taunt addressed to the King of Assyria, probably the royal house in general – Nineveh is finished
 - Assyria's leaders and officials (shepherds) slumber (likely a reference to their death), and her people are scattered with no one to lead them
 - *There is no easing your hurt, your wound is grievous – Nineveh is destroyed, her wound beyond healing; the end has come.*

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ASK:

- What traits of God are brought to mind by the book of Nahum?
- Is the message in Nahum relevant in our world today?
- If Christians live in a wicked nation, are they guaranteed protection from the destruction God brings if He pours out His wrath in judgment on that nation?

REFERENCES

- [1] Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, Baker Book House, 1988. ISBN: 0-8010-5509-1
- [2] Chuck Missler, *The Prophets to the Southern Kingdom, A Commentary*, Koinonia House, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-57821-501-0

UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- What are some of the modern-day messages that we have heard through Nahum today?
- What can you do to help keep the nation you live in from falling under God's judgment and wrath?

WISDOM ✋ HANDS

- What messages did you hear in this lesson that need to be shared with people you know?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY? Think specifically.
- Commit to each other that you will all have the courage to share the message. Pray NOW and then pray for each other through the week to have the boldness to share.

PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Pray for our nation and ask God to bring about revival so that others may come to know Him. Ask Him to help us in sharing His message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Pray that we grow in our intimacy with Him through the study of His Word and in fellowship with one another.

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SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAH (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)