



St Helen's
Bishopsgate

BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Nahum



Background

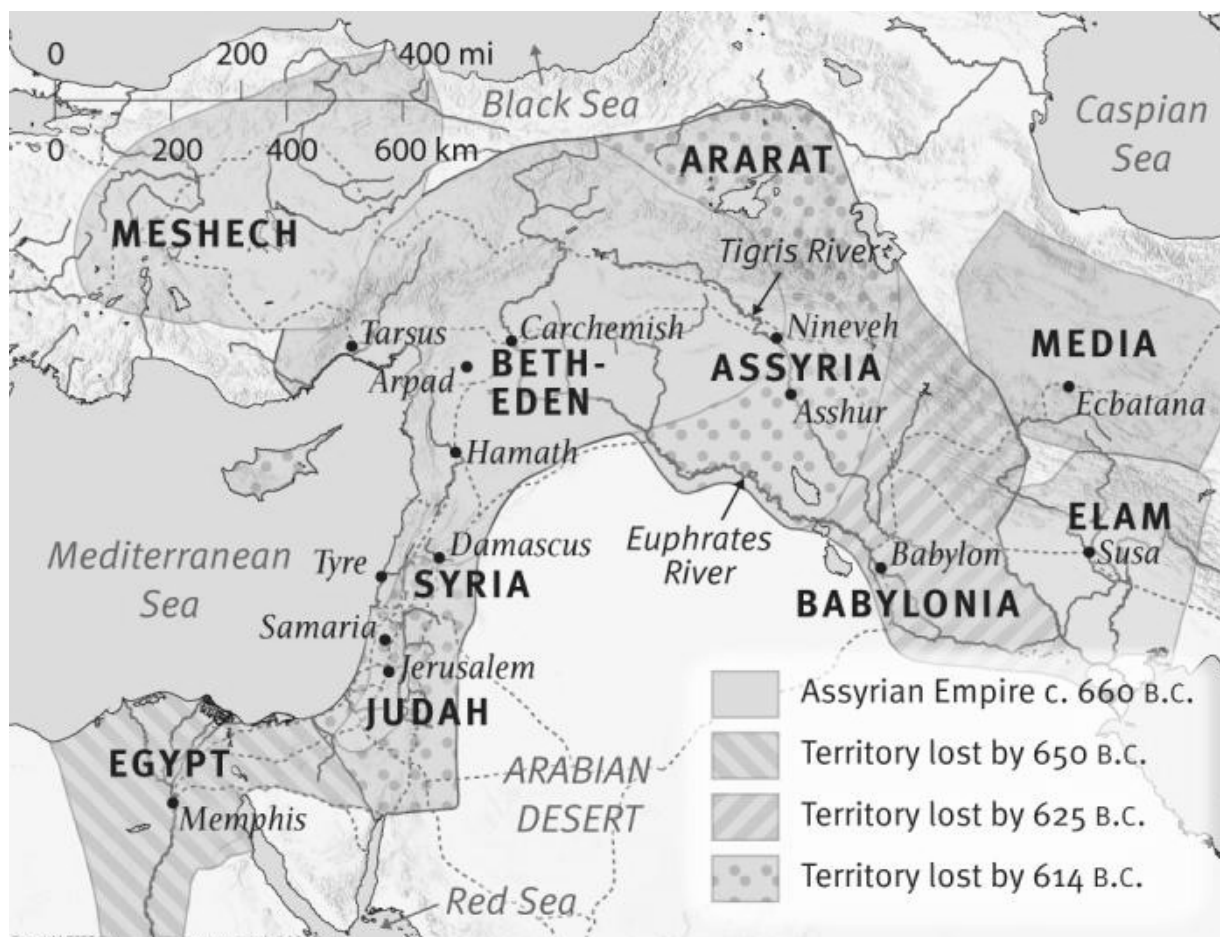
INTRODUCTION

The book of Nahum was written between Assyria's peak in 664BC and Nineveh's fall in 612BC. Nahum's name means comfort and although the book is good news for God's people, it is comfort from a powerfully uncomfortable God. Nahum of Elkosh could be poetic; comfort from a severe God (El Qasha).

Why do God's people need comforting? Because they are under the oppressive grip of Nineveh, the greatest city on earth at that time and the impregnable capital of Assyria's unstoppable empire. Nahum's audience, in contrast, was Judah, a tiny nation who had witnessed Assyria's ruthless army crush Israel years before. God's message to this tiny trembling nation is that Nineveh will fall and the Assyrian Empire will be overthrown.

You will discover that Nahum is a sequel to, and dramatic contrast with, Jonah. There we witnessed God's mercy for this great city of Nineveh. 120 years later, we observe that although God has stayed his hand of judgement, the Ninevite's repentance was short-lived. God's patience is not to be confused with powerlessness. Now God reveals that he will act to vindicate his name, save his people, and conquer his unrepentant enemies.

Be warned, Nahum may well turn your view of God on its head. It may radically change your image of those who spurn God's mercy, and reassure you that suffering for the glory of God is not in vain. Above all Nahum will, by God's grace, deepen both our loyalty and love for our Lord who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ... but who will by no means clear the guilty."

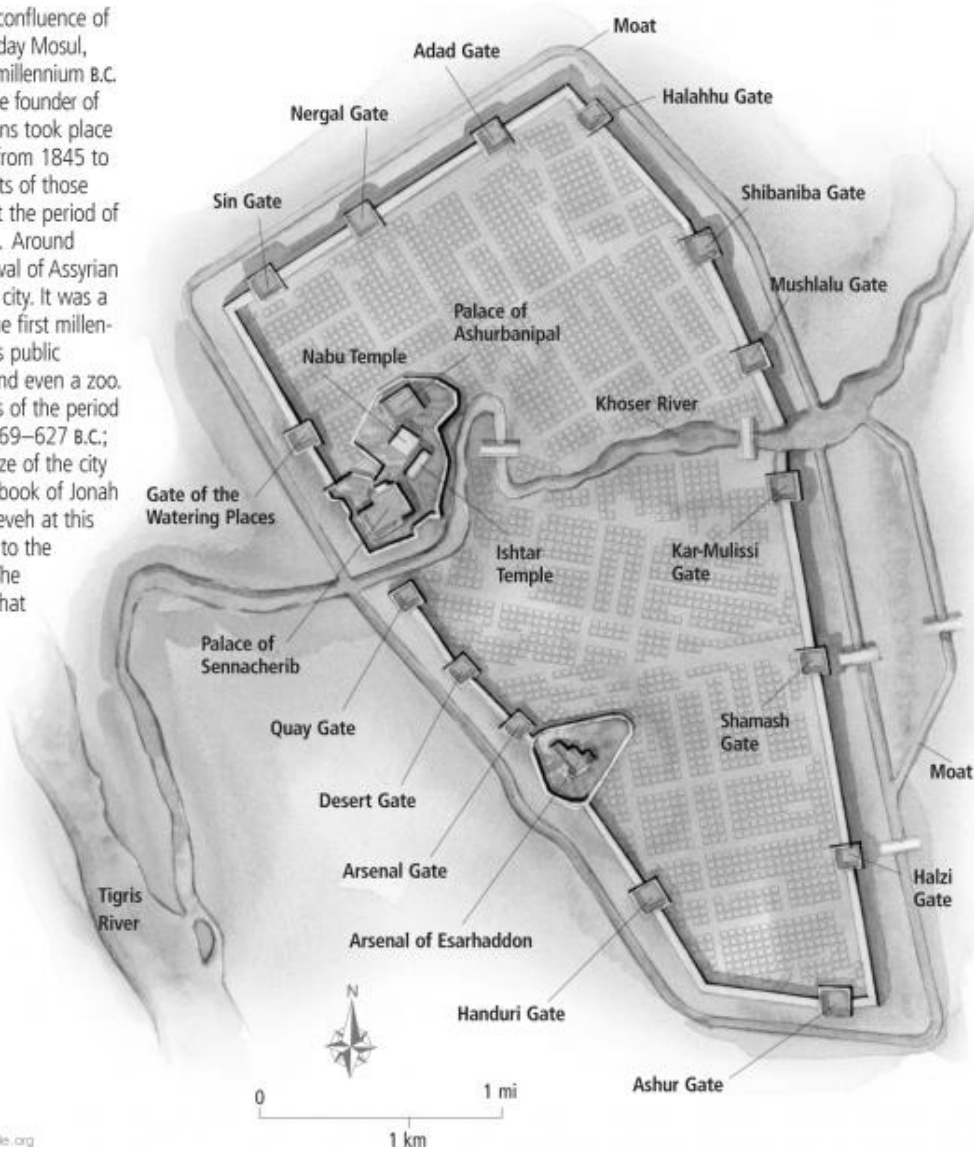


THE CITY OF NINEVEH

Nineveh was situated at the confluence of the Tigris and Khoser rivers (modern-day Mosul, Iraq). It was first settled in the seventh millennium BC. According to the Bible, Nimrod was the founder of the city (Gen 10:11). Major excavations took place under the direction of Henry Layard from 1845–1854. The diagram pictures the results of those excavations, especially as they reflect the period of the Assyrian Empire (1420–609BC). Around 1000BC a great revival of Assyrian power occurred, and Nineveh became a royal city. It was a thriving city during the first half of the first millennium. It contained many modern features such as public squares, parks, botanical gardens and even a zoo. One of the great archaeological finds of the period is the library of King Ashurbanipal (669–627BC; called Osnappar in Ezra 4:10). The size of the city was approximately 1,850 acres. The book of Jonah reflects the flourishing nature of Nineveh at this time (3:1–5). Nineveh eventually fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612BC. The invading armies dammed the rivers that supplied water to the city, causing a flood that broke through one of the perimeter walls, giving the foreign armies access to the city.

The City of Nineveh

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Nahum 1:1–9

Brainstorm

Many contemporary religious and secular commentators struggle with the Christian portrayal of God as both loving and angry. To what extent do we agree/disagree? Why?

Read 1:1-6

1. List what Nahum tells us about God. Which aspects would our friends/colleagues dislike?
2. Why would God's people back then need to know that God is jealous, angry, and powerful? What does Nahum say God will do? How do these vivid images alter our image of God (see Exodus 34:6–7)?
3. What is the conclusion Nahum wants us to draw in verse 6? How does the New Testament sharpen this question for us?

Read 1:7-9

1. How do these verses fit with what we have seen so far?
2. How do they help us understand how this book is a message of 'comfort' for God's people, and so uncomfortable for God's enemies?

Nahum 1:7–2:9

Brainstorm

How do you react to the news of Hindu or Muslim extremists persecuting Christians—how do you feel about a God who allows such persecution, and about the persecutors themselves?

Recap

In what way did Nahum 1:1-6 serve to reassure Nahum's first readers? To what extent did it challenge our perception of God?

Read 1:7–2:9

1. List what God says about:

- a) the suffering of God's people?

- b) the strength of God's enemies?

- c) the certainty of God's victory?

2. In what way would it encourage God's people that God 'knows' about their suffering and Assyria's strength? Today, when are we tempted to doubt this? On such occasions, what lies are we tempted to believe and what truths do we need to trust?

3. What is the challenge of today's passage for God's enemies, however mighty they may look in the present? What is the comfort for those who have taken refuge in God, however much they may be suffering?

4. What is the right response of God's people (1:15)? How can we help one another to rejoice in God's victory in Christ on the cross (Note how Paul uses this verse in Romans 10)?

Nahum 2:10–3:19

Brainstorm

How are our non-Christian colleagues and friends tempted to downplay being on the wrong side of God? In what ways are we tempted to agree with them, if not publicly then privately and functionally?

Recap

From chapters 1–2 so far, what does it mean to have God on your side? Be prepared to share what has encouraged you. How does 2:10 follow on from Nahum's description of Nineveh's inevitable defeat?

Read 2:10–3:7

1. Twice the Lord declares that he is against Nineveh (2:13; 3:5). How does Nahum use the images of the jungle (2:11–13), the battlefield (3:1–3), and the red-light area (3:4–7) to illustrate what it means to be on the wrong side of God?

2. What prevents us believing that God's enemies will be shamed in such a way? How does Jesus echo such warnings in the New Testament?

Read 3:8–19

1. Why does Nahum draw attention to Thebes (or No Amon)? How does Thebes' recent history act as a warning for Nineveh then, and how does Nineveh serve to warn us today?

2. Where may Nineveh have been tempted to place their confidence then, and how does Nahum expose such defences (3:13–17)? In what man-made strongholds do your non-Christian friends or colleagues trust in today, and how would you help them to see the futility of such misplaced confidence from Nahum?

3. In what ways has studying Nahum challenged your view of God and caused you to revere and love him more? What truths have comforted you, and how will your life in the City and at home change as a result?