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C1111 – April 6, 2011 – Nahum 1:1
Introduction To Nahum

We've been studying the Rise and the Reign of the Assyrian Kingdom in the wake of the Decline of the two Jewish Kingdoms. If a power vacuum is formed someone is always going to fill the power vacuum. As the United States declines in power there are other nations filling that vacuum as we speak. And in the 8th century BC power vacuum the kingdom that began to rise and fill was the Assyrian Kingdom. The Assyrians were on the brink of destruction. But God, by His own sovereign choice, sent Jonah to preach the word of God to them. God determines where His gospel goes and the level of revelation a people group receives and when Jonah preached, around 765BC, the Assyrians responded positively to the word of God and were saved. However, they quickly returned to their ways and began a conquest of the Middle East region, vying for supremacy with Egypt until in 721BC they defeated the northern kingdom of Israel and solidified their control of the region. That's the Rise of the Assyrian Kingdom.

There are a number of kings in this period that the Scriptures report interacted with Israel. There is a very helpful chart that comes from Dr Floyd Nolen Jones, in his thesis, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*. You can find it on the internet. Hopefully by now a few of these names are familiar to you. The Assyrian Kingdom is a major kingdom in world history. There are actually seven major successive Gentile kingdoms in history; you're familiar with the four spoken of by Daniel. But there is a broader scheme revealed by Daniel and John of seven kingdoms and the seven are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and Global Rome. Rome is split into two kingdoms because Global Rome is sufficiently different from ancient Rome to be considered by the scriptural authors as a kingdom in and of itself. Egypt and Assyria precede the four kingdoms of Daniel. It's these seven kingdoms, as far as Gentile kingdoms are concerned, that rule from the Flood of Noah

until the future Day of the Lord. They span the gap between these two global catastrophes. So if you know this seven-kingdom scheme and you delve into the history of these nations during their golden era's and you lay them alongside the Bible and you contrast them with Israel and the Church, you contrast their *modus operandi* with the *modus operandi* of Israel and the Church, then you have a pretty good idea of how the world system strategically wars against the people who are holding to the truth. Each of these kingdoms has a strategy of warring against the truth. So you want to pick up on the strategy they use because the same strategies are used over and over by Satan. In one sense Satan isn't that creative because he keeps using the same strategies. Assyria has a strategy and their strategy is the totalitarian regime. They set up one family, one dynasty and allocate all power to that family and the tactics of this family are to brutalize and terrorize and propagandize everybody else. That's what the Assyrian's did and that's what modern totalitarian regimes in the Middle East do today. It's nothing new. It's the same strategy that Satan promotes over and over and over - allocate all power in a single family or regime and use it to crush and destroy people and conquer the world. The Iranian's today are pushing this strategy under the false religion of Islam, but it's the same strategy and the same tactics; brutalization, terror and propaganda. The Ancient Assyrian's wrote the book on this strategy and these tactics.

So this ancient kingdom is very important; it rose to power between 765 and 721BC. And here are some of the kings involved. For one we have Ashur-Dan III, he is in 2 Chronicles, known as Pul and he was the King of Assyria when Jonah preached. His dates on the chart are 773-754BC. He personally repented at the preaching of Jonah and led his kingdom to the Lord. But the Lord stirred up his spirit to go against Israel and he received tribute from King Menahem who put himself under the Assyrian yoke. He didn't have to do that. He could have trusted the Lord but he didn't. Then came another king of Assyria we're not too interested in, Ashur-Nirari V. Then came a very strong Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III. He was a bloody warlord, a conquering king and Assyria owes most of its success to this guy. He greatly expanded their kingdom. He exacted tribute from virtually every kingdom in the region including Israel and Judah, so we have Tiglath-Pileser III and his dates are 745-727BC. Then we have Shalmaneser V and everyone thought he was weak so he led a campaign to teach them a lesson and in this campaign against Israel he waged a three year siege of Samaria and utterly destroyed it, sending the ten tribes of Israel into captivity. That was 723-721. He was

killed in the siege, probably in 722BC and so the next king of Assyria, Sargon II, completed it. So Shalmaneser V rules from 727-722BC. Then Sargon II comes to rule with his son, Sennacherib. Sargon rules from 722-705BC. During this time Sennacherib was his father's Tartan and the Tartan was the next in line to receive the crown and so he was the number two guy in the kingdom and he would lead military campaigns and so forth for the King.

Turn to 2 Kgs 19:20. Now that the Assyrian kingdom had taken over the region, now that they'd conquered and conquered and conquered, they began to inflate with arrogance. Be careful if your nation or kingdom becomes the superpower of the world because arrogance can creep in and once arrogance gets rooted in a kingdom it's only a matter of time before it's going to fall apart because arrogance can never properly evaluate; arrogance blinds you to the true state of affairs. That's why the Scriptures say arrogance cometh before a fall. It always leads to a fall because part and parcel of arrogance is I don't have a right analysis of myself, I can't evaluate properly, I overestimate myself and then because of my overestimate I overextend myself and get creamed. That's what happened to Assyria, They became very arrogant, they overestimated themselves. They started marching around like they were hot stuff and sooner or later when you do that you're going to run into someone bigger. Sennacherib ran into the Lord. He marched right up to the gates of Jerusalem with his propaganda boy, Rabshakeh and started spouting off against the God of Hezekiah. This is what really ticked God off. It wasn't so much that they came up against Hezekiah and Israel. It's that they came up and started spouting off against YHWH, the God of Israel. And the stuff this guy spouted off to scare everyone was first degree arrogance. It was a bunch of propaganda. Just like the Muslim clerics today, just like Ahmadinejad and Abbas and all the rest of the rulers who follow this strategy. They talk a lot of smack and how do the political players respond? How does the media respond? They don't do anything . Why? Because they're scared. They're a bunch of pansies and they fall for the propaganda. They bow the knee. But when Hezekiah heard the smack he didn't bow the knee. Here's a guy, a real guy, not a pansy believer, he's a tough as nails believer and he says I don't like that smack being said about the Lord my God. The Lord my God is bigger than you and so you can take your propaganda Rabshakeh and shove it because My God reigns. So Hezekiah did two things in a threatening situation that are examples for us. What's the first thing he did? He went to Isaiah. Why Isaiah? Because Isaiah was the prophet and the prophet gets the

word of God. So Hezekiah says I want to hear the word of God. The word of God brings things under control. Then what did he do? He went to the Lord in prayer. And it wasn't a little prayer, Hezekiah said, Lord, are you hearing this smack? You do have Your ears open don't you? Because I want you to read what this guy is saying, you can read can't you? Read this! It sounds like it lacks the kind of piety we ought to have in our prayers but that's the kind of prayer that God answered. So obviously that's the way God wants us to petition at the throne of grace. God wants you to march into His throne room and argue with Him. Go ahead, argue, and present your case. That's what gets the Lord's attention. And here's the Lord's response. Verse 22, "She has despised you and mocked you, The virgin daughter of Zion; She has shaken *her* head behind you, The daughter of Jerusalem! ²³"Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised *your* voice And haughtily lifted up your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!" Who was the arrogance against? God. Verse 24, "Through your servants you have reproached the Lord, And you have said, 'With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains, To the remotest parts of Lebanon; And I cut down its tall cedars *and* its choice cypresses. And I will go to its highest peak, its thickest forest. ²⁵I dug *wells* and drank waters, And with the sole of my feet I dried up All the rivers of Egypt.' ²⁶"Have you not heard? Long ago I did it, From ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps." In other words, what is God saying there? I turned you whatever direction you went. I did all this. I rule. Verse 27, that's why "their inhabitants were short of strength, They were dismayed and put to shame; They were *as* the vegetation of the field and *as* the green herb, As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up. ²⁸"But I know your sitting down And your going out and your coming in And your raging against Me. ²⁹"Because of your raging against Me And because your arrogance has come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back by the way which you came." Don't think you can get away with that kind of arrogance, you've crossed the line. Verse 33, "Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. ³⁴'By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,' declares the LORD. ³⁵'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" That last verse is very important. God is answering the prayer for His own sake, something

Sennacherib said reached into the depths of the character of our God and when someone has the gall to do that God finally says, that's it. I'm going to show you who's Boss and when Sennacherib woke up in the morning he found 185,000 of his soldiers dead. He went home with his tail between his legs; he doesn't make mention of any victory report over Jerusalem. So in his palace he has a relief of Lachish because that was the biggest thing he could get his hands on in Judah. Jerusalem was defended by a much Bigger Boy. Hiis sole rex was from 705-681BC and in that year he was worshipping in one of his temples, they had a whole slew of gods and goddesses, they were polytheists, and two of his sons came up behind him with a sword and murdered him. Typical death of a tyrant, conspiracy from within the regime, someone on the inside takes him out. In the same year his son Esarhaddon comes to the throne. He's equally arrogant. The family didn't learn the lesson. Like so many families they keep trudging along in their sinful patterns. He rules from 681-669BC. He says of himself, "I am powerful, I am all powerful, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal, I am honored, I am magnified, I am without equal among all kings...These guys were real pieces of work. His son comes to the throne and this is all the same family! His son Ashurbanipal comes to the throne, he says of himself, "I [am] Ashurbanipal, the great [king], the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria..." In 663BC he led a campaign to Egypt in which he boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses "on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city wall(s) with them." That's the kind of humane treatment you could expect from the Assyrians; typical Middle East tyrant tactics. Arrogance produces a lot of nasty stuff. These people were sick; they were a cancer on the earth. So it's during Ashurbanipal's reign that Nahum is going to be written because it appeared that evil had become so powerful that it was actually going to prevail. The people of Judah thought that if this goes on, if this continues, we're going to disappear as a kingdom and all of God's promises in the covenants are going to go right down the drain. So how can God allow this to go on? What kind of stuff was going on? Here's some of the stuff. These are from the annals of some of the Assyrian kings. "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." Another king says, "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) 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" (ibid., 2:127). Ashurbanipal (669-626) 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" (ibid., 2:319)." If that's the kind of news headlines you're reading, those kind of brutality tactics being used, do you think people were scared of them? Yeah they were. And it seemed that there was no stopping them. So it's in that environment that God sent the prophet Nahum.

Let's turn to Nahum. That's all historical background. There will be a few more kings that come after Ashurbanipal, when the prophecy is fulfilled and we can learn some principles of how to interpret prophecy by how this prophecy was fulfilled. But we now know the historical situation. Judah is crying out for deliverance from Assyrian cruelty and dominance. In verse 1 **Nahum the Elkoshite** is named as the author. Nahum means "to console" "to comfort," and he's consoling Judah with this message of the destruction of Nineveh. Some have doubted Nahum is his real name and said this is pseudepigraphal, which means it was written under a false name. These are the liberal scholars who reject the inspiration of Scripture, and so it was created purely by human beings and whoever wrote it gave himself the name Nahum, which wasn't really his name, but the author said, hey, wouldn't that be neat if my name summarized the message of my book. But like we've seen with so many of the prophets, God sovereignly used the prophet's name to depict the message He wrote through them. So, for example, Jonah means dove, a dove is a flighty bird and Jonah was a flighty believer. Or Amos, Amos means "burden" and he carried a burdensome prophecy against Israel. Joel means YHWH is God and the theme of Joel is the day of the Lord, a day when YHWH demonstrates catastrophically in history that He is God. So we have no reason to think Nahum isn't his real name. We already have a historical pattern laid down for how God does this. And none of the biblical books are pseudepigraphical. The Bible doesn't lie about names or just use poetic descriptions of authors. That's nonsense. Nahum wrote the book and we don't know anything about Nahum except is says Nahum the Elkoshite. And nobody knows what that is. It could be a geographic location or it could be a family name. Some say Elkosh was Nahum's hometown. But we don't know because we've never found a city with that name. It doesn't mean

there's not one; it just means we haven't found one. Jerome, the guy who lived in Bethlehem and translated the Hebrew OT and Greek NT into Latin, the Latin Vulgate, said Elkosh was a town in Galilee and he wrote early in church history but we've never found it. If it was a town in the Galilee then it was in the northern kingdom and the great majority of them were in captivity. Another suggestion is that it's Capernaum where Peter lived. Jesus spent a lot of time there. Capernaum means "village of Nahum," and I've been there a couple of times, it sits right on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, but archaeology of this town puts its founding in the 2nd century BC, long after Nahum in the 7th century BC, so that's not likely, though the village may have been named in memory of Nahum, he's probably not from there. Others say Elkosh was on the Tigris River north of modern-day Mosul near Nineveh, somewhat near where Jonah is traditionally said to be buried. Some identify Elkosh as a town east of the Jordan River. Nobody really knows. Some of the Jewish rabbis argued that Elkosh was a family name. He was from the family of Elkosh. But there's no conclusive evidence. What we do know is that he ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah.¹ His message is to console them by predicting the destruction of Nineveh.

Date

As far as the date of writing if you'll look at Nahum 3:8. Nahum reports about a campaign that we know from Assyrian records Ashurbanipal led into the depths of Egypt. He went into the Nile delta and then south along the Nile River all the way to the city of Thebes and defeats it. Verse 8, "Are you," speaking to Nineveh, "Are you better than No-amon," you probably have a note in your margin that No-amon refers to Thebes, "Which was situated by the waters of the Nile, With water surrounding her, Whose rampart *was* the sea, Whose wall *consisted* of the sea? ⁹Ethiopia was *her* might, And Egypt too, without limits. Put and Lubim were among her helpers. ¹⁰Yet she became an exile, She went into captivity; Also her small children were dashed to pieces At the head of every street; They cast lots for her honorable men, And all her great men were bound with fetters." So if Nahum records the defeat of Thebes and that occurred in 663BC then we know Nahum was written after 663BC. So the terminus a quo, the earliest date is 663. What's the terminus ad quem, the latest date? The fall of Nineveh, predicted in Nahum, occurred in 612BC. So the book was written between 663 and 612. Walter A. Maier

suggests that Nahum gave his prophecy soon after Thebes fell, between 663 and 654BC. His arguments include these:

1. The description of Nineveh (1:12; 3:1, 4, 16) does not match the decline of the Assyrian nation under Ashurbanipal's sons, *Ashur-etil-ilāni* (626-623 BC) and Sin-shar-ishkun (623-612BC).
2. When Nahum prophesied, Judah was under the Assyrian yoke (1:13, 15; 2:1, 3). This fits with the reign of Manasseh over Judah (697-642 BC) more than with the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC).
3. The Medes rose in power around 645BC as an independent nation, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire began in 626BC. If Nahum had written shortly before Nineveh's fall to those nations in 612BC, mention of them would be expected. But since Nahum does not mention the Medes or the Babylonians, he probably wrote his prophecy before 645BC.
4. Most important, however, is the fact that nine years after Thebes was destroyed, it was restored (in 654 BC). Nahum's rhetorical question in 3:8 would have had little or no force if it had been written after 654.ⁱⁱ

So we'll date it sometime between 663BC, the destruction of Thebes and 654BC, the rebuilding of Thebes.

Outline

- I. The Oracle of Nineveh (1:1)
- II. The Lord Declares Judgment on His Enemies (1:2-14)
 - A. The General Declaration of Judgment (1:2-8)
 - B. The Specific Application to Nineveh (1:9-14)
- III. The Lord Describes His Judgment on Nineveh (1:15-3:19)
 - A. The Salvation of Jacob (1:15-2:2)
 - B. The Description of the Battle (2:3-7)
 - C. The Description of the Plundering (2:8-13)
 - D. The Description of the Reason (3:1-7)
 - E. The Description of the Inevitability (3:8-19)

Purpose

What's the purpose of the book? The purpose is revealed in the first verse by the substance of two words. **The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.** Notice the word **oracle**. This word can

mean just a prophetic pronouncement or it can mean “a burden,” the burden of carrying something heavy and in this case it could mean the heavy burden of the destruction of Nineveh since that is the main subject of the book. Almost every verse refers to the destruction of Nineveh in 612BC. So one side of the purpose is to describe the heavy burden of destruction coming upon Nineveh; the other side of the purpose is given by the author’s name, Nahum, which means “to console or comfort” and so the message is one of comfort to Judah. There are a few verses devoted to this purpose.

So the two-fold purpose of the book is to describe the heavy burden of destruction coming upon Nineveh in order to console the Judeans. God knew His people needed this word because the evil of the Assyrian empire had grown to mass proportions and the Judeans were crying out, God, are you going to take care of this evil cancer? God, if you love us and if you’re good, why are you permitting this cancer to persist? What is your purpose in allowing this cancer to continue? These questions vexed the Judeans and so Nahum’s message consoled them, assuring them that God had a purpose for this cancerous people that was consistent with His character and that once this purpose was accomplished, then He would judge.

Theme

The theme is found in Nahum 1:3 and this basically is the answer to the problem of evil. The problem of evil is basically that how can an all-good and all-powerful God co-exist with evil. It’s considered a logical problem and the answer in Nahum is not the answer you will frequently hear Christians give. The most common answer to the problem of evil was advanced by Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga’s argument is the free will argument. God created man with free will because it is greater for a creature to have free will than to not have free will. So what Plantinga does is create an abstract category of greatness and say God must do things this way because of this category of greatness and what he’s actually done is nothing other than what all the Greek philosophers have done and that is create abstract categories and then put God under those categories. Then he goes on to argue that a universe with free will is a better universe than a universe without free will. And that’s basically doing the same thing he did before, create an abstract category of betterness and after that submit God to those categories. So that’s basically the argument put forth by Plantinga, he’s one of the world’s most

foremost philosophers, he teaches at Notre Dame and his argument has been accepted as coherent by secular academics, and the reason why is because nothing in his argument is contrary to paganism. It's an explication of humanism and it's not the answer that God gives through Nahum. God's answer brings in three attributes of God. If you look at verse 3, **The LORD is slow to anger**, let's say gracious for the sake of simplifying things at this time, the LORD is gracious, there's a time element involved in this attribute, grace implies a delay, then he goes on to another attribute, **and great in power**, what attribute? Omnipotent, God is all-powerful, so can God remove evil? He has the ability to remove evil, He's all-powerful. And then a third attribute, **And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished**. What attribute? Just and righteous. God is just and righteous. His righteousness means His character is the standard for what is right and wrong. His justice means that when He judges He does so impartially, God doesn't play favorites. So His justice and His righteousness mean that He Himself is the standard and He's not going to compromise the standard. He may delay judging according to the standard, God is gracious, but His grace doesn't mean compromising His justice. Grace goes on for awhile and then finally He exercises His justice and His power judges. So the answer to the problem of evil is that God is gracious and His grace delays the exercise of His omnipotence according to His justice.

And you have to say, I've done this on message boards, if you find unbelievers bringing up the problem of evil, they'll propose it just the way I have it and if they're asking why God allows it to go on and on just point out that it's a function of God's grace. He is going to judge; it's just that there's more to God than justice, there's also grace and that means He delays exercising the justice. If they're acquainted enough with Christianity they'll say, because I've seen them say to me a number of times in these kinds of discussions, hey, that's right, I forgot about that part of Christianity. And it shows that the problem of evil is not being discussed in these terms very often. The argument has been framed in a wrong way and we have to re-frame the argument. So you'll find if you discuss things with people that most people are not accustomed to thinking of the problem of evil in the frame the Bible sets it in and so one of my hopes is that we can break out of the traditional frame. And it reminds us that we have to be very careful not to allow the agenda to get set by the opposition and then we go rushing in to answer and before you know it we're all in a ball of wax and so it's my hope that we can

re-frame this question in terms of our agenda, set them up so that when they go to try and give an answer they're all in a ball of wax. So we'll be working with this problem but I think it's really neat that God has given us this answer in Nahum and that it has historical precedence. Whether God is going to solve the good and evil problem and how He does it is not an abstract question, it's a historical question that's answered by the battle of 612BC between the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians against Nineveh.

So 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1493). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1494–1496). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1496). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

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