

A Visitor's Guide to the Old Testament

The Book of Nahum

- I. So, what happened to Nineveh after Jonah?
 - A. Unprecedented (in more than one way)
 - B. Timing (for N.T. believers, Romans 12:19)
 - C. Unfortunately, no surprise
 - D. Yes, an agent of the LORD, but... (Isaiah 10:5-7)

- II. The LORD has a message for those who rebel against his purposes
 - A. "Nineveh" or "Assyria" not mentioned in ch. 1, except in the title verse!
 - B. Nahum, one of THREE prophets aimed at specific Gentile nations
 - C. Nahum concludes Jonah's story, but not narrative – prophetic (and fulfilled!)
Title (1:1)... tells us both the "what" and the "who"
 - D. Covenant consistency
 1. The LORD's message against those who opposed his people was in line with his covenant promises (Genesis 12:3)
 2. The Lord's treatment of those who opposed his people also a warning to Israel (Deuteronomy 28)
 - E. Nonetheless, God sent Nahum, that is "comfort", to his remnant

- III. The Uniqueness of the prophet Nahum
 - A. Companion volume to Jonah
 - B. A hymn of praise and glory to God that begins the book
 - C. Later than the "golden age" of prophets – contemporary of...
 - D. Stylistically superior (acrostic, 1:2-8; words to match the mood, 2:1, 9,10; 3:1-3)
 - E. Assyria's Epitaph

Outline of the Book of Nahum

Theme: Woe to Those Who Oppose the LORD - OR - Comfort for the LORD's People

- I. Doom Declared (focus on the Judge... the Who) (1)**
 - A. Because of the LORD's attributes (1:2-8)
 - B. Because of the rebellion of those who oppose the LORD (1:9-15)

- II. Doom Described (focus on the Judgment... the How) (2)**
 - A. The advance of Nineveh's enemies (2:1,2)
 - B. The attack on Nineveh's defenses (2:3-7)
 - C. The plundering of Nineveh (2:8-10)
 - D. The destruction of Nineveh's "Lair" (2:11-13)

- III. Doom Deserved (focus on the Justification... the Why) (3)**
 - A. Because of Nineveh's brutal conquests and slave trade (3:1-7)
 - B. The example of Thebes (3:8-10)
 - C. Nineveh's inevitable destruction (3:11-18)
 - D. The response of the nations (3:19)

(Adapted from Hampton Keathley IV, The Minor Prophets, 7. Nahum, www.bible.org)

Comparison of Companion Books of Jonah and Nahum

| Jonah: The Mercy of God | Nahum: The Judgment of God |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 800 B.C. | 650 B.C. |
| Emphasis on the prophet | Emphasis on the prophecy |
| Disobedient prophet | Obedient prophet |
| Obedient Nation | Disobedient Nation |
| Deliverance from water | Destruction by water (?) |
| Repentance of Nineveh | Rebellion of Nineveh |

Questions for the Book of Nahum

I. Doom Declared (focus on the Judge... the Who) (1)

1. What does it mean that God is “jealous” (verse 2)? See Exodus 20:5 and Isaiah 42:8.
2. Pick out one word picture about God’s power in verses 3-6 that impresses you the most.
3. Verses 7 and 8 speak of law and gospel. Where is the gospel? Where is the law? Does this apply to the world today?
4. God had used Nineveh to punish his people for their sins. But once they finished God’s work, what would God do to them because of their cruelty to his people? (verses 9-14) What would he do for his people? (verse 15)

II. Doom Described (focus on the Judgment... the How) (2)

1. Most of this chapter is a dire prediction of what would happen to Assyria. Yet in verse 2 the Lord gives us a wonderful look into the future. What does Nahum see? Why do you think this verse is interjected here?
2. In verse 3 we hear that the shields of “his” warriors are red. Who is the “he” in this verse?
3. To whom does each of the following sections refer? What scene does Nahum so vividly produce in each section?
 - “The shields of his soldiers are red.” (verses 3,4)
 - “He summons his picked troops, yet . . .” (verses 5-10)
 - “Where now is the lion’s den . . .” (verses 11-13)
4. About two hundred years after Nineveh’s fall, the Greek historian Xenophon stood on the site of the great city, but didn’t realize it because there was no trace left of it. What does that tell us about God’s Word?

III. Doom Deserved (focus on the Justification... the Why) (3)

1. What would Nineveh receive for its prostitution and cruelty? (verses 1-4)
2. What does it mean that God would show everyone Nineveh’s nakedness? (verses 5,6)
3. What point does Nahum make with the reference to Thebes? (verses 7-11)
4. How do verses 12-19 describe Assyria’s powerlessness in the face of its enemy?
5. What hope is left for Nineveh?

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Majoring on the minors – Nahum: A prophet of... comfort?!? (by Prof. Thomas Kock)

Nahum means “comfort.” But Nahum’s prophecy begins: “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath” (1:2). That’s . . . comfort? Let’s talk about it.

A Message of Wrath

The book of Nahum is directed primarily against Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians built their empire by ferociously attacking other nations, killing, pillaging, then exacting exorbitant tribute. Nineveh’s cruelty was breathtaking. History records the Ninevites flaying some of their prisoners or impaling captured peoples on sharpened poles. Their warfare was brutal.

Yet what did God do? In amazing grace, God sent Jonah to prophesy to the Ninevites. And amazingly, the people of Nineveh repented! Jonah’s book ends with a beautiful statement of God’s love even for Nineveh: “And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?” (Jonah 3:11)

But it wasn’t long until Nineveh was back at it. About 40 years later, they would conquer the Northern Kingdom, killing or exiling most of its inhabitants. The Assyrians then imported other captured peoples into the conquered north, and the intermarriage between them and the remaining Israelites resulted in the people called Samaritans. Later they would invade Judah and decimate most of the country, but God miraculously intervened and preserved Judah (cf. Isaiah 37:36,37).

Now it’s Nahum’s time, and God’s patience with Nineveh had run out. Yes, God is “slow to anger,” but he also “will not leave the guilty unpunished” (1:3). Although “the LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble” (1:7), it’s also true that “with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of (Nineveh)” (1:8). God had been incredibly gracious! He’d sent them a prophet. But Nineveh had abused God’s grace. So, now they would feel God’s severe punishment: “Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses” (3:3). Naham concludes his prophecy: “All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?” (3:19).

Jonah taught us that God graciously cared for Nineveh; Nahum tells us that the Ninevites, who scorned God’s grace, would feel his wrath.

A Message of Comfort for Believers

And this is comfort? For the people of God, yes, it’s comfort, for it reminds us of important truths:

- God will not be mocked. Those who stand against God will eventually feel his wrath.
- God advanced his plan of salvation through the Ninevites. Their judgment meant God was serious about disobedience and rebellion, and that judgment brought the Southern Kingdom to its knees in repentance.
- Even in the middle of this great judgment, the Lord held out grace and mercy to his faithful.
- Yes, that’s comfort!

Those comforts remain today. Those who stand against God will feel his wrath. God acts sometimes with brutal force to bring people to repentance. But we find comfort because “the LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (1:7). And that’s a great comfort.

Home: Elkosh. Maybe in southern Judah?

Date: Sometime between 663 (fall of Thebes) and 612 B.C. (fall of Nineveh).

Unique feature: Almost completely directed against one nation—Assyria (and Nineveh, its capital).

Key verse: 2:13 and 3:5. “I am against you,” declares the LORD Almighty.”

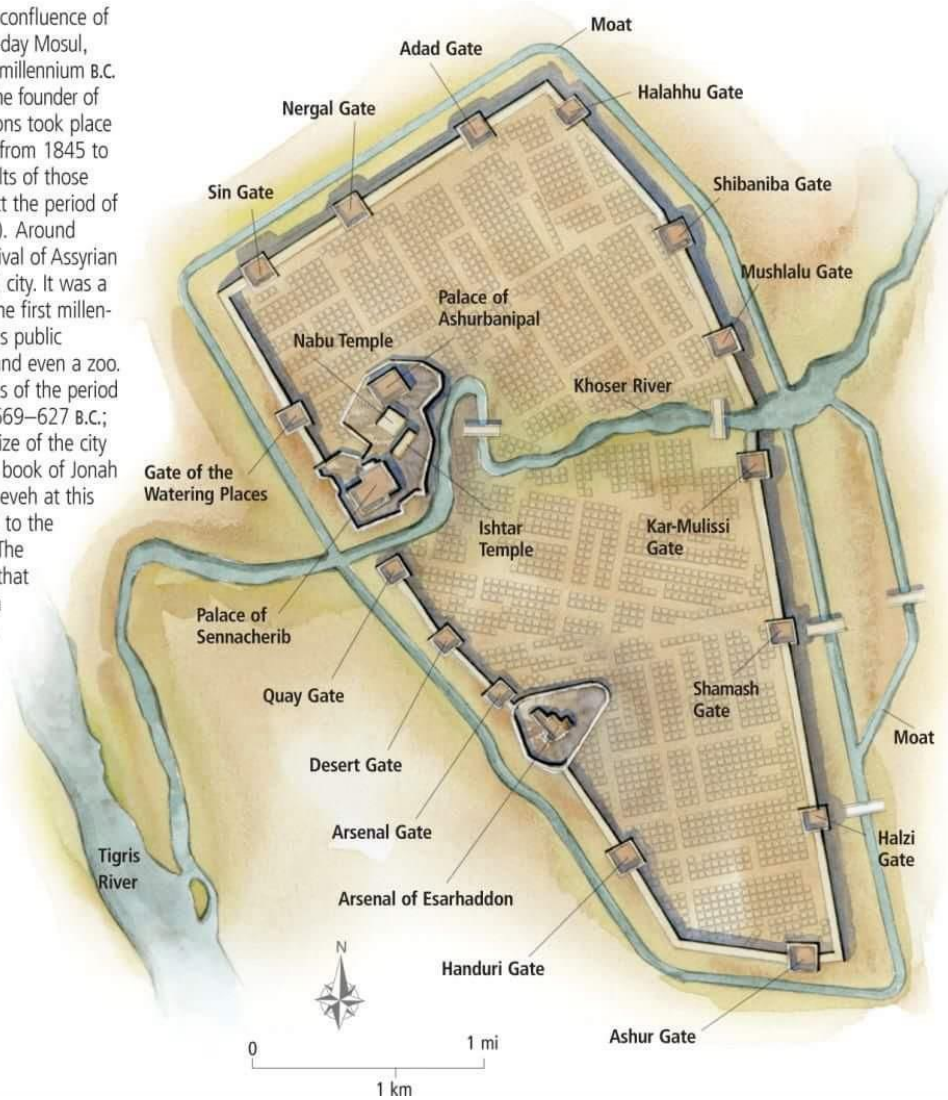
Fulfillments of Nahum's Prophecies

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. The Assyrian fortresses surrounding the city would be easily captured (3:12).</p> | <p>1. According to the Babylonian Chronicle the fortified towns in Nineveh's environs began to fall in 614 B.C. including Tabris, present-day Sharif-Khan, a few miles northwest of Nineveh.</p> |
| <p>2. The besieged Ninevites would prepare bricks and mortar for emergency defense walls (3:14).</p> | <p>2. Olmstead reported: "To the south of the gate, the moat is still filled with fragments of stone and of mud bricks from the walls, heaped up when they were breached" (<i>History of Assyria</i>, p. 637).</p> |
| <p>3. The city gates would be destroyed (3:13).</p> | <p>3. Olmstead noted: "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 counter-wall raised by the inhabitants in their last extremity" (<i>History of Assyria</i>, p. 637).</p> |
| <p>4. In the final hours of the attack the Ninevites would be drunk (1:10; 3:11).</p> | <p>4. Diodorus Siculus (ca. 20 B.C.) wrote, "The Assyrian king ... distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions ... While the whole army was thus carousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy's camp and made unexpected attack by night" (<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 4).</p> |
| <p>5. Nineveh would be destroyed by a flood (1:8; 2:6, 8).</p> | <p>5. Diodorus wrote that in the third year of the siege heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood part of the city and break part of the walls (<i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 9; 2. 27. 13). Xenophon referred to terrifying thunder (presumably with a storm) associated with the city's capture (<i>Anabasis</i>, 3. 4. 12). Also the Khosr River, entering the city from the northwest at the Ninlil Gate and running through the city in a southwesterly direction, may have flooded because of heavy rains, or the enemy may have destroyed its sluice gate.</p> |
| <p>6. Nineveh would be destroyed by fire (1:10; 2:13; 3:15).</p> | <p>6. Archeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood charcoal, and ashes. "There was no question about the clear traces of the 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" (RC.Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson, <i>A Century of Exploration at Nineveh</i>, pp. 45, 77).</p> |
| <p>7. The city's capture would be attended by a great massacre of people (3:3).</p> | <p>7. "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, <i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> 2. 26. 6-7).</p> |
| <p>8. Plundering and pillaging would accompany the overthrow of the city (2:9,10)</p> | <p>8. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, "Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off. overthrow of the city(2:9-10). The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap" (Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i>, 2:420).</p> |
| <p>9. When Nineveh would be captured its people would try to escape (2:8).</p> | <p>9. "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, <i>Bibliotheca Historica</i>, 2. 26. 8).</p> |
| <p>10. The Ninevite officers would weaken and flee (3:17).</p> | <p>10. The Babylonian Chronicle states that "[The army] of Assyria deserted [lit., ran away before] the king" (Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i>, 2:420).</p> |
| <p>11. Nineveh's images and idols would be destroyed (1:14).</p> | <p>11. Campbell Thompson and R. W. Hutchinson reported that the statue of the goddess Ishtar lay headless in the debris of Nineveh's ruins ("The British Museum Excavations on the Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh, 1930-1," <i>Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology</i>. 19, pp. 55-6).</p> |
| <p>12. Nineveh's destruction would be final (1:9, 14).</p> | <p>12. Many cities of the ancient Near East were rebuilt after being destroyed (e.g., Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon) but not Nineveh.</p> |

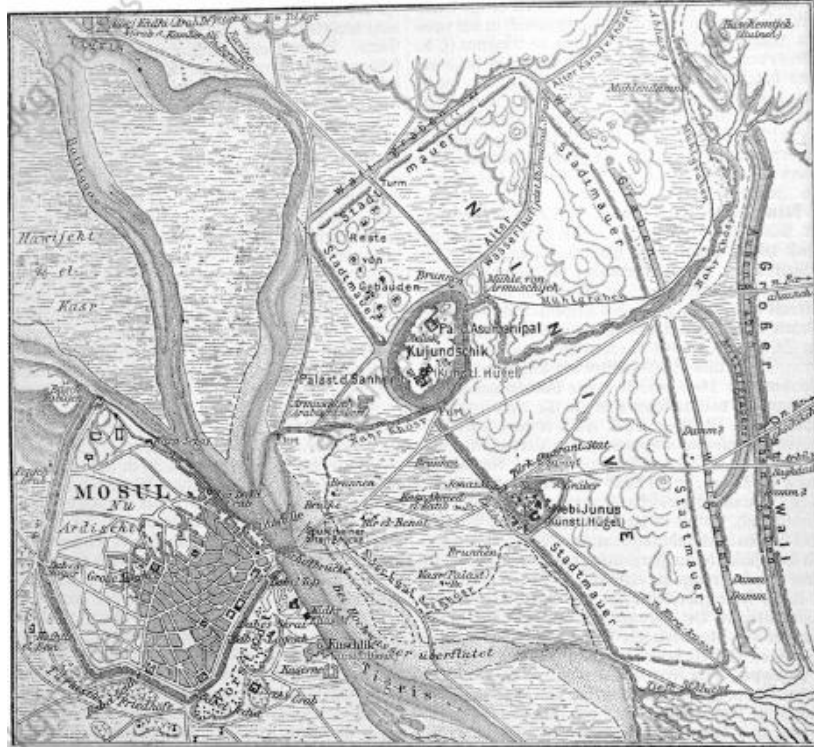
Map of the Ancient City of Nineveh

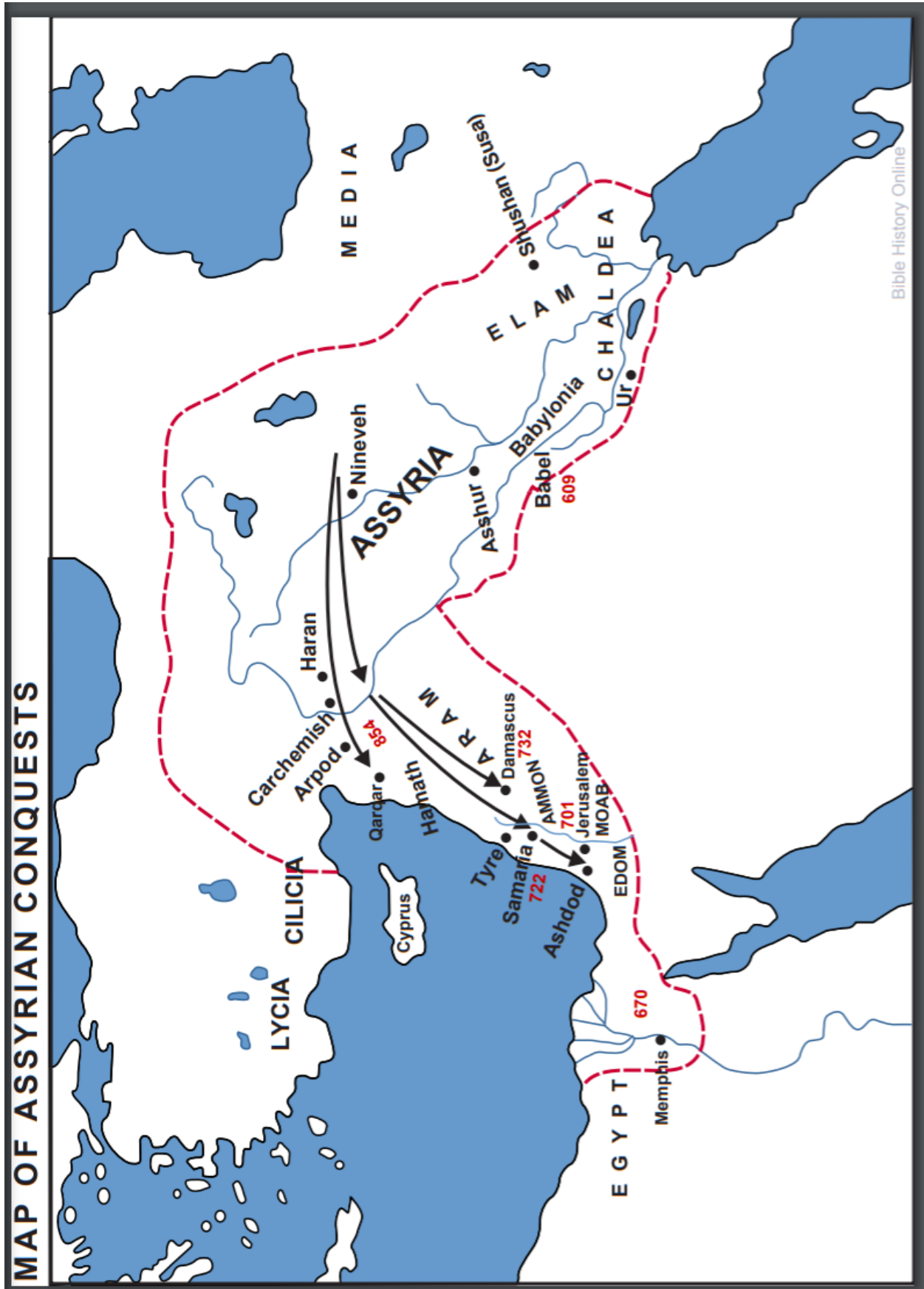
The City of Nineveh

Nineveh, which was situated at the confluence of the Tigris and Khoser rivers (modern-day Mosul, Iraq), was first settled in the seventh millennium B.C. 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 to 1854. The diagram pictures the results of those excavations, especially as they reflect the period of the Assyrian Empire (1420–609 B.C.). Around 1000 B.C. there occurred a great revival of Assyrian power, and Nineveh became a royal city. It was a thriving city during the first half of the first millennium, and contained such luxuries 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 (669–627 B.C.; 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 612 B.C. 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.



Map of the Ancient City of Nineveh and Modern City of Mosul





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