

Nahum

August 4, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Nahum 1:1-15

Session Outline

1. The Setting (Nahum 1:1)
2. The Judgment (Nahum 1:2-8)
3. The Result (Nahum 1:9-15)

Theological Theme

Nahum warned Nineveh of the coming destruction they would face as a punishment for their wickedness. God's people were strengthened by the fact that God has His eyes on both the wicked and the righteous.

Call to Action

Brentwood's Goal #6 Key Ministry Strategies. This is our opportunity as the people of God to show the community, "the LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him!"



Leader Guide

Nahum

Introduction

Sometimes big news can be good for one group of people and hard for another group. Think about election results. The same news is great for one side while it can be devastating for the other. An engagement announcement can be the best of times for the couple while a former significant other may realize the hope of reconciliation is gone. A great job promotion for one person means another candidate will be turned down.

Perspective and position play a huge role in how certain types of news is received. Today we are studying a book of the Bible centered on a prophetic word given about one group of people that also had implications for another group. The perspective in Nahum comes down to the people's relationship with God. It was destruction and devastation for one group and encouragement and hope for the other.

- ❓ When have you received positive or negative information that would have impacted another person or group of people in the opposite way?
- ❓ How does perspective make a difference when receiving the same information?

Session Summary

Although Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them years earlier, they slipped back into all their evil ways of idolatry, wickedness, and oppression of God's people. The Lord gave a vision to Nahum and sent him to proclaim the coming judgment and punishment God was going to bring. God promised there would not be a second judgment because this first one would be completely devastating.

This message gave encouragement to God's people who were suffering under daily abuse. It was a reminder that God was watching out for them, and He takes the mistreatment of His people very seriously. Regardless

of the opposition, God is our source of strength. Despite evidence that Nineveh was strengthening and seemingly impossible to defeat, God was at work preparing to put them in their place and pour out His wrath on them. God also had a plan of redemption and planned to bring victory to His people. Nahum stressed that God is good, loving, kind, and patient. He was not reacting hastily according to the moment but delayed giving the people time to decide if they would repent or face the consequences.

1. The Setting (Nahum 1:1)

The book of Nahum begins with an introduction to what was coming. The prophet Nahum received an oracle against the city of Nineveh. This message Nahum received was for the people of Nineveh but also had implications for the people of Judah and Israel.



How is a Word from God always good news for some and bad news for others?

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and is the same city that Jonah preached repentance to about a hundred years earlier. Nahum's call was to preach to these people who had slipped back into sin and needed to repent. The message given to Nahum was more than words; it was a vision that enabled Nahum to paint a picture of what he had seen in the prophetic vision through his words. Nahum's prophecy is also a reminder that God deals with both individuals and nations.

Nineveh had been a long time enemy of Judah and Israel. Nahum's name meant "comfort," and his words did bring comfort to Israel and Judah while warning Nineveh of the judgment, divine wrath, and devastation they would face. Hearing that God saw the actions of Nineveh and would respond uplifted and encouraged both Israel and Judah. Throughout the Bible, God continually reminds His people that wickedness will not have the last word in the world.




How does the reminder that God will not allow injustice and wickedness to go on forever serve as an encouragement to God's people? How does it motivate us to persevere?

Imagine how it would have felt to those who had been suffering under the Assyrian rule to hear God was about to judge the Assyrians and pour out His wrath. Fear, abuse, oppression, and mistreatment were daily occurrences. Nahum's prophetic oracle describing how Nineveh was going to meet justice was something the people of God had longed for. This was great news for Israel but terrible news for Nineveh.


From God, Not Man

Nahum's designation as "vision" prohibits its being dated near the time of Nineveh's fall as if the message were based on Nahum's political savvy and observation of current events.

-  Application: Where do you currently need the reminder that God knows what is going on with you (and the world) and will act justly?


2. The Judgment (Nahum 1:2-8)

Nahum began his prophecy with a description of the Lord as a reminder (or introduction) to the people about the character of the One who was bringing the judgment against them. Telling them of who they had sinned against was crucial to how they would receive and respond to the judgment. Knowing the truth about God establishes His authority and right to rule in our lives.

-  How does recognizing God's authority in our lives reorient everything we do? What happens when we fail to recognize His authority as the Assyrians did?

Nahum first said God was jealous and avenging. It was important for the people to remember that God was jealous for them. He refuses to share our worship and deserves our whole-hearted devotion because of who He is. This laid the foundation for where they had gone astray and why the vengeance of the Lord was coming against them. Ultimately, any people who set themselves up against the Lord will face vengeance.


Recognizing the Lord is slow to anger and patient is just as important. God is not like humans who often fly off the handle or overreact to something they don't like. God's anger is not random or quick. Because He loves us, and He loved the people of Nineveh, He offers ample time and opportunity for us to see our sin and return to Him. Nahum also described God's matchless power. Understanding God's people leads us to trust in Him and have a healthy fear of His judgment.

-  Where do you need to be reminded of God's power right now—for the sake of encouragement or challenge?

Although He is great in love and mercy, God will not simply let the guilty go unpunished. For God to be holy and righteous, sin must be accounted for. Nahum further identified God's power as the only one who can control the mightiest forces of nature.


Nahum also emphasized God's goodness to those who trust in Him. This again is a message of comfort and warning. It is a comfort for God's people but a warning to those who oppose Him. God sees our tears, knows our hearts, our dreams, our struggles, and cares about every detail of our lives. The people of Nineveh, Israel, and Judah all needed to

remember the truth about God. He is slow to anger but that patience does not mean He will overlook sin, and when His judgment came, it would be like an overwhelming flood.

 Application: Which description of the Lord in these verses stands out to you most and why?


3. The Result (Nahum 1:9-15)

Nahum made clear that once God acted, it would be swift and complete. The reason trouble would not rise up again was not because the people would have learned their lesson but because this destruction would be total the first time. The reference to tangled, dried thorns described how ripe Nineveh was for judgment. Think about what the comparison would be today for a person, people, or country ripe for the judgment of God. While Christians can be assured that God's judgment has been satisfied in Jesus, it is right for us to continually assess our hearts to be sure we honor Him with our lives.

 What are some ways we can regularly assess our own spiritual state before the Lord? Why is it important we do, even as those already following Jesus?

As He did throughout this book, God addressed both His afflicted people and their oppressive enemy. He stated that the enemies of Zion who appeared to be safe from affliction and so mighty that they could not be harmed would be devastated by His promised judgment. God's people, who were weak and afflicted, were promised strength and restoration. Even though God had allowed His people to be overtaken by their enemy, He promised to break the yoke of their oppressor.

At this point in history, Nineveh was a powerful city that was recognized as one of the great cities of the world. The Lord promised to punish them so severely that they would lose their legacy among the nations. He was going to end the wickedness they had been liberally dishing out and bring them so low their name would no longer mean anything.

 How did God's decree against Nineveh serve as a reminder of His faithfulness to His people?

Notice the contrast between the fate of the wicked and the godly. Nineveh would be wiped out but there was good news for the people of God. Nahum spoke of those who bring good news having beautiful feet indicating movement, action, and progress that reminds us of the active work of sharing the gospel (Romans 10:14-17). Every believer is called to share Jesus with others and that necessarily includes action.

This chapter closes with instruction for how God’s people were to live moving forward. They were to keep the feasts as a means of staying in the right relationship with God. Knowing the grace and mercy of God is not a license to be careless and disobedient. Knowing who God is and knowing His characteristics should make us more careful to obey Him. It was time for God’s people to live in the fullness of a right relationship with Him. Believers today are called to the same.

- Application: What practices do we have as a church to regularly put us “in touch” with the Lord? What individual ways do you seek to stay connected to Him?

Conclusion

Nahum spoke the vision from the Lord to the people of Nineveh, the powerful city in Assyria. They had been the enemy of God’s people and were going to suffer the consequences for their evil wickedness. Nineveh turned to the Lord when Jonah preached to them but years later, they slipped back into their wicked ways.

God always punishes sin and there are consequences for those who choose a path of wickedness. God is patient, loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving, but He will be just and judge evil. Nahum’s words of warning to Nineveh were also words of encouragement to God’s people that God had not forgotten them, and He was going to avenge the suffering they endured at their enemy’s hands. Through Nahum, we are reminded God keeps His eyes on the wicked that He will punish and on the righteous He will restore and bless. God has been and will always be the defender of His people.

- Where do you need the reminder that God will always act on behalf of His people?
- What are some ways we can encourage one another in this truth as a group?
- How can you seek a gospel conversation with someone this week by sharing the message of Nahum?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for keeping watch over you. Praise Him for being slow to anger and patient, even with His enemies which has included us all at some time. Ask for strength to trust His faithfulness every day.

Memory Verse

The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; he cares for those who take refuge in him. – Nahum 1:7

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk* by Eric Redmon, Bill Curtis, Ken Fentress
- *Be Amazed* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, & Malachi* by Stephen Miller

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Nahum

Purpose

The book of Nahum provides a great view of a powerful, just God who maintains his absolute moral standards and offers hope to those who are despised and downtrodden. Nahum teaches us to trust God. Even when we despair of any help, we can know that God will stand with those who belong to him.

Author

Nahum, the presumed author (1:1) is the only person with that name in the Old Testament. Like Jonah in the previous century, Nahum prophesied judgment upon Nineveh. The Ninevites in Jonah's time had repented (Jnh 3). But now that Nineveh's leaders had resumed their wicked actions, the Lord called Nahum to reaffirm his coming judgment. Ironically Nahum's Hebrew name means "comfort"—comfort for Judah (1:12–15) because its cruel overlord Assyria would be punished without any "comforters" (see 3:7). Except for the name of his hometown Elkosh (1:1), nothing certain is known about Nahum.

Setting

The Assyrian capital Nineveh was located about 220 miles north of the modern Iraqi capital of Baghdad. By Nahum's time, Israel and Judah had experienced long and distressing affliction at the hands of the Assyrians. As early as Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC), King Jehu paid tribute to the Assyrians. The Lord often used Assyria as "the rod of my anger" (Is 10:5) to punish his people. Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC) and his successor Sargon II (722–705 BC) besieged and destroyed Samaria, taking the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity (2Kg 17:3–6). Similarly, Sennacherib captured and devastated Judah, besieging Jerusalem by 701 BC (2Kg 18–19; Is 36–37). By Ashurbanipal's reign (ca 669–627 BC) Assyrian rulers were infamous for their cruelty (see notes at 3:10, 18–19).

Special Features

The book of Nahum dramatically portrays God overwhelming Assyria to relieve his oppressed people. It was certainly a harsh message for Israel's enemies, but for the people of Judah it was a message of hope.

Extended Commentary

Nahum 1:1-15

1:2–8 On this victory hymn to the Lord, see Introduction.

1:2 Like a jealous (or zealous) husband, the Lord would tolerate no rivals for Israel's affection, whether other so-called gods (Ex 34:14–16) or foreign nations and their kings.

1:3 That God was slow to anger but great in power indicates his wrath was not that of a hot-tempered tyrant. Neither was his compassion based on his inability to defeat those who oppressed his people. By no means would he leave the guilty unpunished, whether of his own people or their enemies (Ex 34:7).

1:4 Bashan and Carmel wither (and even the flower of Lebanon) because of a severe drought, parching the most fertile lands in Palestine (Is 33:9)—from the east, Bashan in Transjordan, to the northwest borders of the storm god Baal's home territory near Mount Carmel and the Lebanon mountains. Actually the Lord alone controlled the storm, rain, and fertility (drying up the sea and all the rivers). Bashan was famous for its lush pasturelands (Jr 50:19), fine cattle (Dt 32:14), and rich forests (Is 2:13; Ezk 27:6), and Carmel (lit "garden-land") was known for its verdant vegetation (Jr 50:19; Am 1:2). Both were withered by God's judgment.

1:5 Verse 5 compares the terrifying power of the Lord's anger to the experience of earthquakes and volcanoes that shake the earth. Other passages that speak of God's judgment in terms of earthquakes are Is 24:18–20; 29:6; Jr 10:10, Ezk 26:18; Jl 3:16. Earthquakes are also associated more generally with God's presence and activity, as at Sinai and at Calvary (signifying the end of the old covenant?). "Earthquakes reminded men and women then as well as now that the only fixed ground is God himself. Not even the earth is ultimately stable. They also point to the fact that one day God will shake down all human kingdoms with the appearing of Christ in Glory (Zch 14:4–5)" (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery).

1:6 Verse 6 provides a "so then" to the whole. If the Lord is a God of vengeance against his enemies, and if he is greater even than his creation, then Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his burning anger? The obvious answer is "No one." His wrath is like fire that is poured out and is so hot that it shatters the rocks.

1:7 Verse 7 is the first clue to the primary message the prophet has for Judah. By somewhat indirect means, Nahum is telling Judah to take refuge in their God who is good and a stronghold for his people but a terrible enemy to those who oppose him. Take refuge is one of the many expressions the OT has for faith.

1:8 Neo-Assyrian kings often claimed that they overpowered their enemies like a flood, and Neo-Assyrian treaties often cursed disloyal vassals with a flood. God would provide the opposite of refuge for Nineveh.

1:9 The verse seems to begin with a question, literally, “What are you [plural] plotting against the Lord?” It is asked of the Assyrians. It is the Lord who will bring about the complete destruction of any strategy to oppose him.

1:10 As fire consumes thorns and stubble, and as drunkards consume beer, so the Lord’s enemies will be consumed.

1:11 The one who plots evil against the Lord, and is a wicked counselor may be any Assyrian ruler (cp. v. 15, same Hb word “wicked”) or even the demonic spirit that energizes him (Dn 10:13, 20–21; contrast Messiah as Wonderful Counselor, Is 9:6). Sennacherib had plotted evil, but his objective to destroy Jerusalem (ca 701 BC) was thwarted (2Kg 19:20–28, 32–34).

1:12 Strong and numerous mean that a formidable army is in view, but the Lord delights in overcoming vast armies, either through the agency of Israel or on his own (cp. Jdg 7:2; 1Sm 17:45–47). You in the last two lines refers to Judah. Richard Patterson (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) has observed “however much God might have used the Assyrians to chastise his people, such would no longer be the case.”

1:13 The imagery of the yoke and shackles is very similar to what is found in Jr 30:8, but there it is in a divine promise of release from Babylonian subjugation.

1:14 Whereas “you” and “your” in v. 13 are feminine singular referring to Judah, you and your in v. 14 are consistently masculine singular referring to Nineveh or its king. The first judgment is that the king’s dynasty would end, and his reputation would be lost after his death (cp. Is 56:5; 66:22). Alan Millard points out that the fear of dying without a namesake was very real in the ancient world, “for that would mean he would be forgotten . . . Moreover, in pagan societies there would be no one to perform the rites that would allow his spirit to rest peacefully in the next world. The names of Assyrian noblemen who fell out of favor were erased from their monuments, and even the names of discredited kings and gods were chipped from carvings in Egypt” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary). The second judgment is that his idols and images would be removed from the temple (Zch 13:2), so that the Assyrian gods would no longer be worshiped and would be angry with him in the afterlife. The statement also implies the Lord’s superiority over the Assyrian gods, from whom kingship was thought to be bestowed. The third judgment may involve not only the king’s death, but also the desecration of his grave.

1:15 John Oswalt (The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66, commenting on the parallel image in Is 52:7) describes the scene portrayed as “a besieged city breathlessly awaiting the news of the outcome of a decisive conflict. If the news is victory, they are delivered; if the news is defeat, all is lost. Suddenly, on a distant hill a runner is seen. What is the news? As he comes nearer it can be seen that he is waving a victory palm and not so much running as dancing. The Lord has won! Let the singing begin!”¹

References

1. “Nahum,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).