



Nahum: God the Avenger

Memory Verse: Nahum 1:2-3 "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet."

Background

Nahum is the 34th book of the Bible and the 7th book of minor prophets in the Old Testament. Little is known about the prophet Nahum. He is called the "Elkoshite" (1:1) and believed to have been from the nation of Judah, but where exactly the town of Elkosh was is uncertain. Nahum prophesied about the impending destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire. Nahum mentioned the fall of Thebes/No-Amon (3:8-10) which occurred in 663 BC, but not its reconstruction in 654 BC. Therefore, it is likely that Nahum preached sometime between 663-654 BC.

Nahum prophesied to Nineveh over 100 years after Jonah's time there. While Jonah's message was one of mercy, calling the Ninevites to repent, Nahum's was purely a message of coming doom. Not only significant for the Ninevites, Nahum's message was also important for the people of Judah. The news of Nineveh's downfall by Nahum (whose name means "comfort") would have indeed brought comfort and encouragement to Judah and all who lived in fear of the wicked Assyrian empire.

The Short Story

God's judgment against Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire, was coming.

What's the Big Idea?

Having heard Jonah's message from God, the Ninevites repented of their sins and received God's mercy. They returned to their wicked ways, however, and were responsible for destroying the northern kingdom of Israel and terrorizing the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 17-19). Nahum tells the Ninevites that while God is slow to anger, He is a "jealous and avenging God" and "will not leave the guilty unpunished" (1:2-3). God, in His mighty power, was going to carry out His judgment on the Assyrians for their wickedness.

Nineveh, first mentioned in Genesis 10:11, was one of the oldest and greatest of the ancient cities. At the time of Nahum's message, the city walls of Nineveh were 100 feet high and wide enough for three chariots riding side by side. Surrounding the city walls was a moat 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep. Nineveh, with these defenses, could withstand a 20-year siege. Nahum's prophecy that "with an overwhelming flood he [God] will make an end of Nineveh;" (1:8) and that Nineveh will "be hidden" (3:11), probably seemed ridiculous to the Assyrians. However, in 612 BC, the Tigris River flooded and destroyed part of the city walls. The Babylonians went through this gap in the wall and plundered Nineveh, setting it on fire. The ruins of Nineveh remained so well hidden that almost no historical knowledge of the Assyrian Empire existed until 1842, when these ruins were discovered by archaeologists. Nahum's accurate prediction of Nineveh's fate attest to God's sovereignty and power.

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

It was a dark time for the faithful in Judah with idolatry and sin rampant in their own culture along with the wickedness of their Assyrian oppressors. Into this environment, Nahum speaks of God's holiness and justice as His judgment comes against the rebellious, unbelieving Assyrians. God may be slow to anger, but His justice is certain. This brought comfort to the people of Judah and it can bring comfort for us today. Even in dark times, God is still sovereign and actively working to bring justice and hope to the world. We can declare, just as Nahum did, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him," (1:7).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

Nahum 1:2-3 "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet."

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Why was God so enraged with Ninevah? What caused His anger to be so intense?
- Who is God avenging? What causes Him to come to the rescue? What does this say about God?
- What does it mean that He is "slow to anger"? Why is His anger good and ours often bad?
- Why is it so hard to believe, "The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished?"
- Why do those who receive Christ avert the wrath of God? Who will receive His wrath?

Practical Application

- What causes you to have a Holy anger? How do you express in your daily life?
- Where do you need the Lord to be "slow to anger" with you? Where do you need an attitude adjustment?
- How hard is it to trust God to deal with evil and injustice? Do unfortunate situations cause you to question God's intent? How does this make you feel towards God? Does it stretch your faith and confidence in Him?
- How would apply Romans 12:9 "Do not take revenge. 'It is mine to avenge. I will repay.' says the LORD."?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:7-8 "The LORD is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him."
- 1:9 "Why are you scheming against the LORD? He will destroy you with one blow;"
- 2:13 "I am your enemy!" says the LORD of Heaven's Armies....."
- 3:1 "What sorrow awaits Nineveh, the city of murder and lies! She is crammed with wealth and is never without victims. "
- 3:7 "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. "

Bonus Features

We learn in verse three that God "will not at all acquit the wicked." The mysteries of Calvary are bound up in that little phrase. A holy God ordained just laws for the government of His world. Man broke the law. All men break it, and God indeed must judge them. When a known criminal is pardoned, something is desperately wrong with either the law or the administration of it. For God to show clemency to man would indicate the same flaw. Yet, He is a God of mercy and love. How could He be just, and yet be the justifier of the sinner? The answer is found in the divine Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. John said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29). Here was One who was both an acceptable and "willing substitute." *Excerpted from 'The Old Testament Presents... Reflections of Christ,' Paul Van Gorden*

Personal Takeaways and Notes