

# JUSTICE AND DELIVERANCE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, 12-13, 15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Nahum 1

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, 12-13, 15

## I. Prophecy

### Nahum 1:1

**1 The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.**

1a. Prophets often began their prophecies using a word that can be translated *burden*. The prophecy that follows is often one of judgment. This is a weighty call, not a trivial or light matter.

The city of *Nineveh* was located on the Tigris River, site of present-day Mosul, Iraq. Nineveh was first mentioned in the Bible when a descendant of Noah's son Ham built it (Genesis 10:11).

1b. *The vision* is another way to refer to the prophecy being revealed in this *book*. The same Hebrew word can also be translated "revelation," which emphasizes that God provided both the experience and the wisdom to understand its significance.

*Nahum* means "repentings" or "compassion." He is the only person in the Old Testament with that name and is not the "Naum" named in Jesus' genealogy (Luke 3:25). Nahum did not provide the names of his ancestors, only that he was from a town called Elkosh. At least four places have been suggested for its location: one north of Nineveh; two in Galilee (including Capernaum, which means "town, or village, of Nahum"); and one near Jerusalem.

Jonah and Nahum are the two Old Testament prophets whose prophecies focused on a coming judgment on Nineveh. Nahum's prophecy differs from Jonah's in two key ways: (1) Nahum was told to preach in Judah *about* Nineveh, not in Nineveh itself; and (2) Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled. Jonah's was unfulfilled because God chose mercy over judgment when the people repented. Zephaniah, a contemporary of Nahum, also named Nineveh in the context of judgment coming to all of Assyria (Zephaniah 2:13).

## II. Portrayals

### Nahum 1:2-3, 6-8, 12a

**2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.**

**3 The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.**

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**6 Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.**

**7 The LORD is good, a strong hold**

**in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.**

**8 But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.**

**12a Thus saith the LORD; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through.**

2. We should take care to understand what it means for *the Lord* to be *jealous*. God's jealousy is not like that of a boy who has a fit if he sees his girlfriend flirting with someone else. The biblical concept of jealousy when applied to *God* indicates a profound sense of caring and commitment.

Repetition in Hebrew prophecy, which was often written as poetry, serves to emphasize the point being made. In this verse, God's *furiosus . . . wrath* becomes more frightening and immediate through Nahum's insistence that God will act out of His righteous rage (compare Nahum 2:13; 3:5-7). As Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

3. If the nation of Assyria deserved to be punished, why had God not done something earlier? God waits patiently because He wants everyone to repent; He does not wish for anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). God does not react in haste.

But God's patience does have its limits. And when His patience ends, He still has the *power* to hold *the wicked* accountable. The people of Noah's day had gone too far from God and acted wickedly, so God sent the flood (Genesis 6-8). Having promised never to destroy the whole world with water again (9:8-11), God still reserved the right to act in judgment.

Although God acts as a judge, this verse

describes Him as more of a righteous warrior (compare Revelation 19:11-16). Unlike human fighters, He has all of nature at His command as His weapons. *The whirlwind* forms in the sky and reaches to earth; *the storm* can yield thunder and lightning, hail, destructive rains, and more. *The clouds* parallel these terms and encompass weather more generally. Not only does God command these, but they are as distressing to Him as *the dust* that kicks up as He walks in His heavens—that is to say, not at all.

Yet even dust can serve His purposes, as seen in the plague of boils that resulted from Moses' obeying God's command (Exodus 9:8-9). Nahum 1:4-5 (not in our printed text) continues to describe God's power in terms of His authority over the forces and features of our world.

6. The recognition of the Lord's power caused Nahum to ask two rhetorical questions. These ask the same thing and in doing so emphasize the impossibility of the answer. No one can withstand God's *indignation* and *the fierceness of his anger*—no person, no nation, no power. Not even the strongest or the strongest-willed has the ability to resist God.

God's *fury* is like a volcano; lava *like fire* is *poured out*. The eruption sends *rocks* into the air. Nothing in the path of a volcano—or the Lord in His righteous anger—can survive. Any resistance is futile.

7. All of God's many attributes are tempered by the fact that He *is good* (Matthew 19:16-17). He creates good things (examples: Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). He gives good gifts (Exodus 3:8; James 1:17). Those who *trust in him* experience His goodness in protection from harm. The phrase *he knoweth them* anticipates Jesus' self-disclosure that He is the good shepherd who knows His sheep (John 10:14-15). On the Lord as *a strong hold*, compare Psalm 31:2; contrast 52:7.

8. Nahum often used poetic imagery to describe Nineveh's destruction, but two factors here were literally fulfilled. The Tigris River ran along the western side of Nineveh, and a tributary from the east joined it there. A severe flooding in both rivers at once would be too much for the foundations of the mighty city.

Many ancient cities suffered capture and destruction, and new cities were built on top of the ruins. But Nineveh was never rebuilt. Figuratively, *darkness* also overwhelmed Nineveh. There is no indication that God used the same darkness in Nineveh as He chose in Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23). Rather, the fate of the city was similar to what was believed of a dead person—existing in some dark place, never to be offered opportunity to enter God's presence (contrast Jonah 2).

Nahum 1:9-11 (not in our printed text) again taunts Nineveh with the futility of opposing the Lord.

12a. *Thus saith the Lord* is a phrase used hundreds of times in the Old Testament (with some variation) to introduce a prophecy given by God. What He revealed about Nineveh would happen as surely as if it had already happened; the prophecy was entirely trustworthy.

*Though they be quiet* speaks to serenity as a result of political alliances and national strength. In this case the Ninevites' might combined with their numerical superiority to create a false sense of security.

### III. Promises

#### Nahum 1:12b-13, 15

**12b Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more.**

**13 For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder.**

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**15 Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,**

**that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.**

12b. The subject of God's address changes here from Assyria (represented by Nineveh) to Judah. Assyria, the instrument of God's anger, had gone too far and would be stopped. The Assyrians' violence and oppression would not *afflict* God's people forever.

13. A wooden yoke was placed on the necks of animals for pulling heavy loads or plowing. While it was a mere tool on a beast of burden, people were never meant to bear the kind of *yoke* in view here. The yoke therefore became a symbol of oppression.

15a. In Isaiah's context, the *good tidings* were that Babylonian exile would end and the people of Judah would be restored to their land. For the apostle Paul, the words to the Romans (see Romans 10:15) find their ultimate meaning in the march of the news regarding Jesus.

15b. *Peace* had been a blessing available to the people in the promised land if they remained faithful to the Lord. This peace was to include cooperation from the land in agriculture, victory over foes, and most importantly, God's presence; in short, reversals of the curses found in Genesis 3.

15c. As a result, Nahum challenged *Judah* to *keep* the various *feasts* prescribed in the Law of Moses. The implication is that some type of restriction had hindered the free exercise of worship for the people of God. Or, more troublingly, the people hadn't been very dedicated to their celebrations to begin with and had used foreign interference as an excuse not to *perform* their *vows*. With the destruction of *the wicked*, however, the people would be free once again to choose devotion to God and enjoy the blessings that came with it.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## JUSTICE AND DELIVERANCE

### Into the Lesson

Finish the following prompts:

*He got what he deserved when . . .  
She didn't get the punishment she had coming to  
her when . . .*

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How do people react when someone's punishment is evidently just? What about when the opposite is true?

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Today's text will lead to fresh thoughts about how and why God ensures justice.

### Into the Word

List the words in today's text that describe God. Which make you uncomfortable? Which are most encouraging?

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How should those who actively opposed God have been warned, based on the prophecies in this passage?

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What images in these verses indicate how God will overwhelm all those who oppose Him?

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Name a key factor that will ensure God's favor.

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How were the citizens of Judah to respond to this prophecy from Nahum?

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List appropriate responses of Christians today to this ancient prophecy.

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### Into Life

Prepare an "elevator speech"—an explanation that can be offered in the time it takes an elevator to close its doors and open them again—that explains the gospel both in terms of God's wrath to be avoided and salvation through Christ to be embraced.

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## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Use your feet to spread the gospel!