**Nahum 1**

﻿Most Prophetic preaching of judgment by the prophets had primarily taken the form of judgment against Israel and Judah. We have those collections in Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Yet the other side of that message of Yahweh’s vengeance against sin and idolatry was their message, strongly worded and emotionally charged, against the nations. In only two cases, Nahum and Obadiah, is a prophet preoccupied with his message against a foreign nation. Jonah might also be included in that category, but that book does not belong generically to the oracles against the nations as do Nahum and Obadiah.

**The Place of the Passage**

The book of Nahum opens with a psalm of praise in honor of God, who, like a warrior, comes to avenge the wrongs committed against his people. This warrior God will decimate Nineveh (the Assyrian Empire), which, though at the peak of its power, with countless armies at its disposal, will be destroyed as quickly as dry vegetation burns. This judgment comes from the goodness of God, who saves those who hide and wait in him. For them, the coming of this warrior God is indeed good news of peace.

**The Big Picture**

The Lord, our mighty warrior, comes to rescue his people by defeating the Assyrians and decimating their capital city, Nineveh.

**History of Nahum** (You fill it in)

**Read through Nahum chapter 1.**

**1** An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

**The Character of God**

**2** The Lord is a jealous and avenging God;
    the Lord is avenging and wrathful;
the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries
    and keeps wrath for his enemies.

**3** The Lord is slow to anger and great in power,
    and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.
His way is in whirlwind and storm,
    and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

**4** He rebukes the sea and makes it dry
    he dries up all the rivers
Bashan and Carmel wither;
    the bloom of Lebanon withers.

**5** The mountains quake before him;
    the hills melt;
the earth heaves before him,
    the world and all who dwell in it.

**6** Who can stand before his indignation?
    Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,

  and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

**Destruction of Nineveh**

**7** The Lord is good,
    a stronghold in the day of trouble;
he knows those who take refuge in him.

**8** But with an overflowing flood
he will make a complete end of the adversaries
    and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

**9** What do you plot against the Lord?
    He will make a complete end;

trouble will not rise up a second time.

**10** For they are like entangled thorns,
    like drunkards as they drink;
    they are consumed like stubble fully dried.

**11** From you came one
    who plotted evil against the Lord,
    a worthless counselor.

**Promise of Judah’s Deliverance**

**12** Thus says the Lord,
“Though they are at full strength and many,
    they will be cut down and pass away.
Though I have afflicted you,
    I will afflict you no more.

**13** And now I will break his yoke from off you
    and will burst your bonds apart.”

**Assyrian Demise**

**14** The Lord has given commandment about you:
    “No more shall your name be perpetuated;
from the house of your gods I will cut off
    the carved image and the metal image.
I will make your grave, for you are vile.”

**15** Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him
    who brings good news,
    who publishes peace!
Keep your feasts, O Judah;
    fulfill your vows,
for never again shall the worthless pass through you;
    he is utterly cut off.

**Critical Questions**

1. 1. In V2-6, Nahum highlights the character of God. What are some of those attributes? Connect them with what you have already learned about them.
2. Who do you think God is wrathful towards? Why?
3. Amid Nahum’s proclamation that God is powerful, vengeful, and wrathful, he proclaims “The Lord is good…” (V7). Why do you think he mentions God’s goodness here?
4. The Assyrian Empire was likely at the height of its power, with a massive army and seemingly endless resources for conquest, during the ministry of Nahum. How do the images of Nineveh’s destruction in verse 10 emphasize the power and might of Israel’s God?
5. Since 722 BC, when the Northern Kingdom was destroyed, Assyria has continued to oppress Judah. Now, being 60 years later, as God’s people cry out to him, it may seem like the process was slow. How do these verses address this “slowness"? Read 2 Peter 3:1-13. How does this passage address God’s apparent “slowness”?
6. Why does the Lord mention the cutting off of images from Nineveh in verse 14? What does such action represent?
7. The note on verse 15 in the *ESV Study Bible* explains the image in this verse as the running of a messenger from a battle, coming home to proclaim the good news of the destruction of Nineveh (see 2 Sam. 18:24–27 for an example of this announcement of victory). How does this picture inform our understanding of the apostle Paul’s use of this imagery in Romans 10:14–17?

**Truth for Today**

**THE CHARACTER OF GOD.** God’s attributes are displayed throughout the Scriptures. The Prophets are no exception. In fact, the Prophets help us grasp a better concept of God. They do this by reiterating what the Torah (the first 5 book of the Bible; Torah means Law). In the Torah, God is revealed to be creator, ruler, and savior. The Prophets apply the Law (or Torah) to the people and tell them how they are or are not living up to God’s Law. In the first chapter of Nahum, there is a glorious account of God’s attributes. They tell us that God is a personal God who is jealous, compassionate, and patient to his people, yet wrathful, judging, and vengeful to the wicked. Here, we see that Nahum describes God as the “Caring Warrior,” his compassion and his wrath together.

**THE SLOWNESS OF GOD**. Amid suffering, it can sometimes feel as though God is slow to act, slow to rescue, slow to heal, or slow to judge the wicked. In fact, this apparent slowness leads the psalmist to cry out, “How long, O Lord?” and to express feelings of being forgotten or abandoned by God (Ps. 13:1). However, the Bible explains that God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6, compare with Nahum 1:3). His slowness allows opportunity for the wicked to turn back to him for mercy and for people in their suffering to trust in God’s promises. Even so, he “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7), guaranteeing a day of reckoning for those who persist in their rebellion and a day of salvation for those who continue to wait for him. Not only that, God was punishing the Israelites and Judahites. The Lord’s mercy and compassion moved him to no longer punish them (V12). The Lord is compassionate to his people and know what they are feeling. Cry out to God when facing suffering, persecution, trials, tribulations, and your punishment for your sin.

**THE SUPREMACY OF GOD.** As noted in the “Reflection and Discussion” section of Week 8, in the ancient world it was believed that the gods of nations at war fought and determined the outcome of the human military battles. The victorious army represented and proclaimed the victorious god. This ancient cultural understanding is taken up by the Bible to proclaim the God of Israel’s supremacy over all other gods. In Nahum 1:14, the prophet proclaims the Lord’s power over the Assyrian gods not only by defeating them but also by casting them out of their own temple. In Jeremiah, the prophet demonstrates the Lord’s power over the Babylonian gods by capturing them and putting them to shame (Jer. 50:1–2). In the New Testament, this language continues through the conquering of the powers of evil (Col. 2:15) and through the destruction of the dragon in Revelation 12.

**Nahum 2**

**The Place of the Passage**

Nahum continues his proclamation against the Assyrians, and their capital city of Nineveh in particular, with a detailed description of the fall of the city. With vivid and sensory detail, the prophet invites the reader to witness the invasion of Nineveh, which begins with an assault on the city walls, moves into the city proper, includes a looting of the city treasuries, and concludes with the destruction of the palace itself. This devastation occurs because the Lord himself is against the Assyrians and is restoring the majesty of Israel.

**The Big Picture**

The den of Assyrian lions, Nineveh, is plundered by the Lord as he restores the majesty of Israel.

**Nahum 2:1-13**

**Attack Against Nineveh**

**1** The scatterer has come up against you.
    Man the ramparts;
    watch the road;
dress for battle;
    collect all your strength.

**2** For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob
    as the majesty of Israel,
for plunderers have plundered them
    and ruined their branches.

**3** The shield of his mighty men is red;
    his soldiers are clothed in scarlet.
The chariots come with flashing metal
    on the day he musters them;
    the cypress spears are brandished.

**4** The chariots race madly through the streets;
    they rush to and fro through the squares;
they gleam like torches;
    they dart like lightning

**5** He remembers his officers;
    they stumble as they go,
they hasten to the wall;
    the siege tower is set up.

**6** The river gates are opened;
    the palace melts away;

**7** its mistress is stripped; she is carried off,
    her slave girls lamenting,
moaning like doves
    and beating their breasts.

**8** Nineveh is like a pool
    whose waters run away.
“Halt! Halt!” they cry,
    but none turns back.

**9** Plunder the silver,
    plunder the gold!
There is no end of the treasure
    or of the wealth of all precious things.

**10** Desolate! Desolation and ruin!
    Hearts melt and knees tremble;
anguish is in all loins;
    all faces grow pale!

**11** Where is the lions' den,
    the feeding place of the young lions,
where the lion and lioness went,
    where his cubs were, with none to disturb?

**12** The lion tore enough for his cubs
    and strangled prey for his lionesses;
he filled his caves with prey
    and his dens with torn flesh.

**13** Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nahum+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-22713f)]chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard.

**Critical Questions**

1. Why does the prophet invite the reader into such a full experience of this vision? How would such a text inspire the faith of God’s people, who are awaiting the restoration of the majesty of Israel?
2. The Assyrian kings were known for their self-praise over their various conquests; they bragged about the violence and terror they inflicted upon their enemies, and they boasted of the lavish wealth they accumulated from their conquests and the tributes they demanded from their vassals.[1](https://www.esv.org/Nahum%2B1/#jonah-micah-and-nahum-week-10-behold-i-am-against-you-fn1) How do these verses fittingly show the reversal of Assyria’s prosperity?
3. The promise of God to Abraham to make him into a great nation and give him the land of Canaan was, in many ways, finally complete during the glory days of King David and his son Solomon. In those days, God’s people had possession of the land, were unified as a nation, and finally experienced peace and stability. The majesty of Israel, however, lasted only a generation, as Solomon’s successors tore the kingdom into two; over the subsequent generations, the two kingdoms continued to devolve and to suffer God’s judgment until only the southern kingdom of Judah was left. In light of this history, what does it mean that “the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel”? (Genesis 32:28)

**Truth for Today**

THE TERROR OF THE LORD. Popular theology often misconstrues the battle between God and Satan[3](https://www.esv.org/Nahum%2B1/#jonah-micah-and-nahum-week-10-behold-i-am-against-you-fn3) as a battle between two equal or nearly equal forces, each vying for absolute rule. This perspective on the cosmic forces does not, however, reflect the reality given to us in Scripture. The Bible makes clear that there is only one absolute power, the Lord God Almighty. Satan is subject to him (Job 1:12), and Satan’s darkness cannot overcome him (John 1:5). Indeed, what could be more terrifying than to hear not once but twice from Almighty God, “I am against you” (Nah. 2:13; 3:5)? Indeed, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE LORD. God will punish the wicked, either now or on the Day of the Lord at the end. Here, we see a picture of God’s divine punishment of a whole empire. Indeed, God did allow them to flourish up till now…not because he couldn’t do anything, but because he was using them to punish Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and because he was allow them time for repentance, as they did in Jonah’s time. Unfortunately, they did not repent.

Appendix A: History of the Old Testament

