

Nahum

Introduction

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Why read this book?

Have you ever been angry? Not just annoyed, but deeply angry? Perhaps a friend has been victimized by gang cruelty. Perhaps you've worked for a boss who puts people down to make himself look good. Perhaps you've been the victim of racial slurs. Nahum reminds us that God is in control of history and will not allow evil to persist forever.

Who wrote this book?

Nahum, an otherwise unknown prophet, whose name means *comfort*.

To whom was it written?

Although the book seems to be addressed to the Assyrians, Nahum's message is actually for God's people, the nation of Judah.

When was it written?

Between 663 B.C., when Assyria conquered Egypt, and 609 B.C., when Assyria was defeated by Babylon. This was perhaps 100 years after Jonah had delivered God's message to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

What was happening in the world at this time?

In 722 B.C. Assyria defeated the northern kingdom of Israel. Now, almost 100 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah was ruled by Manasseh, a puppet king of the Assyrians.

Why was it written?

To assure people that evil does not endure forever and that God will one day fulfill his plan to restore good permanently.

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What to look for in Nahum:

Mercy and judgment, both of which reveal the character of God (see 1:2, 7). Look for ways these seemingly opposite traits actually reflect God's consistent stance toward his people.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*

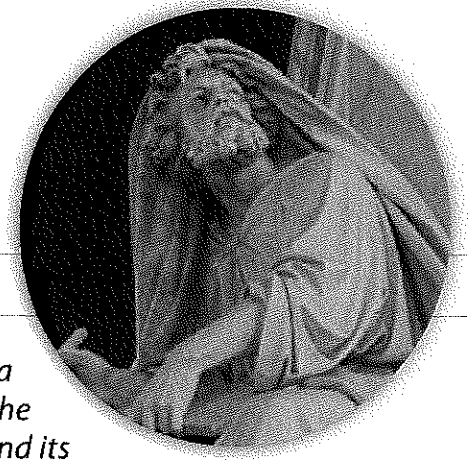


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What hurts the heart of God?

The Assyrians had already destroyed Samaria in 721 B.C., which resulted in the captivity of the Northern Kingdom. This meant that Judah and its capital Jerusalem were now threatened. The Assyrians had a reputation for terrible cruelty in war, especially when they conquered a city.

About 700 B.C., Nineveh had been made the capital city in the Assyrian empire. While Jonah had pronounced its destruction, the people had repented and the judgment on the city was suspended. However, eventually Nineveh returned to its wicked ways and brutality. The focal point of the message of Nahum is God's judgment on Nineveh.

Scripture: Nahum

Based On: "The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Have you heard about Pocket God? It's one of the top-selling video game applications for Apple's iPhone. Here's the game description found on iTunes:

What kind of god would you be? Benevolent or vengeful? Play Pocket God and discover the answer within yourself. On a remote island, you are the all-powerful god that rules over the primitive islanders. You can bring new life, and then take it away just as quickly.

Seeing that game options include throwing islanders into volcanoes, using islanders as shark bait, bowling for islanders with a large rock, or creating earthquakes to destroy the islanders' villages, designers seem to think players will only want to play the role of a vengeful god—which must mean they think that's the only kind of god players can imagine being real. As believers we know that God is merciful and gracious and slow to anger. But there are times in Scripture—oh, there are times—when God *is* vengeful. What do we do with this side of God, like in the Book of Nahum?

[Q] What makes God angry?

[Q] What do you say to those who see God as only angry and vengeful?

[Q] Is there an end to God's grace and patience? If so, at what point?

[Q] Do you think God would punish a nation this way today?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: God does not endure wickedness forever.

What happens when God's patience runs out? "Nineveh had been given the privilege of knowing the one true God. Under Jonah's preaching this great Gentile city had repented, and God had graciously stayed his judgment. However, a hundred years later, Nahum declares the downfall of this same city. The Assyrians forgot their revival and returned to their habits of violence, idolatry, and arrogance." The result is vengeful destruction by God. Read Nahum 1–3.

[Q] How is God described in 1:2–6?

[Q] How do we reconcile this picture and description of God with what follows in verse 7?

[Q] How are we to reconcile what God brings upon a city like Nineveh with our understanding that he is a God of love and compassion?

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Teaching Point Two: A righteous God sometimes demonstrates wrath.

It's hard for us to understand what life was like then. Perhaps those who live in a country that has been overrun by another might have an idea of how evil Nineveh was. We can't really understand God's wrath unless we understand how wicked something is. To help wrap your mind around it, think of something you see as utterly despicable. Can you picture God's wrath against that thing? Perhaps it would be the injustice of people being tortured for their faith, or a child being sold into slavery.¹

Chapter 2 describes the actual fall of Nineveh. It is a graphic portrayal of a military assault. Note the following movements:

- Nineveh's preparation for the coming assault.
- The first sighting of the approaching army.
- The overrunning of the city by enemy chariots.
- The defense of the walls.
- The use of the river to undermine the city's foundations.
- The plunder of the city.
- The conclusion comes in 2:13: "I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard."

[Q] Read chapter 3. What do you see happening? Describe the scene.

[Q] Nahum 3:19 says that when people hear about what is happening, they will applaud. Does this seem right? Why would this be their reaction?

[Q] God reveals himself in Nahum as a God of righteousness and wrath. Could you write a worship song based on this part of God's character? Why or why not?

[Q] What comfort can you find in a God who exacts revenge upon his enemies?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To worship God as he describes himself.*

Activity: *A key passage in Nahum is 1:7–8. Read these verses and write a psalm encompassing these attributes of God. Have members share their work with the rest of the group.*

¹ *Walk Through the Old Testament*, Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa (Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 267.



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Part 3 Apply Your Findings

What lessons should we learn from the fact that when Nineveh repented under Jonah's ministry, it received God's mercy, but even so its repentance didn't last?

[Q] How might God today display his judgment to those who consistently reject his truth, as did those in Nineveh?

Action Point: Set aside 30 minutes this week to reread Nahum 1:2–8 and to compare this description of God to that of Christ at his second coming. Consider: How do these images affect your worship? Your prayer? Your mission?

—Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White

