

The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Lord, Slow to Anger and Great in Power

Nahum 1:1-15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson sets the doctrinal foundation for all three prophets: the character of God. Before Nahum announces a single judgment on Nineveh, he gives a sustained portrait of who God is. He is jealous for His people, avenging against evil, slow to anger, great in power, good, and a refuge for those who trust Him. What is doctrinally at stake here is a balanced and biblical view of God against two common distortions: the sentimental god of our culture who is only tolerant and never just, and the harsh caricature that sees only wrath and misses mercy. Nahum will not let us keep one without the other. Help your students see that God's justice is good news for the oppressed and that His patience is real mercy, not weakness or indifference.

The lesson is also aiming squarely at the spiritual formation of your students. Most people in the room are not being marched off by an empire, but every one of them lives in a world where evil often seems to win and where they are tempted to wonder whether God notices or cares. This passage is meant to anchor them. When they grasp that God is both perfectly just and genuinely patient, two things happen in the heart: they can release their bitterness and need for revenge into the hands of a God who will judge rightly, and they can run to Him as a stronghold rather than to the lesser refuges they usually grab. Aim to move your class from merely knowing that God is powerful to actually trusting Him with the injustices that trouble them.

Keep the lesson warm and personal even while handling weighty truth. The goal is not to win an argument about divine wrath but to help a believer rest. Let the tenderness of verse 7, "the Lord knoweth them that trust in him," be the note the class carries home.

Question 1

Student Question:

Nahum opens by declaring that "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth" (Nahum 1:2). What does the jealousy of God mean in Scripture, and how is it different from the petty jealousy we know among people? What does this reveal about God's love for His people and His hatred of evil?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by helping students understand the biblical meaning of God's jealousy, because the word lands wrong on modern ears. Human jealousy is usually petty, insecure, and self-serving. God's jealousy is the fierce, protective love of a husband for his bride or a father for his children. In the

Scriptures, God's jealousy is most often connected to covenant faithfulness (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 4:24). He will not calmly watch what He loves be destroyed or stolen away.

Notice how Nahum stacks the words in verse 2: jealous, avenging, avenging again, furious, and reserving wrath for His enemies. This is not God losing His temper. It is the settled, righteous response of holiness to entrenched evil. Assyria had spent generations brutalizing the nations, and a God who felt nothing about that would not be loving; He would be morally asleep. The intensity of God's response is the measure of how seriously He takes evil and how deeply He loves those who suffer under it.

Help students see that this attribute protects the gospel. A God who does not care about sin has no reason to send a Savior. The cross only makes sense against the backdrop of a God who takes sin with deadly seriousness. The same holiness that thunders in Nahum is the holiness that was satisfied at Calvary.

Press the point that God's avenging is His alone. The believer is not licensed to take revenge precisely because God has reserved it for Himself (Romans 12:19). Knowing God will judge rightly is what frees us from the corrosive work of carrying a grudge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The jealousy of God as His covenant love, fierce and protective, not petty or insecure.
- Holiness as the root of God's opposition to evil; a God indifferent to cruelty would not be good.
- Vengeance as belonging to God, which frees the believer from personal revenge (Romans 12:19).
- The connection between God's hatred of sin and the necessity of the cross.
- The difference between righteous anger and sinful human temper.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change your view of God's anger to see it as the response of holy love rather than a loss of temper?
- Why is a God who is indifferent to evil not actually a loving God?
- Where do you need to hand a grievance over to the God who judges rightly?

Question 2

Student Question:

Assyria had terrorized God's people for generations, and many in Judah surely felt forgotten. When have you been tempted to believe that God had stopped paying attention to injustice in the world or in your own life? Be honest about where that doubt lives in you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the aim is honesty before God. Judah had endured Assyrian cruelty for so long that despair would have felt reasonable. The exiles and survivors could easily conclude that God had forgotten. Let students name the places where they secretly suspect God is not watching: a wrong that was never made right, an abuser who prospered, a corrupt system that grinds on.

Gently distinguish faithful lament from faithless cynicism. Scripture is full of believers who cried “how long?” without abandoning their trust (Psalm 13; Habakkuk 1, which the class will meet soon). Bringing the doubt to God is itself an act of faith. Stuffing it down or letting it curdle into bitterness is not.

Nahum’s whole point is that God’s apparent silence was never indifference. He was being patient, not absent. The same is true in your students’ lives. The delay of justice is not the denial of justice.

Move toward something concrete. Invite each person to identify one specific injustice that troubles them and to deliberately place it in God’s hands this week rather than rehearsing it in resentment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between faithful lament and faithless cynicism.
- God’s delay is not God’s absence; patience is not indifference.
- The danger of letting unanswered injustice harden into bitterness.
- Bringing our doubts honestly to God as an act of trust, not rebellion.

Discussion Prompts

- What injustice, public or personal, most tempts you to doubt that God is watching?
- What is the difference between honestly asking God ‘how long?’ and quietly giving up on Him?
- What would it look like this week to entrust that situation to God instead of rehearsing it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Verse 3 holds two truths together: “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” How do God’s patience and God’s justice fit together rather than cancel each other out? Why is each one a comfort and not a contradiction?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 is the theological heart of the chapter, and it deliberately holds two truths in tension: “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” This is a direct echo of God’s self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7, where He declares Himself merciful and

gracious, slow to anger, yet one who will by no means clear the guilty. Nahum is quoting the character of God as God Himself defined it.

Help students see that patience and justice are not opposites. God's slowness to anger is the very thing that gives sinners time and opportunity to repent. But that patience has a limit, and it does not mean He will finally wink at evil. A judge who never convicted anyone would not be patient; he would be corrupt. God's patience is the open door; His justice is the assurance that the door does not stay open forever.

This balance is pastorally vital. People tend to collapse one side into the other. Some presume on God's patience, treating delayed judgment as proof there will be no judgment. Others, crushed by guilt or by waiting, doubt there is any mercy at all. Nahum holds both, and so must we.

Point forward to how this resolves at the cross, where God's patience and justice meet perfectly. There God did not acquit the wicked by ignoring sin; He bore it Himself in Christ, so that He could be both just and the justifier of the one who trusts in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unity of God's patience and justice (Exodus 34:6-7) rather than a tension to be resolved by dropping one.
- God's patience as opportunity for repentance, not a promise that judgment will never come.
- The twin errors of presuming on grace and despairing of mercy.
- The cross as the place where justice and mercy meet (Romans 3:26).
- God will not acquit the wicked; sin is genuinely accountable before Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would a God who never judged actually not be a patient God at all?
- Which error are you more prone to: presuming on God's patience, or doubting His mercy?
- How does the cross hold together God's justice and His patience?

Question 4

Student Question:

God's patience toward Nineveh stretched across more than a century after Jonah preached there. Where in your life right now is God showing patience with you, and how should His patience lead you toward repentance rather than presumption (Romans 2:4)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns God's patience inward. The same patience Nineveh received, every believer has received in abundance. Romans 2:4 warns against despising the riches of God's kindness, not realizing that His kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Patience is not permission.

Ask students to consider where God has been patient with them: a sin He has not yet judged, a season of spiritual drift He has not yet ended, a warning He has repeated gently rather than harshly. The danger is that we read His patience as approval.

Help them feel the difference between presumption and gratitude. Presumption says, 'God has not acted, so it must not matter.' Gratitude says, 'God has given me time; let me not waste it.' The Ninevites of Jonah's day used their window and repented. The Nineveh of Nahum's day had hardened.

Make it specific and hopeful. God's patience with your students is an invitation, and the door is still open today. Encourage them to name one area where they have been presuming on grace and to walk through that open door now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's patience as kindness designed to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4).
- The danger of mistaking delayed consequences for divine approval.
- Repentance as the right response to grace, not presumption.
- The open door of God's patience is still open today, but not forever.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has God been patient with you in a way you may have been taking for granted?
- What is the difference between resting in grace and presuming on it?
- What one step of repentance is God's patience inviting you to take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Nahum describes the Lord with overwhelming power over creation: "he rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry" (Nahum 1:4), the mountains quake and the earth burns at His presence (Nahum 1:5). Why does the prophet pile up these images of God's power before he ever announces judgment on Nineveh? What does it teach about the One we are dealing with?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 3 through 6 unleash a torrent of cosmic imagery: the Lord has His way in the whirlwind and the storm, the clouds are the dust of His feet, He rebukes the sea and dries it up, the mountains quake and the hills melt at His presence. Nahum is painting the sheer magnitude of God before he says one more word about Assyria.

Ask students why the prophet does this. The answer is strategic comfort. Assyria looked unstoppable to little Judah. By showing that the God they trust commands the sea, the mountains, and the storm, Nahum shrinks the superpower down to size. The empire that terrified the nations is nothing before the One who melts mountains.

There is an echo of the exodus here. The God who dried up the Red Sea to deliver His people is the same God now standing against Nahum's oppressors. God's past acts of deliverance become the ground of present confidence.

Draw the application carefully. The point is not that God will remove every hardship now, but that nothing your students fear is greater than the God they serve. Verse 6 asks, 'Who can stand before his indignation?' The honest answer is no one, which makes verse 7 (the next question) all the sweeter: this overwhelming God is good and a stronghold to those who trust Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty over all creation, including the forces that overwhelm us.
- The strategic comfort of seeing earthly powers shrink before God's greatness.
- Echoes of the exodus: the God who delivered before can deliver again.
- The proper fear of God: no one can stand before His indignation.
- God's power as the foundation for trusting His goodness.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'unstoppable' thing in your life needs to be measured against the God who melts mountains?
- How does remembering God's past faithfulness steady you in present fear?
- Why is God's overwhelming power good news rather than only frightening?

Question 6

Student Question:

Verse 7 says, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." Where do you actually run for refuge when trouble comes? Name one habit or person or comfort you reach for before you reach for God, and what it would look like to make the Lord your stronghold first.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 7 is the tender center of the chapter, and it deserves to be lingered over: "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." After all the thunder, here is the refuge. The same God who is terrifying to His enemies is a fortress to His people.

This is a self-examining question, so press the practical issue: where do we actually run? Everyone has a default refuge. For some it is control, for some it is food or distraction or a screen, for some it is another person, for some it is anxious planning. These are the lesser strongholds we reach for before we reach for God.

Notice the phrase 'he knoweth them that trust in him.' To be known by God in the day of trouble is not abstract. It means He sees the specific person in the specific storm. Our refuge is not a doctrine but a Person who knows us by name.

Help students name one habitual refuge and one concrete way to make the Lord their first stronghold this week, perhaps a fixed time of prayer at the moment trouble usually drives them to the lesser comfort.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as a personal refuge, not merely a powerful force (Psalm 46:1).
- Identifying the lesser strongholds we run to before we run to God.
- Being 'known' by God in trouble: personal, not abstract, care.
- Trust as the condition that takes hold of God as our stronghold.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the first thing you reach for when trouble hits, before you reach for God?
- What does it mean to you that God 'knoweth them that trust in him'?
- What concrete habit would help you make the Lord your first refuge this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

To His enemies God promises an "utter end" (Nahum 1:8-9), but to His people He promises deliverance and the breaking of their yoke (Nahum 1:13). How does this passage show that the same act of God can be both judgment on the wicked and salvation for the faithful? Where do we see this pattern fulfilled later in Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 8 through 13 show the two-sided nature of God's action. To Nineveh He promises an utter end, an overflowing flood that makes a full end of the place (verse 8), affliction that will not rise up a second time (verse 9). To Judah He promises, 'now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder' (verse 13). The single coming of God means destruction for the oppressor and liberation for the oppressed.

Help students see this pattern, because it runs through all of Scripture and climaxes in Christ. The same flood that judged the world carried Noah to safety. The same Red Sea that drowned Egypt delivered Israel. The same day of the Lord that will judge the impenitent will be the salvation of God's people. Judgment and salvation are two edges of one act of God.

This is also where we must be careful, consistent with sound teaching, not to read these promises as a guarantee of national or political restoration of earthly Israel. Nahum's deliverance of Judah from Assyria is a real historical event, and it also points forward to the

greater deliverance God works in Christ, who breaks the yoke of sin and death from off His people (Galatians 5:1).

Bring it home: for the believer in Christ, the prospect of God's final judgment is not terror but hope, because the very day that ends all evil is the day that completes our salvation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Judgment and salvation as two edges of one act of God (the flood, the Red Sea, the day of the Lord).
- God breaking the yoke of His people, fulfilled ultimately in Christ's freeing us from sin (Galatians 5:1).
- Avoiding a political or nationalistic reading; the deliverance points forward to Christ, not to an earthly kingdom.
- Final judgment as hope, not terror, for those in Christ.
- God's deliverance is decisive: affliction 'shall not rise up the second time.'

Discussion Prompts

- How does it help to see that God's judgment of evil is also the rescue of His people?
- What 'yoke' in your life do you long for God to break, and how has Christ already begun that work?
- Why can a Christian look toward the final day with hope rather than dread?

Question 8

Student Question:

Chapter 1 closes with good news carried over the mountains: "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace" (Nahum 1:15). Who has carried good news of peace to you, and whom is God calling you to carry that news to now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 15 ends the chapter on a surprising note of evangelism: "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" The fall of the oppressor means a runner can race over the hills with good news. Judah is told to keep her feasts and perform her vows, for the wicked shall no more pass through.

This verse is nearly identical to Isaiah 52:7, which the New Testament applies directly to the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:15). The good news of deliverance from Assyria becomes a pattern for the greatest good news of all, the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ.

Since this is a self-examining question, make it personal in two directions. First, who carried good news to your students, the person whose 'feet' brought them the gospel or brought them

comfort in a dark season? Gratitude is in order. Second, whose mountains are they meant to run across now? Every believer who has received good news becomes a carrier of it.

Encourage a concrete response: one person to thank for bringing them good news, and one person to whom they will carry the news of peace this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deliverance of God producing the joyful proclamation of good news.
- The link to Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15: the gospel as the ultimate good tidings of peace.
- Every believer as both a receiver and a carrier of good news.
- Worship and faithfulness ('keep thy solemn feasts') as the response to deliverance.

Discussion Prompts

- Whose 'beautiful feet' first brought the good news of Christ or comfort to you?
- Across whose 'mountains' is God sending you to carry good news right now?
- How does gratitude for the gospel fuel our willingness to share it?

Question 9

Student Question:

Nahum holds together the goodness of God and the severity of God in a single breath. Why is it spiritually dangerous to keep only one of these and discard the other, and how does a right view of both the kindness and the judgment of God shape the way we live and worship (Romans 11:22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it gathers up the whole chapter. Nahum refuses to let us pick between the goodness of God and the severity of God. Verse 7 says He is good and a stronghold; verses 2 and 6 say He is furious and that none can stand before His indignation. Both are true of the one God, at the same time.

Romans 11:22 gives the New Testament summary: 'Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.' Paul says to consider both. A faith that keeps only God's goodness becomes sentimental and presumptuous; a faith that keeps only His severity becomes fearful and joyless. The mature believer holds both and is shaped by both.

Show your students why this matters for worship. We cannot worship a God we have edited down to our preferences. The God of the Bible is not a projection of our comfort; He is holy, and that holiness is exactly what makes His mercy astonishing. Awe and intimacy belong together. The God who is a consuming fire is also our refuge.

Be alert to the cultural pressure to keep only the comfortable half. Our age is suspicious of judgment and allergic to wrath. Yet the people who most need a just God are the suffering and the oppressed. Removing God's severity does not make Him more loving; it makes Him useless to those who cry for justice. Hold the whole portrait together, as Nahum does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goodness and severity of God held together (Romans 11:22).
- The danger of a sentimental faith that keeps only God's kindness.
- The danger of a fearful faith that keeps only God's wrath.
- Worshiping God as He has revealed Himself, not as we would edit Him.
- Holiness as what makes mercy astonishing; awe and intimacy belong together.
- Why the oppressed most need a God who is also just.

Discussion Prompts

- Which half of God's character are you more tempted to forget, His goodness or His severity?
- How does holding both together deepen rather than diminish your worship?
- Why is a God stripped of justice no comfort at all to those who suffer?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole chapter, from the fury of God against evil to His tenderness toward those who trust Him. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you, through this passage, to trust Him more deeply as your stronghold and to become more like Christ in how you respond to a world full of trouble.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back across the entire chapter and respond personally. The thread that runs through all of it is the call to trust the God who is both just and good, especially when the world is full of trouble.

Help them resist a merely intellectual takeaway. The aim of Nahum 1 is not that they would know more facts about divine wrath but that they would actually rest in the Lord as their stronghold and let go of the bitterness, fear, or revenge that injustice breeds in us. Spiritual formation happens when truth changes how we live on Monday.

Connect it to Christ explicitly. The God who is slow to anger and great in power is the God who came in the flesh, who absorbed the world's injustice on the cross, and who will return to set all things right. To become like Christ is to grow in trusting the Father's justice, to refuse revenge, and to carry the good news of peace to others.

Invite each person to name one concrete way they will live differently: a grievance released, a refuge changed, a fear surrendered, a piece of good news carried. Encourage them to write it down and revisit it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trust in God as the central response the whole chapter calls for.
- Spiritual formation as truth that changes Monday, not just Sunday knowledge.
- Christ as the fullest revelation of the God who is just and good.
- Becoming like Christ: releasing revenge, resting in God's justice, carrying peace.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing this chapter has shown you about God?
- What is one specific way you will trust God differently this week because of it?
- How is Jesus forming you, through this passage, into someone who rests in the Father's justice?