

The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

Lesson 1: The Lord, Slow to Anger and Great in Power -- Nahum 1:1–15

Imagine a city so cruel that the whole ancient world held its breath when its name was spoken. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was famous for stacking the heads of the conquered into pyramids, for skinning prisoners alive, for marching whole nations away with hooks in their faces. For generations the small kingdom of Judah had lived under that shadow, paying tribute, swallowing fear, watching the headlines and wondering when the wolf would come for them. Into that fear walks a prophet named Nahum, and the first thing he says is a name: “The burden of Nineveh.” God has something to say about the bully.

But before Nahum says one word about Nineveh, he says everything about God. The book opens not with a weather report on Assyria but with a portrait of the Lord. “God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious.” These are not comfortable words for modern ears. We prefer a God who is endlessly tolerant, who shrugs at evil and calls it diversity. But the people being crushed under Assyria’s boot did not want a God who shrugged. They wanted a God who saw, a God who cared, a God who would finally do something. Nahum tells them that God is exactly that.

And then, right in the middle of all this thunder, comes a line so tender it stops you cold: “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power.” Slow to anger. The same God who is described as furious is also described as patient, the kind of patience that gave Nineveh more than a hundred years to repent after the preaching of Jonah. God is not a short-tempered tyrant looking for an excuse to strike. He is a holy King who has watched the cruelty of empires with a patience we can barely comprehend, and who will, in His own time, set the world right.

This is where the lesson presses into your life. You and I do not live in ancient Nineveh, but we do live in a world where the wicked often seem to win, where the cruel go unpunished and the gentle get trampled. Nahum is written for the believer who has wondered whether God notices, whether evil will ever answer for itself, whether patience is the same thing as indifference. The answer rings through this chapter: God is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows them that trust in Him. Let us listen carefully to what kind of God He is.

Group Discussion: Read the opening verses of the chapter together, where God is described as jealous, avenging, slow to anger, and great in power. Why do we need all of these truths held together, and what happens to our picture of God when we keep only the comforting words and drop the rest?

Personal Reflection: Think of a situation where you have watched someone do wrong and seem to get away with it. How has that tempted you to doubt that God sees or cares, and what would it mean for you to bring that situation honestly to the Lord this week?

Read Nahum 1:1–15

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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)?
5. 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?

6. 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.
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Jonah 3:1–10, where Nineveh's earlier repentance shows the patience of God that Nahum now describes; Exodus 34:6–7, the great revelation of God as merciful and slow to anger yet by no means clearing the guilty; Romans 2:4–11, the kindness of God that leads to repentance and His righteous judgment; Psalm 46:1–7, God as our refuge and strength in the day of trouble; Romans 11:22, the goodness and severity of God held together for the believer.

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