

# ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

September 11, 2022 | Rejoicing in the Justice of God [Nahum]

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

In what ways do you see God's judgment today? How does this differ from His final judgment?

Read Nahum.

Ask God to give you discernment concerning what to believe and how to respond to His judgment.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's judgment of evil will be terrible and complete.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

We can rejoice when we see God holding evil deeds accountable. We can rejoice even more in the salvation we have in Christ.

### MEDITATE

*"Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, host of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies!" (Nahum 3:3).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the main them of Nahum.

Q: *How could God's judgment be a comfort to those who follow Him?*

Q: *Why would a book devoted to the judgment of a city be included in the Bible?*

We know almost nothing of the prophet Nahum. The only occurrence of this name is in the opening line of his book. Elkosh is identified as his home, but no one knows where it was. We are able to date his prophecy within a relatively small window. The destruction of Thebes, which occurred in the year 663 B.C., is referenced in Nahum 3:8. Assyria quickly declined after the year 626 B.C., so it appears Nahum delivered this prophecy sometime during this forty-seven-year window.

Nahum targeted Nineveh specifically in his prophecy, but Nineveh was the chief city of the Assyrian empire. While Assyria may not have been the most notorious adversary of the people of God, they had a long and brutal stint as a superpower in the ancient Near East.

Typically, prophecies of judgment are intended to bring dread, but Nahum's prophecy seems to have served a different purpose. This oracle of judgment upon the city of Nineveh was likely delivered within Judea instead of the city to which it was directed. The prophet intended to encourage the people of God by describing the judgment approaching their enemy. Nahum's name means "comfort," and his book would have comforted the people of God who had greatly suffered by at the hands of this cruel nation.

Q: *Would it be challenging for you to find satisfaction in God's judgment?*

Q: *How does the gospel influence how we understand and apply the book of Nahum?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Nahum's audience would have found satisfaction in his prediction of Nineveh's brutal demise. This may make us uncomfortable today. We typically see it as a flaw in character if someone finds satisfaction in the misfortunes of others. There are several mitigating issues, however. First, Nineveh's demise was not just a stroke of bad luck but the judgment of God. The people of God should always be able to find satisfaction in His actions. Second, we cannot have the same certainty concerning God's judgment that Nahum had. God revealed to Nahum that Nineveh's time for destruction was approaching. There would be no averting

it this time, as in the day of Jonah. Therefore, it was right for Nahum to anticipate that the people of God would find satisfaction in His judgment of evil. We cannot have Nahum's certainty, so any satisfaction we have when it appears that God has judged the wicked must be conditional. We would rather see those who oppose God repent and receive His mercy instead. Apart from God's grace shown to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we would all be on the same path as Nineveh.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Nahum contains three short chapters. The first chapter is a psalm revealing the certainty of God's judgment. Chapters 2 and 3 center on Nahum's pronouncement of woe.

### 1. THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

### 2. 2. THE HORROR OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will overview the key themes from Nahum and offer personal applications. The first chapter of Nahum reveals the certainty of God's judgment. Chapters 2 and 3 form a chiasmic structure highlighting the great despair Nineveh would find in God's judgment. A chiasm (also called a chiasmus, chiasmic structure) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a "mirror" effect as the ideas are "reflected" back in a passage.*

## 1. THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

### ▣ NAHUM 1

🔍: *How does Nahum 1:3 use Exodus 34:6-7?*

🔍: *How did Nahum describe God's judgment?*

Nahum had a singular purpose. His message was to proclaim God's coming judgment. He spent no time identifying sins or detailing accusations. In the first chapter, the prophet did not even pause to tell us who was receiving God's

judgment. We only know it is Nineveh from the prologue (Nahum 1:1) and from later in the prophecy (Nahum 2:8). Nahum's only concern was to declare the certainty of God's coming judgment.

Like several other Minor Prophets, Nahum alluded to Exodus 34:6–7 to make his message, but instead of focusing on God's grace to repentant sinners as Jonah and Micah did, Nahum celebrated God's determination to condemn the guilty (Nahum 1:3). God may be slow to anger, but His judgment against evil is certain.

Nahum utilized several images to describe God's coming judgment—the quaking mountains, the melting hills, the heaving earth (Nahum 1:5). It is as if creation itself was coming undone in the act of judgment. Nahum also compared God's judgment to a flood (Nahum 1:8). As in the days of Noah, the wicked would be overcome by the waters of God's judgment. .

**Q:** *Why should God's punishment of evil provide believers with hope and expectation?*

**Q:** *What comfort do you have in the face of God's certain judgment?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Our sense of justice demands that every wicked deed be held accountable, but this world fails to fulfill our sense of justice. People do the wrong thing and get away with it all the time. One of the more challenging aspects of Nahum 1 is recognizing that the prophet expected his hearers to find comfort in the demise of those God was judging. Israel would be freed from the yoke and bonds of Nineveh (Nahum 1:13). Nahum 1:15 says “Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news.” The good news referred to here is God's judgment against Nineveh. Nahum believed Israel should rejoice at the destruction of Nineveh! Finding satisfaction in the sorrow of others feels counter to our general sense of right and wrong, but Nahum was appealing to our desire to see wickedness held accountable. Nineveh had committed unbelievable atrocities, and Nahum recognized that God was holding them accountable with His judgment. In the same way, when it appears today that people get away with doing the wrong thing, we can find some measure of solace in knowing that God will hold every deed accountable at His final judgment.

**Q:** *What is the answer to the rhetorical questions in Nahum 1:6?*

**Q:** *Who is the worthless counselor who plotted evil against the Lord? (Nahum 1:11)*

Nahum declared that God would completely consume those who stand against Him. No one will be able to stand against His judgment (Nahum 1:6). Even an army at its fullest strength will be cut down by God's affliction (Nahum 1:12). Not even their names will remain after God's judgment (Nahum 1:14).

Nahum alluded to an event from Assyria and Israel's past to illustrate how God would cut the wicked down even when it seemed they could not be stopped. In Nahum 1:11, the prophet referred to a worthless counselor who plotted evil against the Lord. Where most of the prophecy is generic in that it does not address anyone specific, Nahum 1:11 seems to have someone particular in mind. Although we cannot be certain, the best candidate is an Assyrian governor who accompanied the Assyrian army as they besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C. This man was known as the Rabshakeh, and his story is recounted in 2 Kings 18:13–37. He taunted king Hezekiah and his men by declaring that since the gods of the other nations were unable to save them against Assyria, the God of Judah would likewise be unable to stand against them. God did in fact save Jerusalem on this occasion by sending his angel to strike down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19:35). Nahum also alluded to the fate of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. In Nahum 1:14, the prophet declared “from the house of your gods ... I will make your grave, for you are vile.” After failing to overthrow Jerusalem and Hezekiah, Sennacherib was murdered in the house of Nisroch his god, which was in Nineveh (2 Kings 19:35–37).

Thus, Nahum looked to a significant moment from Assyria's past to frame the judgment he foresaw for the city. Just as the previous leaders were brought to nothing by the wrath of God, so Nineveh would be brought to nothing in the days of Nahum.

**Q:** *Nahum said the Lord is a stronghold to those who take refuge in him. How is Christ a better stronghold than anything we could provide ourselves?*

**Q:** *Rabshakeh and Sennacherib looked to their wealth and power as their strongholds. What strongholds do you see people relying upon today?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Nahum 1 is a sobering reminder of what our predicament would be apart from the grace we have in Jesus Christ. Nahum said, “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble” (Nahum 1:7). Believers recognize that Christ is our ultimate stronghold. Human beings often like to think of themselves as their own stronghold. This is what Rabshakeh and Sennacherib thought. We like to think we can overcome every problem with science, love, money, or hard work, but none of this provides the protection we need from God's wrath. Only Christ can do that.

## 2. THE HORROR OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

### NAHUM 2-3

**Q:** *Why would a siege be frightening for an ancient city?*

**Q:** *How does Nahum's use of locusts compare to Joel's (Joel 1:4, 7; Nahum 3:15)?*

Nahum 2-3 can be structured as an extended chiasm, which is when lines form parallel units that extend from a center.

A. The prophet's vision (2:1-10)

B. The prophet's taunt (2:11-12)

C. The declaration of Yahweh (2:13)

D. Woe oracle (3:1-4)

C. The declaration of Yahweh (3:5-7)

B. The prophet's taunt (3:8-13)

A. The prophet's vision (3:14-17)

The center of the chiasm is the focal point. The prophet was announcing complete and utter woe upon Nineveh. This section will examine each set of parallel lines before concluding with the woe section.

The first set of parallel lines describes a people preparing for a deadly siege. A siege was one of the worst possible scenarios in the ancient Near East. The sieged city was overmatched. Otherwise, the inhabitants would meet their enemies in battle. Taking cover within the walls would offer some immediate protection but only with the knowledge that everything left outside would be destroyed. Furthermore, conditions within the sieged city would quickly deteriorate. Food and water would grow scarce. Nothing could be done with the bodies of those who died from starvation or skirmishes with the opposing army.

There is little wonder that Nahum foresaw panic in Nineveh as the army approached (Nahum 2:4-5). In describing the turmoil, Nahum utilized a literary device known as staccato repetition in which each line of a poem is short and unattached to the others. As you read, the rhythm is quick. This helps the reader gain a sense of the panic and flurry

of actions as the invading army drew closer and everyone scrambled to get within the city walls.

Those within the sieged city would be like insects before the invading army (Nahum 3:16–17). In Joel, the prophet described a locust invasion as the judgment of God and then described an approaching army in similar terms. In Nahum, the imagery is reversed. The Assyrians were the locusts, but they would be scattered as the invading army approaches. Nahum may have been alluding to Assyria's widespread military conquest in these verses. Formerly, they were the locust army invading other nations, but now the locusts themselves would be scattered. In the same way, the prosperity secured from militaristic conquest made Nineveh a central hub for merchants in the Middle East. Now, those merchants would scatterer as well (Nahum 3:16).

**Q:** *Nineveh found pride and security in its merchants and princes, but these came to nothing as God's judgment approached the city. What are you trusting in for fulfillment that will come to nothing when God arrives in judgment?*

**Q:** *These verses hint at the reversal of fortunes Nineveh would encounter when God arrived in judgment. Does the idea of reversal at the day of judgment worry you or give you hope? Why?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Assyria had developed one of the vastest empires known in the history of the world making it the worldwide center of commerce and culture. But it would all come to nothing when God appeared in judgment. In the same way, people today seek fulfillment in all sorts of things that will come to nothing when God arrives in judgment. No matter what you seek fulfillment in—entertainment, money, power, drugs, sex, even a quiet family life—it will all come to nothing when God arrives in judgment. Nineveh warns us that we can have the world at our feet one moment and have it all taken away the next. Seeking God through a relationship with Jesus Christ is the only sure way to find fulfillment that will never be taken away.

**Q:** *he Assyrian kings were frequently associated with lions. How does this inform the interpretation of Nahum 2:11–12?*

**Q:** *How is Thebes [Nahum 3:8] comparable to Nineveh? What link did Nahum see?*

Understanding Nahum 2:11–12 requires us to know some history about the Assyrians and read between the lines a bit. The Minor Prophets frequently utilized the imagery of lions in their prophecies. In these passages, God is typically the lion who devours His prey in judgment. Something else is going on in Nahum. The Assyrians kings frequently spoke of themselves and compared themselves to lions as a symbol of the strength and viciousness they wished to embody. So, Nahum was likely referring to the Assyrian kings in these verses. In verse 11, he asked where these lions (the Assyrian kings) would reside once their den (Nineveh) had been destroyed. In verse 12, he was recalling the former viciousness of the Assyrian kings. They tore their prey apart and filled their dens with their victims. Now what would these Assyrian kings do when their city was destroyed? Where did their strength go?

The city of Thebes was perhaps the most renowned city in ancient Egypt, but it was conquered by the Assyrians in 663 B.C. Nahum told Nineveh that they would end up in the same predicament (Nahum 3:8–13).

🔗: *In what areas of life do you depend upon your own strength or capabilities?*

🔗: *How can you learn from seeing others deal with the consequences of their sins?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In forecasting Nineveh’s fall, Nahum pointed them to the city of Thebes (Nahum 3:8). The Assyrians would have been very familiar with the downfall of Thebes. They had caused it. Now, God would bring their downfall as well. These were the most powerful cities in the ancient Near East, but neither stood a chance when God determined to bring His judgment upon them. There is no worldly power beyond God’s judgment. No matter how invincible they seemed, God would bring them down when He determined it was time.

🔗: *How do the two declarations [Nahum 2:13 and 3:5] begin?*

🔗: *How do they differ in focus?*

The parallel declarations in Nahum 2:13 and 3:5 are the two key points for recognizing the chiasmic structure of Nahum 2–3. These declarations begin in the exact same manner—“Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts.” From here, each declaration has its own emphasis. Nahum 2:13 focuses upon God’s destruction of



Nineveh. God would burn their chariots and devour their “young lions,” probably a metaphor for their young princes. God’s judgment would leave these lions without prey and without hope.

Nahum 3:5–7 focuses upon Nineveh’s shame. God would expose Nineveh to the rest of the world. He would even throw filth at them. The result is much the same as the original declaration. Nineveh would have no hope and no comfort (Nahum 3:7).

❖: *Why was shame added as an extra dimension of Nineveh’s punishment?*

❖: *What would cause God to be against a people or a city?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The biggest question Nahum’s declarations pose to us is what would cause God to be against a people or a city? The answer is unrepentant sin. It is clear from Nahum 1:3 that God will not excuse the guilty of their sin. He will hold them accountable. The rest of Nahum essentially works out this concept. We must never think God takes our sins lightly, and since that is the case, we must never take our sins lightly either. Doing so will only illustrate the callousness of our hearts and make us more like Nineveh than we would ever want.

❖: *Since the subject of this woe is Nineveh, how is this woe speech different than most other woe speeches in the Bible?*

❖: *This woe stresses the extent and brutality of Nineveh’s devastation. Why is this appropriate?*

Introducing Nahum 3:1–4 with the word “woe” designates it as a special type of literary unit. Announcements of woe are perhaps the most emotional passages in the Bible. Woe is reserved for those who have experienced sorrow to the most extreme degree, usually as a result of God’s judgment. Typically, woe oracles coincide with lament, but due to Nahum’s unique situation, Nineveh’s woe was Judah’s joy. The actions of this great enemy against the people of God would not go unpunished. In fact, their evil deeds would be met by a punishment equally brutal. Nahum utilized a staccato style of verse to quickly summarize the extent of the nation’s devastation.

Q: *How is this passage surprising when considered against the backdrop of Jonah?*

Q: *Why is humanity so often blind to the grace and mercy of God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In Jonah, God threatened to destroy Nineveh but relented when the city repented of its sin. A little more than 100 years later, the city would see the devastation predicted by Nahum. The word used in Jonah to describe God relenting from His judgment is from the same root Nahum’s name is taken from. Intentional or not, it gives us a clear message concerning the wickedness of the human heart and how quickly we are able to forget God’s grace in our lives. When we forget His grace or assume we will receive it, we underline how unworthy we were to receive it in the first place and call into question whether we actually have it.

## NEXT STEPS

Nineveh brutally tormented the ancient Near East for more than 200 years. If ever a nation deserved God’s judgment, it was them, and as Nahum predicted, God did eventually destroy them. Yet Nineveh’s history with God was not one-sided because, as revealed in Jonah, they received God’s grace, if only for a short time. God’s dealings with Nineveh instruct us in how we should respond to an offense. We need never respond with retaliation. God intends to hold the offense accountable or to reveal His mercy within it. Either way, if we retaliate, we are only usurping God’s actions. This week, allow God’s grace to be revealed in how you respond to offenses, regardless of whether they occur at home or at work, whether they are of a personal nature or not.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.*

*-Father, I praise you for your grace and for your judgment. You perfectly adjudicate every evil deed in this world.*

*-Jesus, I thank you for the forgiveness I have in you. Apart from you, I would have no hope in the face of God’s wrath.*

*-God, help me never forget your grace or take it for granted. Allow your mercy to deeply influence my heart so that I may respond with authentic worship.*

*-Father, help me to show my trust in you by how I respond to offenses.*