

The Message Jonah Wanted to Give

Nahum 1-3

July 17th, 2022

1. The _____ of Nineveh's destruction (ch 1)

2. The _____ of Nineveh's destruction (ch 2)

3. The _____ for Nineveh's destruction (ch 3)

4. Applying the Word
 - a. Find comfort in God's sovereign control of the _____

 - b. Find rest in God's _____

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Nahum

1. Nahum opens with a psalm of praise to the Lord. What do we learn about God in verses 2–8?
2. The Assyrians completed their destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. This means they have been oppressing the southern kingdom for more than 60 years. As God's people cry out to him for deliverance, it may feel like God is slow to act. How do these verses address that slowness?
3. Read 2 Peter 3:1–13. How does that passage and Nahum 1:2–8 inform our understanding of God's apparent slowness in keeping his promises of judgment against the wicked?
4. What does it mean that God is a "stronghold" and "refuge"? What does it mean that he "knows" those who take refuge in him (v. 7)? See also Psalm 27
5. 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 the Lord?
6. Read 2 Kings 18:13–35. Summarize the boasting of the Rabshakeh. How does the Rabshakeh's message to the people within Jerusalem help our understanding of Nahum 2:13?

Note: Adapted from Knowing the Bible by Crossway

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Big idea: God is slow to anger but He will not leave the guilty unpunished.

Intro

There is more injustice in the world than we will ever see made right. If you picture all the injustice as a large circle, such a small portion of it will be resolved. It doesn't mean we shouldn't try – that's what our laws are for and we should encourage just laws and restitution for people when possible. How do we account for victims whose abusers never face prosecution? Unsolved crimes? Failed states around the world with corrupt police? War crimes in Ukraine and Cameroon? Will they get away with it? But how do we make up for 3 centuries of slavery?

Jonah wrestled with this in the book of Jonah. Why are you not punishing the Ninevites (Assyria), God? How can you show compassion?

Fast forward 160 years. There is as much time between the book of Jonah and the book of Nahum as there has been between our time and the Civil War.

Israel has been destroyed by the Assyrians. So has Thebes, the most powerful city in Egypt at the time. Assyria is dominant and powerful on the world stage. It seems like no one and nothing can stop them.

It's hard to imagine a more powerful ancient kingdom. They extended all the way down into Egypt and conquered Thebes (No-Amon in some translations). Their city was protected by double walls, the inner one was 100' tall and wide enough for 3 chariots to race side by side around it. The river coursed around the walls providing a natural moat.

Imagine getting taken into the palace of the king of Assyria in Nineveh as a conquered, displaced ruler. Marched there with a metal hook through your jaw. And you stand before these massive stone carved tablets with bas relief images of all the places they have conquered.

SEE IMAGES OF THE SACK OF THEBES

Here's how the king of Assyria described and boasted about conquering Thebes, "This city, the whole of it, I conquered it with the help of Ashur and Ishtar. Silver, gold, precious stones, all the wealth of the palace, rich cloth, precious linen, great horses, supervising men and women, two obelisks of splendid electrum, weighing 2,500 talents, the doors of temples I tore from their bases and carried them off to Assyria. With this weighty booty I left Thebes. Against Egypt and Kush I have lifted my spear and shown my power. With full hands I have returned to Nineveh, in good health."

— Rassam cylinder of Ashurbanipal[17]

And yet through Nahum God explains that He will stop Assyria's violent reign. It was the message Jonah wanted to give but could not.

1. The **prediction** of Nineveh's destruction (ch 1)
 - a. The character of God (1:2-7)
 - i. Jealous and avenging (1:2)
 1. We can't comprehend a jealousy that is not sinful because human jealousy is focused on us not the good of the other person.
 2. But a holy and loving God knows the very best thing for His people is Himself.
 - ii. Slow to anger but will not leave the guilty unpunished (1:3-6)
 1. This is what Jonah left out in Jonah 4:2 in His quotation from Exodus 34:6-7

- a. **Exodus 34:6-7** And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."
 - b. **Jonah 4:2b** I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.
 - c. He was upset that God was compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth because He wanted God to judge the guilty. He had a truncated view of God.
 - d. We often have the opposite approach – we want a God who is compassion and gracious to everyone – and cringe at the idea of a God who brings vengeance on His enemies and will not leave the guilty unpunished.
 - e. "I like the first part but we ignore the second part" we aren't allowed to do that in Nahum. It's the benefit of reading all of the Bible, even these obscure minor prophets.
- 2. Uses poetic language to describe His power over nature and all the earth.
 - a. Who can stand before His indignation? The implied answer, no one.
- iii. But...The Lord is good, a stronghold, a refuge
 - 1. He is jealous, avenging, AND good
 - 2. Being a stronghold and refuge for one person might look like avenging against another
- b. Verse 8 hints at the form Nineveh's destruction will take.
 - i. The rivers that they were so proud of for their protection would flood, eroding the foundations of the massive city walls until they collapsed and the Babylonians would flood in.
 - ii. The city would be so wiped out that the site would be abandoned and unknown until 1842 when it was rediscovered by British archeologists.
 - iii. Skip ahead to the vivid description in ch 2
- 2. The **description** of Nineveh's destruction (ch 2)
 - a. Written as if Nahum is there and seeing it with his eyes, hearing it with his ears, and he wants us to experience it as well. (vv. 3-6)
 - i. Shields and warriors are dressed in red
 - ii. Chariots are rushing through with flashing steel and spears
 - iii. Nobles stumble – according to historical records, the prince burned his palace down upon himself and his family rather than be captured.
 - iv. The gates of the river opened – describing the flood that undermined the walls
 - b. It would be plundered (v. 9)
 - i. Which is what happened. It was the wealthiest city in the world and when archeologists unearthed it they expected to find vast stores of treasure, but they found none. It was completely plundered.
 - ii. They found a library, parts of the palace, artwork – but no gold.
 - c. All of this is fixed – certain (v. 7)

- d. The chapter ends in v. 13 with a declaration from God that He is against them.
 - i. A sobering judgment that reappears in ch 3
- 3. The reasons for Nineveh's destruction (ch 3)
 - a. Why would God do this?
 - i. They were violent
 - 1. Bloody city full of lies and pillage
 - 2. No wonder the chapter ends with a statement that all who hear will clap their hands, "for on whom has not your evil passed continually?"
 - b. So God is against them.
 - i. What makes judgment passages hard and compassion passages easier, is we see that we deserve judgment but we want compassion.
 - ii. If God will not allow the guilty to go unpunished and we know that all of us are guilty, where does that leave us?
 - iii. We want to rush past this to mercy but we need to let it sit heavy on us for a moment or mercy seems cheap.
 - 1. We may not have shed blood in violence, or we might have. That is the 5th commandment – murder.
 - 2. But have we had other gods before the true God? (1st commandment)
 - 3. Have we misused His name? (3rd)
 - 4. Have you honored your parents? (5th)
 - 5. Adultery – which Jesus says includes in the heart even if not in the actions
 - 6. Stolen anything – even something small
 - 7. Lying
 - 8. Coveting – jealously wanting something that others have that seems better than your own – their home, their car, their phone, their wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend
 - iv. God could say to each of us, "I am against you. I will cut you off." Why hasn't He?
 - 1. **Matthew 27:46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").
 - 2. It's not that we don't deserve to have the same things said of us that were said of Nineveh. We do. God destroying evil is hard for us, judgment passages are hard for us, sometimes because we look in the mirror and we see evil in ourselves. (adapted from Guthrie)
 - 3. But Jesus took our place. He was cut off in our place. Judgment either falls on those who have committed evil or it falls on Christ.
 - 4. Even the shocking language in 3:5 – I am against you...I will show the nations your nakedness, set you up as a spectacle.
 - a. Those were literal descriptions of the violence and shaming that the Assyrians and other ancient peoples did, and they are describe what Jesus experienced.

- b. Is anything more of a spectacle than a naked Messiah hanging on a public cross while people mock Him?
 - 5. **2 Corinthians 5:21a** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,
 - a. He became sin for us
 - b. “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
- v. What do we hear instead of “I am against you...I have cut you off”?
 - 1. **Romans 8:31** What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - a. Nahum is for us. How? Not because we see the fall of a nation today and assume it’s because of the identical issues as Assyria and it’s capitol, Nineveh. We know the cause and effect in Nahum because God revealed it.
 - b. Nahum is for us because of what it tells us about God in the unfolding drama of redemption.
 - i. He is jealous and avenging
 - ii. Slow to anger – but not incapable of anger
 - iii. He will by now means leave the guilty unpunished
 - iv. AND He is good, a stronghold, He knows those who take refuge in Him.
 - c. ESV Expository Commentary - All of mankind is thus divided into two groups in the context of this global judgment: those who seek refuge in God (v. 7) and those who continue as his enemies despite the warning Nahum offers of coming judgment (v. 8).

4. Applying the Word

- a. Find comfort in God’s sovereign control of the **nations**
 - i. The Assyrian empire was vast and powerful when Nahum gave this message. It would have been unthinkable to them that they could fall.
 - 1. 1:12 – though they are at full strength and likewise many, even so, they will be cut off and pass away.
 - 2. 2:7 It is fixed – certain – that they would fall
 - ii. They had just conquered Thebes (No-amon) in Egypt, but God explains that they are no better.
 - 1. 3:8-10 – Thebes was by the Nile as a protection, just like they are by the river.
 - 2. Just like Jesus told Pilate, you wouldn’t have any power unless God gave it to you, so the nations only have the power God gives to them.
 - iii. He can say of them, and all who plot against Him, in 1:9 – whatever you devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it.
 - 1. This is at a national level – how much more so in our little lives.
 - iv. Injustice will continue to infect our world. We can and should pass and enforce just laws, but things will get missed, our justice will be distorted.
 - 1. But when God’s kingdom comes one day, it is going to come with perfect justice. And it will endure forever with perfect justice. He will win!

b. Find rest in God's refuge

- i. Judah was this little hillbilly, weak power isolated by a sea of Assyria around them, and yet they outlasted Assyria. Assyria fell to Babylon by 612 BC. Judah was taken by Babylon as well in 586 BC, but they returned to the land, they persevered, they still exist today as a people both inside and outside the land of Israel.
- ii. Nahum functions as the book of Revelation –
 1. Speaking to his people when they were a small, weak group of people with a powerful empire against them (Assyria over Israel, Rome over the church)
 2. Mark Dever – “Not one trial will outlast us if we are children of God.”
- iii. You may have seen video this week filmed by some hikers as a sudden avalanche cascaded down the rocky slope of a mountain in Kyrgyzstan. They are filming it as it gets closer and closer. It's hard not to yell at the screen, “what are you doing! Run!” It ends with the snow washing over the camera. But they survive because they hid behind a rock, a refuge, that was stronger than the avalanche.



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"This city, the whole of it, I conquered it with the help of Ashur and Ishtar. Silver, gold, precious stones, all the wealth of the palace, rich cloth, precious linen, great horses, supervising men and women,...Against Egypt and Kush I have lifted my spear and shown my power. With full hands I have returned to Nineveh, in good health."

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Exodus 34:6-7 ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

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2. The *description* of Nineveh's destruction (ch 2)

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3. The *reasons* for Nineveh's destruction (ch 3)

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4. Applying the Word

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a. Find comfort in God's sovereign control of the nations

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b. Find rest in God's refuge

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Mark Dever – “Not one trial will outlast us if we are children of God.”

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