



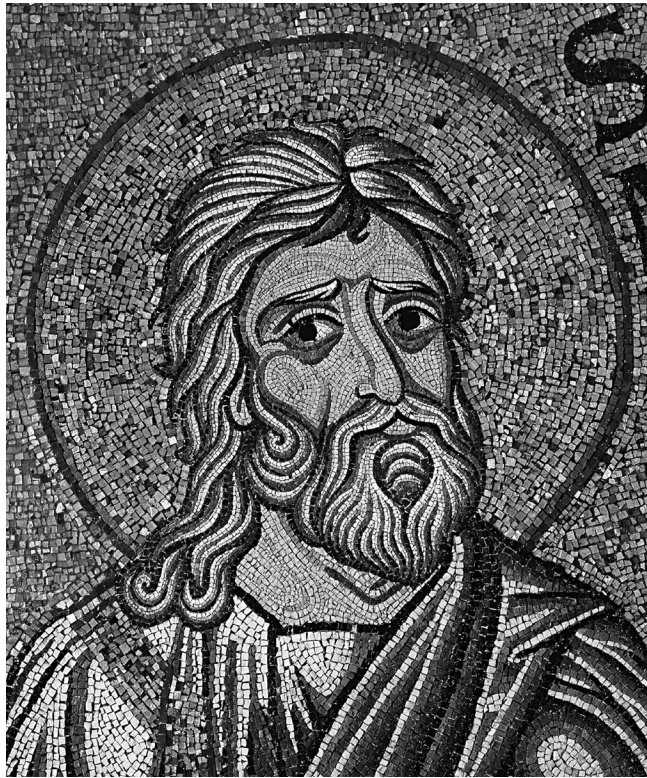
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Nahum/Habakkuk/Zephaniah

LEADERS GUIDE

The prophet Zephaniah's dark eyes and taut face mark him as one who must proclaim the Lord's wrath against the nations, and also against Judah. His prophecy, like those of other Minor Prophets, announces the Day of the Lord and the need for repentance. Yet, the prophet also has the joy of announcing God's mercy to be shared with those who seek the Lord with repentant hearts. As you study these lessons from the prophets, rejoice in the mercy the Lord has shown to you and to all people through Jesus Christ.



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 51.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 51**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1 ½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then, the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxxv–cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

God, the Divine Warrior

Nahum 1

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

God's power is seen in His ability to act as a warrior against the enemies of His people.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. see God's action in the past in judging the Assyrian Empire;
2. understand that no one can withstand God's just anger; and
3. take comfort that God is always in control of what happens in the world to His people.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 51.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 557)

Lecture Presentation

1 Nahum and Nineveh (1:1)

The three short books that we will study are part of the section of the Bible referred to as the Minor Prophets. They are designated as *minor* due to the fact that each of these books is relatively short, not that they are unimportant. Each is written by a prophet about whom we know nothing other than what he tells us in the book named after him. We have no other information about these prophets anywhere else in the Old Testament.

For the Book of Nahum, the prophet identifies himself as "Nahum of Elkosh." This doesn't help us much, since we do not know the location of the town. Various locations have been suggested, but it remains unknown. Most likely, the town was somewhere in Judah.

The name Nahum means *comfort*. The name is fitting of the prophet's work, since his message provides comfort to the people of Judah about an enemy whose destruction is certain. The tone of the book may seem anything but comforting, but since Nahum is prophesying the destruction of the major enemy of Judah, God's people receive comfort from Nahum's prophecy.

His short book begins: (1:1) "An oracle concerning Nineveh." Most Christians reading this sentence will probably not have a very visceral reaction to it. Indeed, the only reaction will probably be a recognition that Nineveh is the city where Jonah was called to preach.

The Nineveh here is indeed that same city, but Nahum lived about 150 years after Jonah. The people living in Judah at the time of Nahum's prophecy recognized Nineveh as the capital of the superpower of the time, Assyria. The reaction to the name would have been similar to the reaction of the people of the United States to the mention of Moscow during the Cold War.

Actually, the reaction would have been even stronger. Nineveh represented not only the *potential* for destruction of the country (as Moscow did for the United States during the Cold War), but it also represented the *actual* oppression, suppression, and destruction of the lands and people of Judah. In 722 BC, the Assyrian army had besieged Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom

of Israel, and, after a three-year siege, had carried off most of the people to captivity, scattering them in various places in the Assyrian Empire. This could almost have been in living memory for Nahum's hearers.

Before the rise of the Assyrian Empire, Babylon, to the south of Assyria, had been the dominant power in the region. The Assyrian kings considered themselves, however, to be the true successors of the ancient Akkadian Empire, which had been in the same area of the ancient Near East. Thus, the empire is called the *Neo-Assyrian Empire*. The Assyrian Empire had its start as Adad-nirari II, king of Asshur from 911–891 BC, began expanding his rule from the city of Asshur. He expanded westward, toward the Mediterranean Sea, and southward, toward the Persian Gulf.

It took time to expand westward and then southward, but this was accomplished under successive Assyrian kings. Although there was early contact between Israel and the Assyrians, the empire became a real threat to the children of Israel during the second half of its existence.

Asshur was the old religious capital of the Assyrian Empire. In this city was the center of the worship of the god Asshur. The city was also the administrative capital of the empire. Although Asshur remained the religious capital, King Sennacherib (who reigned 704–681 BC) made Nineveh the political capital. Thus, Nineveh became synonymous with the Assyrian Empire.

The (Neo-)Assyrian Empire lasted about three hundred years (911–612 BC). Assyria did not become a superpower overnight, nor was its influence immediately felt in the Promised Land. The kingdom of Judah at first had more to fear from Egypt, as Judah came into existence after the death of Solomon in 931 BC, when his son Rehoboam ascended the throne and the northern ten tribes rebelled and formed the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam.

However, as Assyria became more powerful, conflict intensified. The culmination of this conflict occurred in 722 BC, when Samaria, the capital of Israel, was captured, and the people deported. The biblical writers record the event this way:

(2 Kings 17:5–6) Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

You will probably recognize at least some of these Assyrian kings mentioned in the Old Testament: Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sargon, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon. Some of these kings are quite prominent in the biblical record, as the Assyrian forces came into conflict with Israel and Judah.

Assyria did not have the reputation of being kind. One might think this is just a case of the former oppressed people being able to record their impressions when their oppressor has disappeared. Such is not the case, however. The Assyrian armies were as cruel as the Bible portrays them, and even crueler. One can discover this from actual Assyrian records.

Ashurnasirpal II was king of Assyria from 883–859 BC. His activities during his reign are recorded on reliefs that have been excavated in his palace. Here is an excerpt from one of these annals:

I built a pillar over against his city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted. And I covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar. And I cut the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers, who had rebelled. Many captives from them I burned with fire and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers. . . . And in many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living, and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks around the city. Their young men and maidens I burned in fire. (D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 1 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926], 145)

When did Nahum write his book? He doesn't say, so we have to determine the date from what we know about the world situation at the time. The latest that Nahum could have written is 612 BC, since he is prophesying the destruction of Nineveh. He speaks about the fall of Thebes as having already happened. Thebes fell to the Assyrians in 663 BC. Therefore, that represents the earliest date that Nahum could have written.

Can we be more precise? Not definitively, but we can perhaps say that the book was written before 627 BC, when the last strong king of Assyria died. After this time, it became apparent that Assyria might not be as strong as it had appeared. Nahum delivered his message from God at a time that it seemed impossible that the mighty empire might be defeated.

2 Oracles and Visions (1:1)

There are two words in the first verse that warrant further discussion. The two words are *oracle* and *vision*.

The word *oracle* is an accurate and usual translation of the Hebrew word used here, but it can be often misunderstood. A different translation of the Hebrew word is *proclamation*. God has given a message to Nahum to proclaim and proclaim accurately. One must not compare a biblical oracle like Nahum's to the oracles of the ancient Near East, or to the oracles of Greece and Rome.

One of the most well-known of those oracles was the Oracle of Delphi. The *oracles* delivered by the Oracle of Delphi were often ambiguous in meaning, able to be interpreted in several ways. Thus, whatever the outcome of a particular action, one could consider that it had been "predicted" by the Oracle. There was often nothing entirely definite about that prediction.

The oracles that the prophets delivered from God were exactly the opposite of this. What God said, He meant; what God meant, He said. God's oracles were unambiguous, clearly stating what God had in mind for a country; and God clearly stated why He was doing what He planned to do.

A look at the oracle that Nahum proclaims shows exactly that: it is unambiguous in its meaning. No one can mistake what he is saying. It is a clear prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh.

The second word in this verse that needs perhaps a little explanation is the word *vision*. It is not that the word is hard to understand. The word very clearly states that Nahum saw something that God presented to him.

In your personal study, you looked at several other people who saw visions from God. Visions were not an uncommon occurrence in the Bible. But what does that mean to us; should we expect visions today? There are some Christians who say that God can choose whatever method He wants to communicate with us, including visions.

Martin Luther dealt with people who wanted to deal directly with the Spirit. Although the matter was different than visions (Karlstadt and others against whom Luther was writing in *Against the Heavenly Prophets* taught that one need simply meditate upon the Passion to obtain its benefits), the root problem was the same. Will the Holy Spirit deal directly with us Christians? Will He directly communicate with us?

No, answered, Dr. Luther. "Something else must always be there. What is it? The Word, the Word, the Word. Listen, lying spirit, the Word avails" (AE 40:212–13). A little later, Luther wrote, "Just as in the case of baptism we confess that only water is present, but since the Word of God, which forgives sin, is connected with it, we readily say with St. Paul, that baptism is a bath of regeneration and renewal. Everything depends on the Word" (AE 40:214).

For Luther, there was only one sufficient and necessary thing to have in order to know what God was communicating to us: the external Word of God. It did not matter what one thought or what one thought the Spirit was saying—the external Word of God had to be present in order to clarify and make certain what God was determining to say.

We do not know what certainty God gave Nahum that this vision was from God and not a figment of his imagination. We do know that he proclaimed the vision as God's message.

We, however, have God's Word in the Letter to the Hebrews (1:1–2): "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world." We learn what the Son tells us through the external Word of God, the Word found in the Bible.

Is what the Spirit "tells" you or "shows" you something that you cannot verify from the Bible? Then there is no way to know *what* spirit has told you and showed you something. It could be the Holy Spirit, or it could be the spirit of Satan. Both have the ability to communicate with you. But the Holy Spirit will never tell you anything that conflicts with the Bible. "The Word, the Word, the Word." Leave visions to the people of the Bible.

3 God's Wrath (1:2–8)

Instead of jumping immediately into God's judgment of Nineveh, Nahum begins his proclamation by looking at the nature of God in general. Nahum reveals what appear to be polar opposites in God's nature: God is a God who is both avenging and wrathful, and yet slow to anger and good. Both of these aspects are seen in God's dealing with humankind.

God is not simply a grandfatherly figure who loves His creation. The number of times that Nahum mentions wrath or vengeance in verse 2 should give the reader a

clue that this is definitely a part of God's nature. God cannot stand sin, since He Himself is holy and sinless. Any sinful person will feel His wrath against sin.

This wrath and vengeance does not come because He *likes* to be wrathful and full of vengeance. God does it because of His nature. If He did not hate sin and show His wrath against sin, He would not be true to Himself. Nahum says, (v. 3) "The LORD will by no means clear the guilty."

At the same time, God is slow to anger and good. These characteristics are also part of God's nature. If one looks at the history of the Assyrian Empire, one can see that God is slow to anger. The Assyrian Empire lasted about two hundred years. If God were merely wrathful, and not at the same time a loving God and slow to anger, the Assyrian Empire would not have lasted so long.

You and I can be thankful that God is slow to anger. (Psalm 51:5) "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." King David spoke these words on behalf of all humans. If God were only wrathful, He would have annihilated us at our conception.

But since God is slow to anger, He yearns for us and all people to come to the knowledge of salvation in Christ Jesus. This is His desire and the reason He commands that His Word be preached to all nations.

4 Oracle Against Nineveh (1:9–14)

After giving us a glimpse of God's nature, Nahum delivers the oracle, the proclamation, against Nineveh. (V. 9) "What do you plot against the LORD?" This is the question for all unbelievers. We might put the question into the modern idiom this way: "Do you *really* think you can put one over on God?"

Unbelievers in general, and Assyria in particular in this oracle, believe that they can get by with their sin, that somehow God won't catch them. Such an illusion does not keep God from acting. He will make a complete end to Assyria, showing not only His wrathful nature against sin but also His loving nature toward Judah by delivering them from their oppressors.

This is the reason Nahum delivered his oracle against Assyria in Judah. It is quite unlikely that anyone from Assyria heard the condemnation of the nation. With some of the prophets who delivered oracles against neighboring nations, it is quite possible that someone from those nations might have heard the proclamation.

But the Assyrians were unwelcome in Judah; they would not have heard Nahum's preaching.

Nahum, however, was preaching for *Judah's* benefit. He wanted the people of Judah to know that God was in control of the situation, even if it didn't seem to be so. God knew very well the oppression that the Assyrians were bringing on Judah, and He would stop it. He had the power, the authority, and the will to do it.

That same message is a comfort to us today. There are certain situations in the world where we have no control. Things just happen to us—locally, nationally, and globally. It may seem that the world has run amok and that no one can do anything about it. God, however, remains in control of the world. It may not appear to us that God is doing anything, but He is. God operates in His own time and in His own way. God remains for us "a stronghold in the day of trouble" (v. 7). God does not leave us hanging forever; we can depend on Him to do the right thing in His own way and in His own time.

Conclusion (1:15)

Destruction of the oppressor means salvation for the oppressed. News of the destruction of Assyria will be proclaimed. As we will see several times in our studies, events in the world mirror spiritual events. Just as the destruction of Assyria is good news to those oppressed by Assyria, so the destruction of the power of Satan is good news to those oppressed by him.

Although news of Assyria's destruction doesn't affect us personally, news of the destruction of Satan's power *does* affect us. We can rejoice at that news every time we hear it pronounced in church: that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose on our behalf so that we need not be oppressed by Satan. That is good news indeed!

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

The Destruction of Nineveh

Nahum 2

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Whatever God has decreed is certain to happen, whether it is a decree of punishment for nonbelievers or a decree of grace for believers.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. understand that God's judgment of Nineveh was just;
2. learn that, at times, God allows evil to contain evil; and
3. rejoice, knowing that as believers, God is not against them, but is for them.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 54.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Almighty God, You know that we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns

with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany; *LSB Altar Book*, p. 571)

Lecture Presentation

1 God's Name (2:2)

If someone were to ask you what God's name is, you might well reply, "God." That's not quite accurate, however. *God* is the designation, the title, the position—but not the name of God.

God's name actually occurs here in the text of Nahum, but you wouldn't recognize it unless you were already aware of it. God's name hides behind the word "LORD," written in small capitals, that you see in verse 2 (and that you also saw in the first chapter).

To find the first usage of God's name, we must go back to Exodus 3, where God presents Himself to Moses in the burning bush. After God told Moses that he was to go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses asked a reasonable question:

(Exodus 3:13–15) Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

If you look at the text in an English Bible, you will see that "I AM WHO I AM" is, like "LORD," written in small capitals. God here gives His name to Moses, and that name is "I AM." The Hebrew for the full phrase "I AM WHO I AM" is 'Ehyeh asher 'ehyeh. The shortened form, "I AM," is 'Ehyeh and was likely pronounced YAH-way. This is the name of God.

God is the only being who is. Everything else that exists has come into existence because God created it. If God had not created the heavens and the earth, they would not be here. You would not be here, either, without the creating hand of God. Only God can say “I AM” and mean it.

In Revelation, we get a fuller statement of God’s being. John writes, (1:4) “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.” A few verses later, we find this self-designation of God: (1:8) “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

Only God can say that about Himself. The Jews of Jesus’ day understood that. When Jesus said to them, (John 8:58) “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am,” they understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. (John 8:59) “So they picked up stones to throw at Him”—a perfectly correct response, if Jesus were not God. After all, if He were not God, Jesus would have been blaspheming by saying, “I am.”

But Jesus was not blaspheming. He was who He claimed to be: God incarnate. His use of God’s name indicated that. The Second Person of the Trinity, like all the persons of the Trinity, has always existed and always will.

Moses continues the record of His encounter with God: (Exodus 3:15) “God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD . . . has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” Here we have “LORD” in small capitals, just as we had “I AM” in small capitals in the preceding verse. But here, instead of “I AM,” the name “LORD” means “HE IS.”

The Hebrew consonants behind “LORD” are YHWH—*consonants* because Hebrew was originally written with only consonants. The vowels were supplied by the person reading the text. In order to make certain that everything would be read correctly, Jewish scholars in the second to eighth centuries added marks to the consonants to show exactly what vowels should be read. Because of the importance of the sacred Scriptures, they wanted to make certain that the text could be read accurately.

The question for YHWH is, what vowels are supposed to be read? The word itself had become regarded as being far too sacred to be pronounced since some time after the Babylonian Exile. Instead, the Hebrew word for “Lord” was substituted for YHWH. Every time one saw YHWH in the text, one would read instead “Lord”—or *Adonai* in Hebrew.

Accordingly, when the vowel marks were added to the text, the vowels shown for YHWH were *a*, *o*, and *a*. Every Jewish reader knew that these vowels were not to be read with YHWH, but as vowels of the word *Adonai*. Christians in the Middle Ages didn’t realize this, however, so when they started reading the Hebrew Old Testament, they would read the vowels as if they actually *did* occur with the indicated consonants.

The vowels followed consonants in each syllable, so presented themselves as *YaHoWaH* (or, with a slight adjustment of similar sounds, *Jehovah*). Hebrew readers knew that such a word did not exist, but Christian readers were simply reading what was in front of them, and they began to think of *Jehovah* as the name of God.

Jehovah as the name of God came about, therefore, because of a misunderstanding of what the Hebrew text presented. Hebrew readers substituted the Hebrew word *Adonai* when reading the text, never pronouncing the sacred name of God. Early medieval Christians read the consonants with the indicated vowels and got *Jehovah*.

Most scholars agree that the name was originally pronounced “Yahweh,” and that is what we use here. But this raises questions: Does it make any difference what we call God? Why not simply “Lord”? Is there anything wrong with the name “Jehovah”?

There is certainly nothing wrong with simply calling God “Lord,” as we do in so many prayers in church. We can address God in any number of ways, including “Lord,” “God,” and “Heavenly Father.” God doesn’t grade us on how we address Him.

On the other hand, we live in a multicultural world. Different people use “God” and “Lord” to mean different things—beings much different from the Christian God and Lord. The Arabic expression “*la ilaha illa Allah*,” confessed by Muslims, means simply “there is no god but God.” But the Muslim god is not the Christian God. The Muslim God is not named Yahweh.

Krishna devotees refer to Krishna as “lord.” This is what rock star George Harrison does in his song “My Sweet Lord.” It is known that Harrison identified with the Hare Krishna faith. In his song, however, he uses both Christian phrases and Hindu phrases, so the result is a mixture. The Bible clearly tells us that the beliefs of Christians and Krishnas are *not* the same.

By using the name Yahweh, we distinguish the Christian faith from all other faiths—including Judaism, which does not say the word. But the Christian God, Yahweh, is also distinguished from the god of the Jews because

Christians acknowledge that Yahweh has revealed Himself as a Trinity, as three persons in one, and that the Second Person took on human flesh and became the man Jesus in order to save humankind from their sins.

The Christian God is distinguished thus from all other so-called gods by His revelation as the One who was and who is and who is to come, and as the One who revealed Himself most especially in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ. As long as one believes and professes that, it doesn't make any difference whether one addresses Yahweh as "Yahweh" or as "God" or as "Lord," or even as "Lord Jesus Christ," addressing just one of the three persons of the Trinity.

There is nothing inherently wrong with calling God Jehovah, the way a child might misspeak its parent's name. The difficulty with Jehovah is that it has been misappropriated by the Jehovah's Witnesses. They insist that the only way to refer to God is "Jehovah." But the god that they address as Jehovah is not the Christian God. The god of the Jehovah's Witnesses is another man-made idol, a god who is not a god, a god whose worshipers are destined not for heaven, but for hell.

It is because of this "baggage" that we are better off not using the word Jehovah at all. The better options are Yahweh—or even Lord, as long as it is understood as referring to the Trinity.

2 The LORD of Hosts (2:13)

There is one phrase that includes the word "LORD," and that phrase occurs in verse 13: "Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts." In Hebrew, this is "*Yahweh tseba'oth*" (tsuh-vah-OAT).

The second word of that phrase is the plural form of the Hebrew word *tsaba'* (tsah-VAH, or as usually spoken in English, SAH-bay-oath). This word means "host" or "army." You may recognize the word because it is *still* used in modern Hebrew to refer to the army. (The Israel Defense Forces is in Hebrew "*Tsuh-VAH Hah-hah-gah-NAH Luh-Yees-rah-EHL*," which is literally, "The Army of Defense for Israel.")

This title of God, "the LORD of hosts," was a favorite of the eighth-century prophets. Among the Minor Prophets, the phrase is especially noteworthy in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The Hebrew word *tsaba'* can refer to armies and war. In Judges 4:2, it refers to men in military service. In Numbers 1:3, the verb is translated "to go to war." But the word can refer to a wide variety of

things. In 1 Kings 22:19, the word is used to refer to angels surrounding God's throne. In 2 Kings 17:16, the "host of heaven" is the stars and planets.

Everything in heaven and earth that God created is called a "host" in Genesis 2:1. God has created everything in an orderly way to serve Him. Luther wrote the following in his lectures on Genesis: "God calls Himself the God of the armies or of the hosts, that is, not only of the angels or of the spirits but of the entire creation, which carries on warfare for Him and serves Him. . . . God created all these creatures to be in active military service" (AE 1:74).

The phrase "LORD of hosts" is such a good description and title for God that you would not be surprised to find that it has been used in traditional Christian liturgy. The phrase is found in the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy") sung during the Communion service. You might recall the first line, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth." *Sabaoth* is the word for *hosts*.

However, sometimes a different phrase is used: "Lord God of pow'r and might." The source is the same, but here the *concept* is translated rather than the word (*hosts*) itself. Although the imagery is lost, we are still praising the God who is all-powerful and almighty, able to create the hosts of the heaven and earth.

3 Destruction of Nineveh Prophecies (2:1–12)

Nahum reported receiving a vision at the beginning of his book, and his second chapter almost seems like a description of that vision. The details appear as if he were seeing the destruction of Nineveh "live," with all the confusion and tumult of actual warfare.

God is carrying out His commandment, bringing Nineveh to an end. The vivid description shows the city being captured, the inhabitants running off, and the city being left open to being plundered—a wealth of plunder, since Nineveh had amassed a great amount of wealth through its own plundering of conquered cities. The city is left in a desolate condition.

In verses 12–13, God taunts Nineveh with a comparison to lions. This "taunt song" is meant to ridicule the reliance of Nineveh on its own strength. Nineveh had depended on the power of its armies and its people to plunder the world. Like a lion, it had been the master of its domain. Now, its domain was being destroyed. Where was its power? Upon what could its people now rely?

Any person or nation that relies on itself, and not on God, is in that same situation. Self-reliance is not a bad attitude in our day-to-day life, but it is deadly in spiritual matters. God's power is beyond the power of any individual (or nation), and anyone who thinks himself equal to God is open to ridicule for such ideas.

4 Destruction of Nineveh Certain (2:13)

"Behold, I am against you," God declares (v. 13). Because God is against Nineveh, destruction is certain. It *will* happen. That doesn't mean that God still doesn't desire repentant hearts and true belief. God would later speak through the prophet Ezekiel to deliver this message:

(18:21–23) If a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all My statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

God does not desire the death of the wicked. It is His desire that every wicked person turn away from his wickedness to God, trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. Only through that trust in Christ can a person do what is just and right.

Conclusion

"Behold, I am against you." There can hardly be words that are more sorrowful. Those are not the words believers hear from God. We hear that God is for us:

(Romans 8:31–35) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

We can confidently depend on God. He showed His love for us by sending Jesus Christ to take our sins upon Himself and to die for those sins. There is now nothing that can separate us from God. If God is for us, who can be against us?

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.