



nahum

TRUSTING IN THE JUSTICE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

The book of Nahum is often called, "Nineveh's Death Song." A century earlier, the city of Nineveh heeded the message of Jonah, but now their hearts were hardened against God. Nahum's message, so graphically depicted, is a reminder for us today that first, the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble (1:7), and second, although the LORD is slow to anger and great in power, He will by no means clear the guilty (1:3).

Do you know the title of the most popular or best-known sermon ever preached on American soil? "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," by Jonathan Edwards, July 8, 1741, Enfield, Connecticut. This message was significant because it was at the heart of a movement known as the "Great Awakening" that swept across protestant America during the 18th century.

Obviously from the sermon title, you realize it was not exactly a "people-pleaser" message. The message was strong and straightforward.

What was the text of the message?

"Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly" (Deuteronomy 32:35 ESV).

This strong passage talks about the surety of the judgment of God.

How needy the people of Jonathan Edwards' day were to the

urgency of this message! Edwards addressed the fact that people underplayed the majesty and holiness of God, and overplayed their ability, their goodness, and their attempts at their own personal righteousness.

Through this 10-point sermon, Edwards outlined the severity and truth of God's judgment, and the need for a spiritual awakening due to the certainty of God's judgment and the necessity of God's intervention.

The following is a cornerstone statement found in his message:

"There is nothing that keeps wicked men, at any moment, out of Hell, but the mere pleasure of God." —Jonathan Edwards

We don't know exactly how Edwards delivered this message since we have no recordings. He could have been red in the face with veins popping out on his neck, or screaming at the people... but probably not. Some scholars

indicate he may have just simply read the text he had written.

What I *do* know is that in Enfield, Connecticut, the people began to weep as they heard the application. They became broken underneath the tremendous weight and power of Edwards' message. In the course of the sermon, some in the crowd even cried out, "What must we do to be saved?"

Why do I share this history with you? In many ways, this is the backdrop to the book of Nahum.

"It is impossible to read this prophesy of Nahum without an almost frightening sense of awe." —G. Campbell Morgan

Frankly, Nahum is a message of doom. There is a real sense of sinners in the hand of an angry God.

My intention is not to trivialize Scripture, but I can almost hear the *Imperial March* as I open the pages of Nahum—you know, the entrance theme for Darth Vader in *Star Wars*. In much the same way, I get the sense of approaching doom and darkness as I read the text.

Let's look at three different dimensions found in the book.

Nahum: The Big Picture

1. Nahum is the sequel to Jonah.

Nahum is actually the sequel that Jonah would have liked to see happen in Nineveh.

If you remember, Jonah was a man called of God to go to Nineveh, the capitol city of Israel's wicked enemies, the Assyrians. He was called to preach how God was going to send judgment.

However, the people responded to God's message and repented. God forgave them. The end result? Jonah was mad at God because Jonah did not want God to forgive them. Jonah wanted Nineveh to experience the judgment of God.

Now fast forward about 100 years. The prophet, Nahum, was living and preaching as God directed, and God said to Nahum (*paraphrased*), "It is time!"

There had been a reprieve of judgment for a while until God sent Nahum to the city of Nineveh to preach the reality and certainty of doom and judgment:

"An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries and keeps wrath for His enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty" (Nahum 1:1-3a ESV).

This is the backdrop of Nahum's message. Nineveh had experienced the forgiveness of God by heeding the message of delivered by Jonah, but now a century later, their hearts had hardened against the LORD.

What we read in the book of Nahum is a matter of historical record. The Babylonians, the Assyrians' enemy, brought their armies and defeated the Assyrians. So great was the devastation of Nineveh, it has been said that when Alexander the Great fought the Battle of Arbela in 331 B.C., he was near the site of ancient Nineveh and unaware there had ever been a city there.

2. Nahum's prophesy is dated between the destruction of Thebes (Nahum 3:8) and the assault of Nineveh by the Babylonians (612 B.C.).

We know Nahum's message was between 663 and 612 B.C. The city of Nineveh was unbelievable in the ancient world. This capital city was said to have had 1800 acres that were walled together. The walls were so wide that three chariots abreast could go around the top of the walls.

Nineveh was a place of tremendous intimidation and power. We also know the Assyrians were the worst enemies of Israel. The Assyrians devised every form of human torture imaginable, putting people over a stake and hanging their bodies, using flesh

hooks (as I mentioned before) and severing tongues, just to name a few. They executed graphic, unbelievable torture.

The book of Nahum is often referred to as "Nineveh's Death Song." It is sometimes called "the cry of humanity for justice" because finally Israel, the people of God's covenant, saw their enemies overtaken after having suffered under their oppression.

3. Nahum is a book of haunting lyrical poetry and zealous spiritual passion.

"The shield of his mighty men is red; his soldiers are clothed in scarlet. The chariots come with flashing metal on the day he musters them; the cypress spears are brandished. The chariots race madly through the streets; they rush to and fro through the squares; they gleam like torches; they dart like lightning" (Nahum 2:3-4 ESV).

Here we have an amazing picture—a battle in motion with both the stain of scarlet blood and the movement of chariots. Nahum's prophecy foretold desolation and destruction to this great city.

It has been said when Queen Victoria of England celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem to honor and commemorate the 60-year anniversary. Apparently, many people were offended by

the poem because the focus of Kipling's writing was one that ultimately brought a warning about the potential of the British Empire to fade like empires before it.

*God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

...

*Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

—Rudyard Kipling, 1987

So many portions of Scripture—though written in images and ways we could quickly skim over—are reminders to us that we dare not forget the reality and certainty of the judgment of God upon the world.

Overview of Nahum

The Doom of Nineveh is...

- Declared Chapter 1
- Described Chapter 2
- Deserved Chapter 3

On the one hand, Nahum is a book filled with bad news. Have you ever had to deliver bad news to someone? As a young person, did you ever call your parents and tell them you had an accident? You knew it was going to scare them (and you weren't excited about what it would mean for you), but you had to deliver the bad news anyway.

Have you ever had to tell your mate you received a speeding ticket? Maybe you started your conversation this way: "You are not going to believe what happened to me today! It is going to cost us."

However, I'll tell you what is really bad news. It is having to tell someone they lost a loved one. I don't know if you have ever had to be the bearer of that kind of news, but it has happened many times in my life. There is nothing worse than walking up to someone I care about and frankly, feeling like I just hit him in the face with a 2x4. That is the only way I can describe it. It is a horrible feeling.

Nahum was called by God to be the bearer of bad news. I don't know that Nahum loved them, but he had to deliver the difficult news either way.

On the other hand, the message of Nahum is good news. How? It was a reminder that God was going to settle the score with judgment and justice for the people in Nahum's own homeland, Israel. God was going to relieve His people of their oppressors. God was going to do what no man and no human court could do—deal with the issue of this problem. Ultimately, Nahum was able to deliver the message of the Avenger. Nahum spoke to his own people about how God is a refuge, strength and comfort.

Interestingly, the name, Nahum, means *comfort*. I think you will

agree, nothing about this book looks like comfort at first glance. However, we find comfort by recognizing God's righteousness and justice in life.

Everywhere we look, we see evil perpetrated in the world. We may have questions and doubts as we face the darkness and uncertainty amid the doom around us. We may not always understand the circumstances or the events that flow into our lives. They may be ugly, awful, and evil; and we may struggle to know how to reconcile them.

So how do we find strength amid the evil around us? It is in knowing we have a God that is good, and a God we can trust because of His providence, His power and His promises.

Nahum: The Focal Point

Throughout our study of the Minor Prophets, you have probably recognized the fact there are repetitive themes. One of the repetitive themes has been *judgment*, and it may feel like we have gone from one message of doom to the other with each consecutive book.

However, if we not careful, the 12 minor prophets can become like a group of stick men drawn on a blackboard—all looking the same and proclaiming the same message of judgment. But every one of the minor prophets is unique with a unique focus to

help us learn something about ourselves, and much more about who God is and His character.

"The permanent value of this book is that in it we have an explanation of the anger of God this is in harmony with the revelation of God in the Bible in its entirety... Any careful examination of these writings, and especially this book will show in the last analysis that the reason for the anger of God is found in His love... Jealousy is always the outcome of wrath, resulting from wrong done to love. It is an emotional revolt against infidelity." —G. Campbell Morgan

Jealousy is a revolt ultimately against the object of love. Now, of course, when I mention jealousy, most of us tend to think of petty jealousy—the envy so many of us have toward another that makes us focus on ourselves.

God—being very unlike us—is pure and perfect in His love. Therefore there is a jealousy in God—an overwhelming reality about how far His love goes to never remit, to never release, to always require a resolution—even if it means wrath.

So many of us tend to focus only on the characteristics of God that we like: love, faithfulness, kindness. And those are very real. However, if all we ever present to the world is a soft-sided picture of God, we neglect to give a full, accurate representation of who He is.

In fact, there is a tendency to so focus on one, two or three aspects of God, we lose the majesty and awe of God. A thorough understanding of God is essential in worship and for our lives.

If I showed you a magnified, close-up photo from the great outdoors, you might remark about the variance of hues and color, or maybe even a slight difference in texture. But there is a problem. You would only be aware of a small, limited sampling represented in the photo and not the larger scope from which it was taken. As a result, the only reference you would have would be a broad brush stroke with no real distinctiveness or context.

However, if I took the camera lens and backed out from this closeup shot to a panoramic view, you would see the sampling was taken from the Grand Canyon or the Smokey Mountains or a beautiful seashore.

The point is this: Many times we have a tendency to focus on one aspect of God and fail to see His overall wonder, majesty and glory. Yes, He is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath. Yes, He is a God of faithfulness, but He is also a God of justice. We need to see and declare the whole truth of God. Therefore Nahum takes us somewhere we don't often go. He helps us to see sinners in the hand of an angry God.

Our world resists this view of God at every level. Everyone is okay

with a God who is for them, but no one likes the idea of a God who is against them. God is God. Therefore we have to embrace the whole character and nature of God as it is presented in the truth of Scripture.

We find these six descriptions of God in the first chapter of Nahum: (1) Jealous, (2) Avenging, (3) Wrath, (4) Justice, (5) Anger, (6) Fury.

“The LORD is a **jealous** and **avenging** God; the LORD is **avenging** and **wrathful**; the LORD takes **vengeance** on His adversaries and keeps **wrath** for His enemies. The LORD is **slow to anger** and **great in power**, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:2-3 ESV, *bold added for emphasis*).

What does all this mean?

Jealousy. I have previously tried to describe that our jealousy is typically a sinful jealousy rooted in envy. But the jealousy of God is ultimately not a vice; it is a virtue. It means protecting that which He cherishes and cares for. God is not petty; God is zealous for all that He loves. Sin has ultimately spurned the very love of God, and God Himself continues to declare His love. But there is a point where God's love moves Him to wrath.

Avenging. The Bible tells us God is avenging. It certainly means punishment and retribution, but

it is more than retaliation. God is not “this for that”; He brings retribution and consequence.

Wrath. This is the idea that God crosses over from one point where He is full of favor to the place where He ultimately moves against, even against those that He loves.

Justice. Very clearly, the Bible tells us, “The Lord will by no means clear the guilty” (Nahum 1:3 ESV).

God will never clear the guilty as if winking and saying, “Hey, it’s okay... That’s okay. Don’t worry about that one.” The Bible is very clear. God will never clear the guilty, not of their own doing and not of their own effort

Anger. The root for the word, *anger*, is the idea of hard breathing. Have you ever noticed when people get mad, they breathe hard?

Fury. It is the idea of fire and brokenness. Some people think this attribute is only found in the “Old Testament God.” This may be why some people have a hard time with the Old Testament. They want to remain in the New Testament because they attribute the “New Testament God” as One who is loving and forgiving—a God who is nonjudgmental. Really? Look at this New Testament passage:

“Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days

with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of His [Jesus’] coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4a ESV).

In other words, the scoffers will say in the last days (*paraphrased*), “Jesus said He is coming again. Hey, it’s been 2000 years! Who thinks there is a Jesus coming back again?”

“For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4b ESV).

The scoffers continue (*paraphrased*), “Look, the world just goes on. Don’t give me all this Jesus stuff!”

“For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished” (2 Peter 3:5-6 ESV).

The Bible describes the reality of a global flood. The world God created was destroyed with a flood. Yes, a real encounter with the judgment of God. But the Bible says there is still coming a day of reckoning with the wrath, vengeance, jealousy and fury of God:

“But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and

destruction of the ungodly... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" (2 Peter 2:7, 10 ESV).

This is not an Old Testament picture; it is a New Testament promise of what God is going to do at the end of the age when He brings finality.

How can both wrath *and* love be attributes of God?

"One evangelical cliché has it that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. There is a small element of truth in these words: God has nothing but hate for the sin, but this cannot be said with respect to how God sees the sinner. Nevertheless the cliché is false on the face of it, and should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone, the psalmists state that God hates the sinner, that His wrath is on the liar, and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests on both the sin and the sinner. Our problem in part is that in human experience wrath and love normally abide in mutually exclusive compartments. Love drives wrath out, or wrath drives love out. We come closest to bringing them together, perhaps, in our responses to a wayward act by one of our children." —D.A. Carson, *God's Love and God's Wrath*

Have you ever loved your children more than words could say and

also been absolutely at the point of wrath in your response to them? It may be because of something they did—some action or some behavior.

For example, if your small child suddenly starts running away from you and there is a car moving, what happens? As a parent, first there is an alert and alarm, "I've got to save *them!*" Once you save them, do you respond by saying, "Honey, that's okay."? Probably not. If you are like most parents, the wrath suddenly rises up in you and you say, "Don't you ever do that again!" Why? Because you love them. Although destruction was averted that time, it was very near.

What if you find your children hanging out with a group of kids that have a bad influence on them? One day you clean their room and find a little bag of white power or a big bag of weed. Do you think you would respond this way? "Honey, I found this in your room. You might want to put it somewhere better."

Of course not! You would be asking, "Do you know the destruction this would do to you? Do you not know what kind of decision you are making in your life?"

This is exactly the point D.A. Carson makes:

"This is not the way it is with God [that is that love and wrath are mutually exclusive]. God's wrath

is not an implacable blind rage. However emotional it may be, it is an entirely reasonable and willed response to offenses against His holiness... Thus there is nothing intrinsically impossible about wrath and love being directed toward the same individual or people at once. God in His perfections must be wrathful against His rebel image-bearers, for they have offended Him; God in His perfections must be loving toward His rebel image-bearers, for He is that kind of God... These themes barrel along through redemptive history, unresolved, until they come to a resounding climax in the Cross.”
—D.A. Carson, *God’s Love and God’s Wrath*

Yes, we see these things in Scripture. Yes, there are parallel lines in which we struggle. Yes, we understand that love’s integrity is defended by the severity of consequence. If you love someone, you can’t just let something happen in their life; you can’t just let them go on into destruction.

“[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6 ESV).

A real part of love is hating everything that is destructive, deceptive, and ultimately, everything that would take away the power of the one loved.

So amid all the awful and awesome realities of God, there is a hope and promise:

“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will

by no means clear the guilty... **The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him**” (Nahum 1:3a, 7 ESV, *bold added for emphasis*).

Nahum 1:7 is the verse in which I want to focus. This is the comfort and strength we need in the days and times in which we live.

Are we living in evil days? Yes. Do we see things we know are against the very character, nature, righteousness, holiness and justice of God? Yes. We struggle and battle with these things, but *the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him*.

A few days ago, I shared this verse in a text with a dear friend of mine who was facing surgery. He texted back and said, “Now that’s digging deep for a Scripture!”

Maybe you never knew this verse was in the book of Nahum, but I pray you will take it to heart today.

Nahum: The Takeaway

As we consider some “takeaways” from Nahum, let me begin first by speaking to those who have placed their faith in Christ as their Savior and Redeemer:

(1) To whom much is given, must is also required.

See Luke 12:28.

God has given us much. God gave Nineveh a chance, then another chance, and yet another chance. God was gracious, but ultimately there came a day of reckoning. While it is true that as believers, we will never face the wrath of God in the final judgment, the Bible does declare that as followers of Jesus Christ, there will one day be a reckoning for what we have done with our lives and the grace of God that has been given to us.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7 ESV).

As believers, we live with a longer view of life than most because we not only look at this life, but also life after death.

“So whether we are at home [heaven] or away, we make it our aim to please Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ESV).

Believers will not face the final judgment of wrath that leads to total and final destruction, but the Bible does speak of a day when believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The questions asked that day will be something like these: What kind of a steward are you? What have you done with your time, your money, your gifts, your life? What have you done with what God has given to you?

Do you recognize the importance of using what God has given to you for His glory rather than just knowing about it or using it for your own benefit?

Now to those who have never trusted in Christ as their Savior:

2. The wheels of God’s judgment may turn slowly, but the justice they bring will be sure.

See 2 Peter 3:3-9.

Never, never trivialize the patience of God. If you are a prodigal, living in rebellion, indulging in everything that is forbidden in the Word of God, let me assure you there will come a day of judgment. I do not say this as a threat. I am speaking truth to you in love because you need to repent and trust in Jesus as your Savior.

“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:8-9 ESV).

The patience of God is for *repentance*! It is not to strengthen your resolve to stay indifferent and indulgent in idolatry and immorality—living your life apart from God. God is patient to give you an opportunity to repent. Don’t trivialize this in your life.

3. We are free to love our enemies because judgment belongs to the Lord, not us.

See Romans 12:19-21.

Interestingly, Romans 12 picks up where the passage ends in Deuteronomy 32:35:

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19 ESV).

We do not have to reckon all the scorecards of life. God is our refuge and strength. We live and honor justice because we live and honor a just God. For all the wrongs in our lives, we can trust God to make them right. Ultimately, God must be Judge, and that frees us to love our enemies and trust His judgment.

4. Comfort belongs to those who take refuge in the Lord.

“The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him” (Nahum 1:7 ESV).

You can find comfort and strength when you take refuge in the Lord. The greatest strength and confidence you have as a believer is not what you know about life; it is what you know about God as you live in the light of His goodness, refuge and strength.

5. God is full of grace, but He will not allow His grace to become a substitute for His righteousness.

See John 3:16-18.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18 ESV).

The Bible is clear. God will not clear the guilty. The Bible also tells us this:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because He has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18 ESV).

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36 ESV).

How do we resolve the love of God and the wrath of God? There is only one way—the cross. On the cross, the love of God was demonstrated and the wrath of God was satisfied.

Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless, son of God, was the substitute for every one of us. Jesus came, lived, died, was buried and rose from the dead so that God's wrath might be found in Him and that His righteousness and grace might be found in us.

Imagine you are holding a book in your hand entitled, *The Record Book of My Life*. On the front side of the book is your birth certificate; on the backside, your death certificate. The pages in between catalog your life story as you have lived it. There are chapters where the good things of your life are written. And like all of us, there are chapters outlining sins, failures and faults.

So here is the problem. Here is your life's book in your hand and here is God in the heavens. Sin separates you from God. Yes, God loves you, but your sin has separated you from God.

How is God going to love you and yet, get beyond the consequence of your sin?

2000 years ago, God's Son stepped out of heaven and came to earth. Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life on earth so that on the cross, He might take the wrath of God

upon Himself. As a result, God can take the "record book" of your life (of your sin) and put it on Jesus Christ if you will believe on the name of Jesus Christ and put your faith alone in Him for your salvation. You can be clean and right before God. You can have a relationship with God. This is the Good News!

God by no means clears the guilty, but God in His grace has made a way for the guilty to satisfy His wrath and He offers mercy through His Son, Jesus Christ.



Father, I pray we would trust the justice of Your judgment, looking at the world around us, looking to the cross, calling upon Your name, that we might be saved. I pray there would be those today who would hear and who, from the heart, would say, "Today, I repent of my sin and I receive forgiveness in Christ."

Father, I pray that those of us who know You, will never get over the wonder of Your grace. I pray we will live lives not of convenient commitment, but sacrificial gratitude to Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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