

GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God will punish all sin so that none may accuse Him of unrighteousness.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Nahum

+ SETTING:

Over a century after Nineveh's repentant response to God's warning through Jonah, God gave Nahum a final word for the Assyrian capital. We don't know how long the city's contrition lasted, but it eventually faded. In 612 BC, the Babylonians decimated Nineveh and—thanks to Nahum—God's people saw it coming. This book of prophecy is a record of God's message to His people suffering under the oppression of Assyria. To Nineveh, this was a severe indictment. But these words pointed the hearts of God's people to the holiness, justice, and faithfulness of the Lord, who would certainly, decidedly, and finally avenge the many wicked wrongs wrought by the Assyrians.

DAY 1

READ:

Nahum 1–3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Nahum 1:1-8

NOTES

What is your favorite movie? What is it that you love about the movie? Is it merely the message of the movie, or is there more to it than the script?

Captivating movies enamor us through more than the words spoken. An exceptional director communicates mood and movement through the angle from which they shoot a scene, the lighting they select, and the cinematic filters they use on the camera. A good movie transports us to worlds we've never known or specific situations we've never been in. It is through the journey we take with the characters that we catch the message the screenwriter wants us to receive.

The writers of the Old Testament and the details they provided can seem so far removed from our current reality. Indeed, there are many differences between our world and theirs. But there are always important principles for us to “get” from every book, passage, and verse in the Bible. The best way to do this is to take the time to learn more about the situation so that we can try to put ourselves in their shoes. Because, like in a good movie, when we imagine what these words would have meant to them, they can mean so much more to us today.

Here in Nahum, the director of the message started off with a hymn of praise to God. Most of the book is in poetic form, and the first section of the poem means to bring us on a journey that leads us to worship God.

It's easy to get lost in the harsh language and bloody details of this prophecy and miss the message of the book. Nahum carefully crafted this book to point God's people toward praise of the good and powerful character of God even as they suffered at the hands of the Assyrians. For us as readers, we too can see God's goodness and power in how He chooses to display His mercy and judgment.

What characteristics of God in Nahum 1 stir you to worship? Which characteristics challenge your understanding of who God is?

DAY 2

READ:

Psalm 94

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 94:1-15

NOTES

Have you ever encountered a lost child? Perhaps it was at the park, a department store, or maybe a theme park. Often the panicked, helpless child is on the verge of tears, if not already there. Safety was felt in the care and company of his or her parents. Separation from them, however, pulls that security out from under the child's feet. Instantly his or her world goes from one free of cares to one full of fear and anxiety.

When we are in the midst of difficulty, panicked and feeling helpless, it is easy to feel that God has forgotten us, especially during seasons of prolonged troubles. The evil one wants us to give in to the thought that the Lord does not see our dire situation or that He simply does not care. When we are waiting on God for deliverance that seems unlikely or far away, it is tempting to believe that He is unable or unwilling to save us.

Psalm 94 communicates encouragement for the soul who feels lost and forgotten. It, like the book of Nahum, points our hearts to who God is: a God of vengeance (Ps. 94:1), the Judge of the earth (Ps. 94:2), the Lord who will not forsake His people or abandon His heritage (Ps. 94:14). Regardless of what we see or feel, God is always working. Despite our seemingly hopeless situation, there is always hope for the one who follows Yahweh.

Even in the darkest of days, when we feel lost and forgotten, there is much to which we can hold fast:

- God will never forsake us.
- God will bring justice to His people.
- God will never abandon us.
- God will bring rest from the days of trouble.

Have you bought into the lie that God has forgotten you? Consider sharing this with a trusted friend who can pray for you and remind you of God's love and care for you.

DAY 3

READ:

Nahum 1:7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Nahum 1:7

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #42: SIN'S EFFECTS IN THE WORLD

Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of Christ.

“The LORD is good.” Four simple words we struggle to grasp. From the dawn of time, the evil one has been attacking the truth that God is good. Satan’s primary strategy is to get us to question the goodness of God. The enemy could have attacked the truth of any one of God’s attributes. He chose the one aspect that would do the most damage. Once he got Eve to buy into the lie that God didn’t really have Eve’s best interest at heart, Satan had succeeded in bringing sin into the world. Humankind has been doubting God’s goodness ever since.

If we doubt that God is good, then we cannot trust any other aspect of who He is. If God is all-powerful but not good, then He cannot be safe. If God is all-knowing but not good, then He cannot be trusted. God’s goodness is foundational to who He is. It is essential to every action He takes.

Oftentimes, when we look at the poor choices we’ve made—the ones in which we should have known better—these choices stem from a lack of trust in God’s goodness. When we fail to follow God in the way we treat people, we declare that His way is not good. When we withhold our time, talents, and tithes from our local church, we state that His plan for the body of Christ is bogus. When we willingly ignore God’s plan for sexuality and instead follow the desires of the flesh, we show that we don’t believe God’s way is the best plan for our lives.

Ultimately, every choice to sin is a proclamation that we know better than God, thinking our way is good and His way is not, or even that His way may be good but our way is better. We must remind ourselves that God is always good, and we are not. His plans are always for the ultimate good, and ours are not. We are limited, but He is limitless in goodness. Let us never forget!

What are some areas of your life where you struggle to believe that God’s way is good? What steps will you take to trust Him more?

DAY 4

READ:

Nahum 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Nahum 1:12-13

NOTES

Yesterday we looked at the goodness of God. Nahum made a direct connection with God as good and God as a stronghold, a refuge where He cares for His people. Several passages in the Old Testament provide a picture of God as our refuge. Ruth sought God's caring wings of safety as her refuge (Ruth 2:12). David declared a song of praise to God as his fortress, deliverer, rock, stronghold, and shield in whom he took refuge (2 Sam. 22). Dozens of psalms affirm God as our refuge.

To take refuge in God is to rest in His provision.

To take refuge is to place all our trust in Him.

Trusting God can be a scary prospect. We are taught to trust in our strength and abilities. Our culture highly esteems self-confidence. People are even taught to trust no one but themselves. However, seeking refuge in God requires neediness. The prerequisite for needing a stronghold is the recognition that we are weak. This is antithetical to the messages we've heard all our lives, making the act of trusting God a difficult one.

Taking refuge in God is not just about recognizing our weakness and neediness, it is also about our view of God. If we settle our hearts on the fact that God is good, this confidence in God's character will be like a magnet that naturally gravitates toward metal, an automatic drawing.

Our journey of taking refuge in God starts with our need for a Savior. Not one of us can save ourselves. Our sin has brought on the storm of God's wrath. Through taking refuge in Christ, we are delivered from the punishment due to us. We are given a safe and secure way out through the cross, where Jesus provided forgiveness of sins and power over death.

What need do you have today that draws you to take refuge in Christ? Pray about that now.

DAY 5

READ:

2 Peter 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Peter 3:8-9

NOTES

The seasons of waiting in life are some of the hardest. Times of loss can be dark, but the times when we're suspended in between the here-and-now and the what-might-be tries our patience. With loss, there is much grieving, but with the tragic and irreversible comes a sense of finality. With waiting, there is a sense of unruliness. When you're waiting on a decision, an opportunity, or a big change, it is hard to make plans. Life seems on hold. Days feel like weeks. Weeks feel like months. Months feel like years.

This is especially true if in the waiting there is also suffering. In Nahum, we encounter God's people in a season of waiting as well as great suffering. Their days must have been more than hard. Those years must have been agonizing as they waited on God's deliverance. Yet the hastening of God's deliverance meant a hastening of His judgment.

In 2 Peter, we get a glimpse of God's character that is important to hold on to in our seasons of waiting. It is easy to get caught up in what's right in front of us and forget that God sees all, knows all, and holds all in the palm of His hand. Those long, long years are but a moment to God. Therefore, we can rest in Him as we wait on His perfect timing, not only for our well-being but also for the well-being of those who have yet to trust in Him.

Perhaps the very season we are praying for God to remove is part of God's patient plan to give a lost soul additional time to reach repentance. That in itself should give us hope and purpose in our waiting.

What can you be praying for and asking God to give you a glimpse into His perspective while you endure a season of waiting?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Let us mourn with Nahum and let us say with him, 'Woe to him that builds up this house [by injustice]' . . . Let us not, I beseech you, cease mourning in this way, and if it is not unbecoming, let us also bewail the apathy of our brothers. Let us not weep loudly for him who is already dead, but let us weep for the robber, the grasping, miserly, greedy man."¹

-Chrysostom (d. 407)

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God's covenant was true every time I looked elsewhere for love and acceptance. His covenant has been true every time you've acted out of fear and doubt. It is still true, no matter the circumstances we face or the hurt we hold in our hearts. Even when the temporary feels painfully permanent, His covenant is true. Remember whose you are."²

-Amanda Bible Williams

POINT 1: The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished (Nah. 1:1-6).

The Lord, the good God of Israel, is a jealous God. He will avenge His _____ that is withheld by others through a display of His wrath. Certain judgment awaits the _____ before God.

? Why is it good that God is a jealous God?

Nahum's prophecy of judgment against Nineveh was intended to _____ God's people who suffered under the Assyrians. Yet the Lord is also _____ that sinners might repent and be saved.

? What emotions might rise to the surface knowing God will punish all wrongdoing one day?

POINT 2: The Lord will be a stronghold for those who take refuge in Him (Nah. 1:7-8).

When the whirlwind of God's wrath comes, all who continue to _____ in the Lord need not fear because God will never cease to _____ for them.

? What are some ways we should expect to experience God's care for us?

Utter _____ was coming for the unrepentant Ninevites. Whatever the _____ had started, God would put to a full and complete stop.

POINT 3: The Lord will be vindicated before the nations (Nah. 3:1-7).

The _____ and _____ of Assyria would not last. The Lord condemned them

to a bloody end, the kind they perpetrated on other nations.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #42: SIN'S EFFECTS IN THE WORLD

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How should believers in Jesus respond to the promise of destruction for God's enemies?

MY RESPONSE

Because God will not leave the guilty unpunished, we rest in His righteousness, refusing to take vengeance into our own hands when we are wronged.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways God's jealousy and vengeance should affect the way we think, feel, and act?
- **HEART:** How do you need to pray today in light of the jealousy and justice of God?
- **HANDS:** What steps will you take to grow in your knowledge of God and your faith in Him, namely, in Jesus, the Son of God?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"God will hold the guilty accountable. No one will get away with sin and injustice—neither individuals nor nations. Now is always the appropriate time to respond to God's gracious patience with repentance and faith. Those who delay turning to the Lord in repentance and faith are only storing up divine judgment for themselves. Don't be like Nineveh, for whom it was already too late."³

—Ken Fentress