

The God Who Comforts

A Sermon on Nahum

by

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1. Introduction (Background and 1:1)

- a. Nahum is one of two minor prophets written about the city of Nineveh.
 - i. The first is Jonah, the second is Nahum. If you don't remember the basic premise of Jonah, I'd encourage you to listen to my sermon on that.
 - 1. Between the two books though, there are some striking differences.
 - 2. The startling thing to me about the message of Nahum is that it occurs only about 100-150 years after the message of Jonah.
 - ii. As for the prophet himself, we don't know a tremendous amount about the prophet Nahum.
 - 1. We know his name means consolation, or comfort. He was a prophet around the same time as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, and Habbakuk, and He comes from a place called Elkosh.
 - 2. We don't really know anything about Elkosh either, incidentally.
- b. The general structure of the first chapter of Nahum is laid out fairly simply.
 - i. The first 8 verses are comprised of an acrostic poem.
 - 1. If you're not familiar with what an acrostic poem is, it is typically set up so the first letter of each line spells out a word, phrase, or like in this case, the Hebrew alphabet.
 - 2. It isn't a true acrostic like we understand it today; it is missing some letters, which has been no small subject of debate.

ii. The second half of chapter 1 then make up predictive prophecy foretelling of the fall of Nineveh, which is the capital city of Assyria.

1. Within this we find the focus switches back and forth between Israel and Assyria.

2. As the downfall of Assyria is foretold, the uplifting of Israel is also foretold.

2. God's Character Explained (1:2-8)

a. Who can endure the jealous and vengeful God (v. 2)?

i. The first verse of the poem immediately brings three characteristics of God into burning focus.

1. The first characteristic shown of God is that Yahweh is a jealous God.

2. The second characteristic shown of God is that Yahweh is an avenging God.

3. The third characteristic shown of God is that Yahweh is a wrathful God.

ii. The compendium of these attributes of God sets the tone for the rest of the book of Nahum and will ultimately color why the prophecy against Nineveh is so harsh.

1. The reality is that God's judgment upon them is set against the backdrop of these qualities—and this is because Assyria violated the terms of God's covenant with Abraham.

2. The picture being displayed is that God reserves this wrath, or literally expressed from the Hebrew, the Lord watches over His enemies with a controlled fury, waiting to be poured out upon them.

b. Who can endure the sovereign indignation of Yahweh (vv. 3-6)?

i. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (v. 3a).

1. The Hebrew expression of the Lord being slow to anger is literally that He is called “long of nose.” In every instance the expression is used, it is used to speak of patience in the midst of opposition.
 2. Yet despite the fact that the Lord is patient in displaying His anger upon the wicked, Nahum reminds his hearers that He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.
- ii. In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon wither. Mountains quake because of Him and the hills dissolve; indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him. (vv. 3b-6)
1. Vv. 3b-6 are all simply unfolding what it means for God to be great in power, leading to the rhetorical questions posed in v. 6.
 2. When we get to v. 6, the clear answer is that none can stand before His indignation and none can endure His burning anger.
- c. Who can endure the pursuit of the Lord who guards His people (vv. 7-8)?
- i. Notice the contrast then between the last several verses depicting the downfall of the wicked and now the uplifting of Israel.
 1. In v. 7 Nahum makes the positive confession that Yahweh is good and this is another aspect born out of the reality that He is a God who takes vengeance.

2. How Yahweh is good is made clear when we see that He is a stronghold to His people in their day of trouble.

3. God's Character Expressed (1:9-11)

- a. What Nineveh has started in vain, Yahweh will bring to an end (v. 9).
 - i. The reality being laid bare here by the prophet speaks to the fact that though they conspire behind the scenes, the Lord ultimately knows everything they are doing.
 - ii. The promise then given is that in light of their devises against Yahweh, He will make a complete end to it.
- b. The totality of their folly will be realized (v. 10).
 - i. Beyond the predictive prophecy, this section simply serves to show the completeness of Nineveh's destruction.
 - ii. The inevitable reality is that their destruction is imminent, yet ultimately, it is self-imposed due to their own folly and the folly of their king in going against the Lord.
 1. The first eight verses showed the futility of rising against the Lord of all creation.
 2. In essence, it is as if the Assyrian king claimed right to Yahweh's throne. This obviously did not work out well for him.
- c. The occasion for judgment is bound in their wicked king who made an enemy of God (v. 11).
 - i. The Assyrian King Ashurbanipal is the focus of Nahum's prophecy here, namely for his conquest of Israel.
 - ii. The important point to note is that even though the Lord uses the Assyrians as His arm of retributive judgment against Israel, He will nonetheless bring them under judgment.

1. If you were here for my sermons on Micah, you'll remember this comes as a result of Israel's flagrant defiance to God's covenant with them. If you do not, simply go back and listen.
2. The point to take note of is that even though God must punish Israel for covenant unfaithfulness, He must remain faithful to His own covenant to punish the evil-doer who becomes a curse to Israel.

4. God's Character Evidenced (1:12-15)

- a. The judgment of Yahweh as a consolation to Judah (vv. 12-13).
 - i. It is in light of the fact that God shall make waste of Nineveh entirely that the Lord then turns to His children and gives them the foundation of their comfort.
 1. In v. 12 the prophet tells them that though the Assyrians are mighty and great in number, they will be cut off.
 2. The expression here is similar to that of the last few verses, in that Yahweh is reassuring Israel of His pledge to utterly decimate the Assyrians.
 - ii. God promises to break the yoke of slavery off of them and tear off their chains.
 1. This can only happen through the destruction of the Assyrians.
 2. What this means for the Israelites is that their comfort from God is in the destruction of the Assyrians.
- b. The judgment of Yahweh as a dread for Nineveh (v. 14).
 - i. Notice now how severe the language is against Nineveh.
 1. The language here is utterly brutal.
 2. There is no mincing of words, nor is there any hesitation of displaying their great harlotry.
 - ii. The language here again simply serves to show the totality of their judgment.

1. They will not be remembered, though they were once the greatest name in the Eastern world.
 2. The city was to be erased from physical history simply for their incredible brutality and idolatry, for they were detestable before the Lord.
- c. The judgment of Yahweh is a glorious future hope of deliverance (v. 15).
- i. We know from the timeline of things in the OT that the Israelites would still come under the bondage of another oppressor in the Babylonians.
 1. What that means then is that even though they will go right back into bondage with the Babylonians, they will see God's covenant faithfulness on display in the here and now with the Assyrians.
 2. There is an interjection—a call to behold, but what? The feet of the one who comes to bring good news on the mountain, who announces peace.
 - ii. The prophet writes, "For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely."
 1. The wicked one here is connected to this far off, future deliverance under the true and rightful King of all the earth, Jesus Christ.
 2. This verse then, ultimately speaks of a Divine Warrior who will be victorious at the Last Day, bringing his people to a peace where the evil doer is no more, and their memory is gone from the land just as the Assyrians.

5. Conclusion