

Mid Week • Nahum

INTRODUCTION

Queen Victoria was celebrating sixty years on the British throne when

Rudyard Kipling published his poem “Recessional.” [\[1\]](#)

While the poem is a prime example of Kipling’s poetic genius, not everyone in England liked it.

To many, it seemed to speak ill of England and bordered on treason.

The poem put a hole in their sense of national pride at a time when the empire was at its peak.

Kipling meant “Recessional” to be a warning that *other* empires had vanished from the stage of history and England might well end up following in their wake.

God was still the Judge of the nations.

So Kipling wrote: [Show Slide 1]

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!

The Prophet Nahum would have applauded Kipling’s poem, especially his reference to the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh, for it was Nahum who wrote the Old Testament book that vividly describes the *destruction* of Nineveh and the end of the Assyrian Empire.

Nahum made it clear that God is indeed the Judge of the nations, and that as it says in Proverbs 16:18 “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

In the seventh century B.C., the very mention of Nineveh brought fear to people’s hearts all throughout the middle east.

But today, Nineveh is mentioned only by Bible students, archeologists, and people interested in ancient history. [Show Slide 2]

The Book of Nahum is a compliment to the Book of Jonah.

Separated by about a hundred years, Jonah tells the tale of how a Jewish prophet was sent by God to the pagan capital of the Assyrian Empire to declare judgment was coming lest they repent.

Repent they did, and the city of Nineveh was spared the wrath of God.

But after a little more than a hundred years, the revival that was sparked by the preaching of Jonah has been long forgotten, and the Ninevites have grown *more corrupt* than ever.

By Nahum's time, the Assyrian Empire is at its zenith; this is the peak of its power, influence, wealth and power.

Assyria controlled the surrounding regions with an iron and brutal fist.

Egypt, Babylon, Media, Elam, Palestine, the regions of Asia Minor and the Saudi peninsula all lie under the Assyrian yoke.

Assurbanipal, the Assyrian monarch is on the throne.

He was Assyria's last great king and had completed the move of the Assyrian capital from the city of Nimrud to Nineveh.

[Show Slide 3]

Little is known about Nahum himself except that he came from the town of Elkosh.

Where *that* was located we have no idea whatsoever.

Many Bible students think that Elkosh was the older name for the city of Capernaum and that Capernaum was renamed because it was the original home of the prophet Nahum –

Capernaum means – Village of Nahum – “Kapher Nahum”.

[Show Slide 4]

Nahum's references to the area of Galilee where Capernaum is located may mean that though he prophecies from the nation of Judah, his original home was in the *northern kingdom*.

He and his family had fled to the south when the Assyrians conquered the northern nation of Israel. [Show Slide 5]

We can pinpoint the time of his prophecy to the middle 7th century BC.

The city of Thebes in Egypt has fallen to the Assyrians but the fall of Nineveh is yet future.

Thebes fell in 663 BC while Nineveh fell in 612 BC.

So we know that Manasseh was reigning in Judah and the prophets Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk were all alive at this time.

The name Nahum means “comfort.”

His message of Assyria’s doom would have brought great comfort to the people of Judah who had suffered under the brutal domination by Assyria for half a century.

As we’ll see later, the book of Nahum is the necessary compliment to the book of Jonah.

Jonah reminds us that God is slow to anger and shows mercy and grace to the repentant.

Nahum shows us that while God is indeed slow to anger, He does not put off wrath indefinitely when people refuse to repent.

Wrath restrained becomes *wrath reserved* when people repent of repentance and return to their sin.

The theme of Nahum is God as Judge of the Nations.

A simple outline for Nahum is this: [Show Slide 6]

Chapter 1 – God is a Righteous Judge

Chapter 2 – God Will Righteously Judge Nineveh

Chapter 3 – *Why* Nineveh Deserved God’s Righteous Judgment

CHAPTER 1

1 The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

2 God *is* jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and *is* furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves *wrath* for His enemies;

For the last several weeks we have seen repeatedly, in both our studies in the OT and in the NT, that God is *full* of mercy and compassion.

Indeed, we saw last Sunday in the story of the prodigal son how God REJOICES when sinners repent.

What we may forget is that the same God who is full of mercy and compassion, is perfect in righteousness and can tolerate no sin.

There would be *no such thing* as mercy if there wasn't *first* justice and judgment as its backdrop.

Where there is no wrath, there is no *need* for mercy. Mercy presupposes the existence of wrath.

Nahum here reminds us of something critical – God is jealous!

He has a right to be!

You see, all of creation exists FOR HIM!

It finds its purpose and meaning as it willingly yields TO HIM!

The best thing each part of creation can do is yield itself to the Lord because that's what it was called into being for.

I have a few Snap-On screwdrivers at home.

On the handle of several of them are the words, “Not to be used as a prybar”

They're screwdrivers; flathead and Phillips head screwdrivers meant for slipping into the slot on the head of a screw and turning.

But sometimes people try to use them for other purposes.

They will use them as a lever to lift some object and pry something loose.

They weren't made for that and Snap-On got tired of replacing broken screwdrivers because people were using them improperly.

So the manufacturer put a warning on them – “Don't misuse.”

All of Creation exists for the glory of God.

When we turn to our own designs and direction, we work contrary to the very reason for our existence and this brings frustration and harm, not only to ourselves but to the creation around us.

That's why God is *jealous* – He's jealous *for* us because in His infinite love for us He knows the only way life works is when we live for Him.

He hates the inevitably hurtful end of choosing to go *our own way* rather than His.

God's jealous is not the selfish petty thing we're familiar with.

It's a holy zeal FOR the people He's created to experience the fullness and benefit of His love.

There once was a Billionaire who happened to pass by the desk of one of the many secretaries in one of his many office buildings. His was immediately attracted to her and struck up a conversation with her.

He asked her out and they began to see each other regularly. He gave her numerous gifts and took her to the finest places.

He always treated her with the utmost respect and tenderness and never was there a hint of inappropriateness in his expectations. But one day, she started avoiding him and stopped answering the phone.

He decided to see what was going on and followed her, only to discover she was sneaking out of her apartment to go carry on an affair with a homeless man living in the park.

He became jealous – not because he was selfish and insecure about being loved and accepted; on the contrary, there were literally millions of women who admired him and had made it plain they would like to be romantically involved with him.

No, because he genuinely loved that secretary, he was jealous that her infidelity to him was now barring her from the *enjoyment* of his love.

Do you see the point? His real love for her meant he wanted the best for her, but her spurning of his love to go after something far less meant her loss.

That's how God is jealous.

He doesn't need us – our love adds nothing to Him!

But He loves us so much, when we turn our love and affection to something less than He, it bars us from experiencing the fullness of His love and the blessing it brings.

As God looks at the nations of the world, He is jealous.

They exist for Him, and yet they think they exist for themselves.

So over time, as they grow farther and farther away from Him in the pursuit of their own designs and desires, His wrath grows and grows to the point where it is brimming over, then judgment comes.

3 The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit *the wicked*. The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the

dust of His feet.

It's with this verse that we see most clearly the link to Jonah.

This is a reference to Exodus 34:6-7

Jonah had also quoted this passage when he said he knew that the Lord was slow to anger and if the Ninevites repented then He would stay the promised judgment.

Jonah WANTED Nineveh to fall so he resisted the Lord's command to go and preach.

Here Nahum repeats Jonah's quote, but adds to it the inevitability of judgment if repentance doesn't continue.

This is what happened – Nineveh harkened to the preaching of Jonah and repented, from the least to the greatest.

But after a hundred years, the revival sparked by Jonah was long forgotten and the people of Nineveh had become arrogant and haughty.

Their sin now was far worse than in Jonah's day – and all the more so because they had tasted of the goodness of God yet turned to their own ways once more.

The day of mercy is passed – and God is now to come in swift judgment.

4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, And the flower of Lebanon wilts.

5 The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it.

6 Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him.

Nineveh boasted that their city was impregnable.

Part of their over-weening pride was formidable appearance of their fortifications.

Archaeologists have confirmed the legitimacy of their boast.

The city was massive and very likely in Nahum's day had a population of over a million people in Greater Nineveh.

It was the world's foremost city; equivalent to modern day

London, NY, LA and Rome all rolled in to one.

It was the cultural, economic, military, and religious center of the world.

The central city walls were some 60 miles in circumference and were 100 ft. high.

1500, 200 foot high towers reinforced the wall.

The walls were 50 ft. thick at the top and could withstand any amount of battering because an earthen rampart had been built up around the base of them.

Greater Nineveh spread well outside the walls of the central city.

In fact, archaeologists have discovered that the city covered some 350 square miles!!!! [Show Slide 7]

All of this conspired to give the Ninevites the impression that they were unconquerable.

For a couple generations their armies had been indestructible and no one had been successful at attacking their major cities.

Nahum bursts their bubble in vs. 4-6.

Nineveh wouldn't be dealing with merely HUMAN forces.

The God who created the land the city sat on would wage war on them.

His armies are limited to horses, men and spears.

He can marshal the very forces of nature!

**7 The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble;
And He knows those who trust in Him.**

While God will judge the unrepentant, He will be a refuge for those who turn to Him.

When judgment inevitably falls, those found in Him will be safe.

**8 But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end
of its place, And darkness will pursue His enemies.**

**9 What do you conspire against the LORD? He will make
an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second
time.**

**10 For while tangled like thorns, And while drunken like
drunkards, They shall be devoured like stubble fully
dried.**

Nahum eloquently describes the perfection of God's judgment of the wicked.

Just as a flood is unavoidable, so God's judgment is unstoppable.

All the plans people have made to do their own thing and reject

God will be overwhelmed and swept away.

Not one ungodly thing will prevail.

They shall be devoured like stubble fully dried.

This speaks of the chaff left behind after threshing wheat.

It blows away and collects round the base of walls and rocks.

People would collect it and use it as a type of fire-starter

because it ignites so quickly and burns with a greedy kind of energy.

Some years ago, I took the Christmas tree outside in our backyard and burned it.

Put it in a patch of dirt that we used for a vegetable garden in the spring and summer and threw a match on it.

It caught and fairly EXPLODED into flame.

The flames shot so high, they licked the telephone wires that came to the back of our house.

That's the picture here.

When God's judgment of the nations finally comes, it won't be like trying to start a campfire with wet firewood.

It will ignite and burn like a dry Christmas tree!

11 From you comes forth one Who plots evil against the LORD, A wicked counselor.

This verse is highly provocative because in Assyria's history we see a picture of God's future judgment of the nations.

The wicked counselor referred to here may very well be Rabshakeh, mentioned in Isaiah 36.

This man was sent by the king of Assyria to Jerusalem to try and get their surrender by threatening them with terror.

Rabshakeh spoke blasphemously about God and completely twisted the truth to make it look as though Assyria was unstoppable.

His wicked counsel was that the people of God ought not trust in the Lord but instead trust in man, the man who ruled over the

kingdoms of the earth in that day – the King of Assyria!
There are many Bible students who think that Nahum is here pointing back to their recent history and this character Rabshakeh, and then using that as a picture or type of the end times.

In Revelation 13 we read of The False Prophet who will come with a message for the people of the end times to not trust God but to look to and worship the Antichrist.

Rabshakeh pre-figures the False Prophet, and Nineveh stands as a picture of the kingdoms of this world which oppose God and shall in the end experience His wrath and judgment.

It's interesting that the first type of the antichrist in scripture is Nimrod, who we read founded the city of Nineveh.

Here we find Nahum announcing the judgment of Nineveh, and in a manner that clearly speaks of it as an object lesson on the final judgment of the world-system.

12 Thus says the LORD: “Though *they are safe*, and likewise many, Yet in this manner they will be cut down When he passes through.

That's for Nineveh – but now to Judah he says . . .

Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more;

13 For now I will break off his yoke [meaning Assyria's yoke] from you, And burst your bonds apart.”

Then again to Nineveh He turns and says . . .

14 The LORD has given a command concerning you: “Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. Out of the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the molded image. I will dig your grave, For you are vile.”

Archaeologists were a bit stunned when they began to decipher some of the inscriptions found in Assyrian ruins.

They spoke of acts of torture so barbarous that it was beyond comprehension.

[Show Slide 8 – this shows siege and taking of Lachish, a city in Judah. On it are some examples of the sadistic terrorism the Assyrians used in battle.]

In the chronicles of Assurbanipal, the Assyrians king who ruled while Nahum wrote this, they regularly ripped people's limbs off their bodies, they would put out their eyes, impale them, boil them in tar, and skin them alive.

This was the first time in history these things were practiced. And all for the purpose of terrorizing their enemies.

The Assyrians relished in these practices and their reputation as being cruel and brutal!

They actually made it their aim to leave a battlefield covered with corpses and would cut off the heads of their victims to erect a pyramid of skulls as a memorial to their greatness.

As Nahum says – God found them to be vile!

15 Behold, on the mountains The feet of him who brings good tidings, Who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, Perform your vows. For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; He is utterly cut off.

The news of Nineveh's judgment would be good news for Judah because it meant the end of the terror Assyria fostered. The people of God would be free to worship without fear.

CHAPTER 2

In 612 B.C., the Medes, Babylonians, and other nations dominated by Assyria united to attack the capital of Nineveh.

This chapter is a vivid description of what happened as seen by Nahum in the vision God gave him.

1 He who scatters has come up before your face.

This speaks of the invading army of Assyria's enemies

**Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen *your* flanks!
Fortify *your* power mightily.**

This is the shouted command of the Assyrian captains as they stand atop the city walls and towers.

But above the shouts of the mighty men of war comes the Word of the Lord . . .

2 For the LORD will restore the excellence of Jacob Like the excellence of Israel, For the emptiers have emptied them out And ruined their vine branches.

3 The shields of his mighty men *are* made red, The valiant men *are* in scarlet. The chariots *come* with flaming torches In the day of his preparation, And the spears are brandished.

4 The chariots rage in the streets, They jostle one another in the broad roads; They seem like torches, They run like lightning.

This is a picture of the invading army as it sweeps through the outskirts of the suburbs of Nineveh, the parts of the city that lay outside the walls that surrounded the central district.

5 He remembers his nobles; They stumble in their walk; They make haste to her walls, And the defense is prepared.

The Ninevites were so used to victory on foreign battle-fields, they had come to think that if battle ever came to their homeland they would be the epitome of strength and military might.

But now it's all confusion!

When the soldiers finally get it together and attempt to leave the city in a counter-attack, they'll find themselves hemmed in; the invaders will be all set and read for them with their defenses well in place.

6 The gates of the rivers are opened, And the palace is dissolved.

Here is where we get some specific prophecy about how Nineveh will fall.

The Khoser River flowed through the city and provided what was thought by the Ninevites to be an unstoppable water supply that would allow them to outlast any siege.

The siege of Nineveh did last 2 years, but the invaders dammed up the River – not to keep the water out of the city, but for another reason.

They created a lake as the river backed up behind the dam, then they released the water so that it washed down the riverbed and swept away a large portion of the rampart and wall.

After that it was a simple matter for the Medes and Babylonians to enter the city and take control.

The part the Lord played in all this was that He sent storms right at this time that swelled the river and produced the volume of water necessary to create the flood.

7 It is decreed: She shall be led away captive, She shall be brought up; And her maidservants shall lead *her* as with the voice of doves, Beating their breasts.

Just as the Assyrians had made it their policy to deport people out of their lands, so they would be deported and sold into slavery.

8 Though Nineveh of old was like a pool of water, Now they flee away. "Halt! Halt!" *they cry*; But no one turns back.

9 Take spoil of silver! Take spoil of gold! *There is* no end of treasure, Or wealth of every desirable prize.

10 She is empty, desolate, and waste! The heart melts, and the knees shake; Much pain *is* in every side, And all their faces are drained of color.

The sins her people had perpetrated elsewhere were coming home to roost.

11 Where *is* the dwelling of the lions, And the feeding place of the young lions, Where the lion walked, the lioness *and* lion's cub, And no one made *them* afraid?

12 The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, Killed for his lionesses, Filled his caves with prey, And his dens with flesh.

13"Behold, I *am* against you," says the LORD of hosts, "I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be

heard no more.”

Nahum is taunting the Assyrians as they march off to the slave markets, just as they had taunted their victims.

The image of the lion was often used by the Assyrians in their art and architecture.

They likened themselves to the lions of the field.

Nahum asks, “Where is the lions’ den now? Where is all your prey, the treasures you ruthlessly took from others?”

CHAPTER 3

In chapter 3, Nahum gives three reasons why Nineveh deserved to be judged.

1) Their ruthless bloodshed vs. 1-3

2) Their idolatry vs. 4-7

3) Their pride and self-confidence vs. 8-19

First, Nineveh would be judged because of their causal disregard for the sanctity of human life.

1 Woe to the bloody city! It *is* all full of lies *and* robbery. Its victim never departs.

2 The noise of a whip And the noise of rattling wheels, Of galloping horses, Of clattering chariots!

3 Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. *There is* a multitude of slain, A great number of bodies, Countless corpses—They stumble over the corpses—

The Assyrians were clever diplomats who lied to other nations and then broke their promises and destroyed them.

They used *peace* as a *weapon* – avoiding conflict with a stronger nation till they’d built up their forces or had worked covertly to weaken their opponent.

They desired conquest far more than peace.

Peace was for them a tactic – a strategy by which to gain an advantage over an opponent.

They also slaughtered people without regard for age or sex or what part they may or may not have played in fighting for their enemies. They stacked up corpses like lumber as warning to anybody who would oppose them.

They had not more compunction about killing a pregnant woman or 6 year old child than an armed soldier.

The shedding of *innocent* blood is a serious sin that God notes, remembers, and judges. [\[2\]](#)

Second, Nineveh would be judged because of their gross idolatry.

- 4 Because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, The mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations through her harlotries, And families through her sorceries.**
- 5 “Behold, I *am* against you,” says the LORD of hosts; “I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, And the kingdoms your shame.**
- 6 I will cast abominable filth upon you, Make you vile, And make you a spectacle.**
- 7 It shall come to pass *that* all who look upon you Will flee from you, and say, ‘Nineveh is laid waste! Who will bemoan her?’ Where shall I seek comforters for you?”**

In the ancient world, idolatry was usually accompanied by prostitution.

Nowhere was that more true than in Nineveh, where the chief deity was Ishtar, goddess of sexual passion, fertility, and war. Since it’s a spiritual law that we become *like* the god we worship, the Assyrians were given over to lust, greed, and violence.

Speaking of the worship of idols, Ps. 115:8 says,

Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.

What we believe determines how we behave.

If your chief deity is centered on erotic passion, wealth, and war, what values will you come to honor?

Everywhere Assyria conquered, she imported the worship and

influence of Ishtar.

In ancient times, prostitutes were able to entice their customers by keeping their bodies hidden and revealing only so much as to entice.

Prostitutes were *punished* by shaming them, and that meant to expose their nakedness to the public.

That is what God promised to do to Nineveh.

God would strip Nineveh bare.

What made the idolatry of Nineveh all the worse is that they had been led to faith in the real God under Jonah and the revival that took place a hundred years before.

Third, God would judge Nineveh and the Assyrians because of their arrogance and pride.

8 Are you better than No Amon [another name for Thebes in Egypt] That was situated by the River, That had the waters around her, Whose rampart was the sea, Whose wall was the sea?

9 Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, And *it* was boundless; Put and Lubim were your helpers.

10 Yet she was carried away, She went into captivity; Her young children also were dashed to pieces At the head of every street; They cast lots for her honorable men, And all her great men were bound in chains.

The Assyrians had conquered the city of Thebes, here called No-Amon, in 663.

Like Nineveh, Thebes thought itself safe from attack because of its fortifications, location, and allies - yet the Assyrians had taken it.

The lesson ought not have been lost on them - but it was.

Why? Because of pride!

11 You also will be drunk; You will be hidden; You also will seek refuge from the enemy.

The terror they have used so effectively in causing their enemies to act like drunken men will now be visited on them.

12 All your strongholds are fig trees with ripened figs: If they are shaken, They fall into the mouth of the eater.

Their defenses will fall easily and then be sued by the enemy instead of against him.

13 Surely, your people in your midst are women! The gates of your land are wide open for your enemies; Fire shall devour the bars of your gates.

14 Draw your water for the siege! Fortify your strongholds! Go into the clay and tread the mortar! Make strong the brick kiln!

15 There the fire will devour you, The sword will cut you off; It will eat you up like a locust. Make yourself many—like the locust! Make yourself many—like the *swarming* locusts!

Nahum taunts them to prepare for war – it will not avail them!

16 You have multiplied your merchants more than the stars of heaven. The locust plunders and flies away.

17 Your commanders are like *swarming* locusts, And your generals like great grasshoppers, Which camp in the hedges on a cold day; When the sun rises they flee away, And the place where they are is not known.

18 Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; Your nobles rest *in the dust*. Your people are scattered on the mountains, And no one gathers them.

19 Your injury *has* no healing, Your wound is severe. All who hear news of you Will clap *their* hands over you, For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?

The destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire will be swift and complete.

And so it was!

When Assurbanipal died, his viceroy Nabopolasar in Babylon rebelled against the new Assyrian king.

Nabopolassar formed an alliance with several of the nations the Assyrians had dominated and they attacked. It was all over in a couple years and the Assyrian Empire was left in ruins.

In fact, the destruction of Nineveh was so sweeping, by the 2nd century AD, people had lost knowledge of where it was even located.

CONCLUSION

If the book of Jonah is meant to remind us of God's mercy, then Nahum is the necessary balance weight to remind us of His righteous *anger*.

But God's anger isn't like human anger, which can be selfish and out of control.

His is a *holy* anger, a righteous indignation against all that defies His authority and disobeys His law.

In chapter 1:2, Nahum wrote that God was "furious"; and in verse 6, he described God's "indignation" as so fierce and powerful that it is "poured out like fire" with the power to "shatter" the rocks.

Verse 3 assures us that God's wrath isn't a *fit of rage* or a *temper tantrum*; for "the Lord is slow to anger."

Slow yes – but not stopped dead.

It is slow – slowly building!

And there will come a day when God's slowly building wrath will spill over in righteous indignation.

The winepress of His wrath will be full and He will tread it by Himself!

The judgment of Nineveh is presented as an object lesson on the future judgment of the entire Christ rejecting world.

The God that Nahum introduces to us is a jealous God who is angry at sin, but He is also a good God who cares for His people.

Nahum invites us, as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 11:22 to "consider the goodness and severity of God."

Realizing there is indeed a day of reckoning coming – we are compelled to share with people how they can find refuge in Christ from the overwhelming flood of God's judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:11 • Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

[1] This introduction adapted from Warren Wiersbe.

[2] Deut 19:11-13; 2 Kings 21:16; 24:4; Ps. 106:38; Prov. 6:16-17; Isa. 59:7