

## “Comfort for the Oppressed”

### *Nahum 1*

Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever been verbally put down for a character flaw, a lack of ability, or something about your background? Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith? Then Nahum will encourage you.

Perhaps the least know minor prophet, Nahum has a short and powerful message of hope for Israel who was bullied by the Assyrians in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Assyrians were cruel in how they treated those they conquered. When Israel was divided between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, God allowed Assyria to capture the 10 tribes in the north in 722 BC because they failed to follow God’s commandments. God warned His people in Deut. 28-29 that if they should continually forsake His Words then He would send a foreign nation to discipline His people through exile.

However, God won’t tolerate this nation to cruelly mistreat His people. Should they abuse His people unjustly and cruelly then God says I am watching and will deal with you one day. And it won’t be pretty.

So the book of Nahum is like telling Frodo and Sam to hang in there since Gollum is going to suffer a terrible fate because of his mistreatment of you. Or its like telling Luke Skywalker the Emperor is going to pay for the way he mistreated you. Hang in there.

And we like to see the endings to those kinds of movies, when the bad guy finally gets it. Yes, but’s that the movies. Life isn’t a movie. No, but when God is your refuge you can trust Him for a good ending and reverse the fortunes of His people one day.

And while we have history on this side of Nahum to say ‘Yup, God punished the Assyrians and Nineveh’ its another thing when we’re the ones suffering now and our oppressors are getting away with their cruel physical, verbal, mental or even social media abuse. What kind of comfort can we get from Nahum about the mistreatment we may be experiencing?

The book of Nahum is not long, containing only 47 verses and takes less than 10 minutes to read. We know from clues within the book that Nahum was sent by God to the Southern Kingdom of Israel known as Judah (1:15) well after the Assyrians captured the north (in 722 BC) and after 663 BC when Assyria cruelly destroyed Thebes in Egypt. Assyria would be defeated by Babylon in 612 BC. So Nahum ministered during the reign of Manasseh, who was personally taken captive by the Assyrians in which God used to bring him to repentance, or he spoke during Josiah’s reign. Assyria had bullied Hezekiah, yet God intervened and then they bullied Manasseh and now God said that’s enough. Chronologically Nahum follows Micah and Isaiah and precedes Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

Nahum means ‘comfort’. Nehemiah means the same thing only the suffix ‘iah’ means God is my comfort. Scholars are unsure of where Elkosh was. Some wonder if it is the same place as Alquosh in Northern Iraq, which seems odd that he would be from there, while others suggest he is from Capernaum but ultimately we don’t know. Like many of the prophets he begins

*An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*

An oracle means a burdensome message and he received it through a vision from God. This tells us something important right away; that a message from God about the judgment of those who oppose God is heavy.

## **The Message of Judgment Weighs Heavy on God's Messengers (1:1)**

The prophets did not enjoy giving messages of judgment but they were from God and they were compelled to share His Word. Many of them suffered for their messages. Jeremiah especially. In Jer. 20:14-18 he laments that he was ever born because God had given him this heavy message against his own people Israel.

*Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow  
and to end my days in shame? (20:18)*

Nahum's message was heavy but it was against their enemies, people who had hurt them. There was relief in that but God doesn't enjoy this either, as we'll see shortly. This is something we can relate to. We who know Christ through faith also understand we are saved not just to God but from a painful separation from God when we die. The gospel contains bad news as well as good news. The Good news is that God loves you and wants to come into your life and forgive your sins and promise you His presence forever; now on earth and on the new earth in eternity. But the Gospel also presents the bad news that we are all sinners separated from God and destined to a painful Godless eternity if we don't repent.

I have stood at the bedsides of people who knew they were days, even hours from dying, and trying to share Christ with them knowing what was waiting for them if they didn't repent. To be a follower of Christ is to be burdened with the knowledge that people will spend all eternity in a terrible place called the lake of fire if they don't accept Christ as their Saviour, asking Him to forgive their sins. And there is no joy in that knowledge even if they were terrible people who mistreated others.

And yet, God can't not judge them because of the promises in His Word. So as Nahum begins to share this burdensome message for those who oppose them, he also knows it's a message of comfort to God's people who are being oppressed. And we need to share His message knowing

## **God is Consistently Faithful to His Words And to His People (1:2-8)**

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies.*

Jesus said in Matt. 5:17-18

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

Which means, as we apply it to Nahum, God will fulfil His promises to bring justice against those who oppose Him. In John 3:16, God says *'that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but*

*have everlasting life.*' That means whoever doesn't believe in Him will perish. These are also promises from God.

All Scripture is God's very words and are instructive for us. The news that God will take vengeance on His enemies means that His enemies did something terrible that requires God to deal with. God gives people the choice how to live. To make their own decisions on how to treat others. But He takes it very personally when those who reject Him attack His people. That's comforting for us. Because if God was all lovey-dovey and overlooked all transgressions, that would be unfair to those who gave their lives to serve Him. And yet

### ***He graciously delays judging (vv.2-3a)***

While God will take revenge on those who hate Him and His people, v.3 is a reference to God's own words to Moses in Ex. 34:6 when Moses asked to see God's glory. This is what God spoke when He revealed a glimpse of His glory to Moses;

*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;*

How slow? Sometimes hundreds of years. You have to read Nahum with Jonah in the background. Jonah prophesied before the Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom captive. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh 100 years before this word to Nahum and say

*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*

When Jonah finally goes after a bout of disobedience, he preached, *Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."* <sup>5</sup> *The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

And the king tore his robes in repentance and declared to the entire nation that they should repent of their sins and

*3:8 Call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*

And Jonah knew God was a gracious and compassion-ate God slow to anger (he quotes Ex. 34:6 also in Jonah 4:2) and that this might happen. So before you prejudge God as cruel, remember He already gave them a chance to repent. They did for awhile but they failed to pass along the good news of repentance in God to the next generation and as a result that generation rejected God and would perish.

When you look at the prophecies about and against the world ruling empires in Daniel and you know that Babylon will overthrow Assyria and then Babylon will be overthrown by Persia, then Persia by Greece and Greece by Rome, you realize most of those empires lasted at least 100 years and some a few hundred. So God is slow to anger. He delays judging, which sometimes frustrates the people of God. But as Nahum points out and history has proven the truth of God's words, judgment

## ***Is inescapable to those who oppose Him (vv.3b-6)***

Nahum uses word pictures of God riding on the clouds and wreaking massive destruction. Rocks don't shatter very easily. Mountains quaking and hills melting sounds like a volcano eruption. And if you've seen any footage of the volcano that's been spewing lava for 4 weeks now on La Palma island off the coast of Spain, you know how devastating this is. And yet strangely, tourists are flocking to see this massive destruction. Like lava flowing down a mountain side so sure is God's justice coming to those who oppose Him and hurt His people. And so with the knowledge of God's power and justice, God still reaches out to people

## ***And desires for people to make Him their refuge (vv.7-8)***

This is the key verse to the book. All judgment verses need to be filtered through v.7,

<sup>7</sup> *The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, <sup>8</sup> but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness.*

Notice He's a refuge in trouble. Because God is slow to anger and delays judgment, He gives the rebellious people of the world time to repent and come to Him. But that also means His people might suffer for awhile. We too must be patient with God. We too must, as Jesus said, pray for our enemies. God is not cruel, He's just and merciful. Listen to these verses about God's future judgment:

*Ezek. 18:23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?*

*2 Pet. 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

This is God's desire that in the knowledge of a future judgment people would repent and turn from their wickedness and make God their refuge by faith in Jesus. I know some of you have some very antagonistic family members who want nothing to do with your faith in Jesus and sadly, have excluded you from family get togethers. That's hard. Yet how do you pray for them? To repent and see the error of their ways before its too late. Why do we feel that way? Because God and Jesus feel that way.

So while the message of judgment against God's enemies is an unpopular one and difficult one to share, yet for us we are to be

## **Comforted that God rewards our Faith **(1:9-15)****

In his message against Assyria God communicates through Nahum that

## ***He deals fairly with idolatry and injustice (vv.9-14)***

In vv.9-14 God is telling Assyria you are only getting back what you dished out. Rejected Me and You worshipped other gods therefore you will experience my wrath. The wine that you get drunk with and the thorns you planted for others, you will fall into these traps yourself. Assyria was known for cruelly treating their captives as vv.13-14 point out, putting yokes and shackles on them. We have

an example in 2 Chron. 33. While God spared Hezekiah from the Assyrians, Hezekiah's son Manasseh was not as fortunate. But it was his own fault.

*33:10 The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. <sup>11</sup> So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. <sup>12</sup> In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. <sup>13</sup> And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.*

If the Assyrians treated a king like that, how much worse did they treat others? God says to Assyria, you're going to suffer a similar fate. So knowing God will deal in His time and His way with those who hurt us because they oppose Him, God

### ***Encourages us to worship in confidence (v.15)***

*<sup>15</sup> Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.*

Here we see clearly that Nahum was speaking to the Southern Kingdom who were being threatened by Assyria, yet God said, 'Don't worry about them. Stay faithful. Be confident to worship Me even though the enemy is giving you a hard time. Their days are numbered. I've got this.'

And that's the point we need to take away from this. Because oppression and opposition has a tendency to cause us to fear and back away from being vocal about our faith, maybe even hindering us from attending worship. God says don't allow them to stop you from following me. The good news says, I am your refuge and will reward your faith. Those who oppose you because they hate me will find they wasted their life.

Ps. 73 is a great example for us. In Ps. 73 the worship leader of Israel, Asaph, shares his doubts about walking with God. He says things like the wicked and arrogant seem to have no problems, they seem to get away with cruelty, they blaspheme God and get away with it; they have no worries Lord. And he thought 'it is vain to follow God' and he admitted 'his feet almost slipped' until "*I entered the sanctuary of God and then I understood their final destiny*" (73:17).

He rebukes himself for doubting and reminds himself in v.23 'You hold me by your right hand, You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me to glory.'

*<sup>7</sup> The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,*

*Father in heaven, you see things we can't see and know things before they are about to happen. Help us to trust You and the counsel of Your words to keep us in the right direction. Heb. 11:6 says 'Without faith it is impossible to please you because anyone who comes to you must believe that You exist and that You reward those earnestly seek You.'*

*May we be those who earnestly seek You and take shelter under your wings. May we trust Your sovereign goodness for ourselves and for those who oppose you. May we pray for our antagonistic family members and friends because we know their final destiny if they don't repent. May we worship and share our faith in confidence because You are always with us and You are enthroned*

*in heaven. May You encourage all of us today to trust You with all our heart and not lean on our under-the-sun only understanding in our head.*

*Lord, if someone's feet were slipping today, wondering if living for you by faith is really worth it because sometimes it doesn't look like You're in control, I pray that these words from Nahum would encourage them to draw near to You again and that You will draw near to them. May we all ask forgiveness Lord when we doubt your power and presence around us, and may we all renew our trust in You and Your Son, King Jesus whose return we await.*

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