



“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the cloud are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3).

Mercy and Might

Central Truth: The prophet preached a balanced message of divine love and wrath.

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Meet Nahum, prophet of God. He lived in the seventh century before Christ, the same time period in which Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and other prophets lived. That period has been called “the silver age of Hebrew prophecy” because of their fine ministries.

Nahum is called “the Elkoshite,” meaning he lived in the town of Elkosh. (Its location is not known.) There is no information about Nahum's personal life. From internal evidence, it seems best to set the date of Nahum's writing about 610 to 607 B. C. (He probably witnessed the first deportation of Judah to Babylonian captivity, which came in 605 B. C.) At the time of Nahum's ministry, the city of Nineveh was under siege and he saw it as the vengeance of God on a cruel nation.

Nahum was a writer of exceptional ability. George Adam Smith says of him, “His language is strong and brilliant; his rhythm rumbles and rolls, leaps and flashes, like the horsemen and chariots he describes.” He is one of the finest of Judah's ancient poets. But more important than his style is his message. He is concerned with setting forth the nature of God whom we worship in Jesus Christ.

The attributes of God are not contradictory. He can be a God of justice and of mercy at the same time. We must see God in all His divine perfections. This study deals with both the mercy and justice of God and magnifies Him in our eyes.

I. THE VENGEANCE OF GOD (Nahum 1:2, 3)

A. The vengeance of God is terrible. *“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies”* (verse 2).

That hardly sounds like the God we meet in Jesus Christ, does it? But it is the same God. In Jesus, we meet Him showing love and mercy toward sinners. In the writings of Nahum, we meet Him executing vengeance on sinners. It is the same God in two roles.

If this does not sound like a proper description of God, consider the terrible nature of sin. Sin is so exceeding sinful that it merits the worst of judgments. (Think of how terrible it must be that it needed the death of God's innocent Son to pay the penalty for it!) Judgment is according to offense. Serious sin deserves serious judgment.

B. The vengeance of God is specific. *“His adversaries”* are the recipients of His justice. He warned, *“I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and I will reward them that hate me”* (Deuteronomy 32:41). Those who are guilty will find the verdict executed upon them. Those who are innocent will be preserved in peace when judgment falls. There are different degrees of punishment of sinners for different depths of sin.

C. The vengeance of God is controlled. He is *“slow to anger,”* but He *“will not at all acquit the wicked”* (verse 3).

The anger of human beings is often unjust. An angry person often lashes out at anyone within reach, sometimes even at an innocent child. Not so with the wrath of God. He shows His wrath toward one who deserves it, and determines its severity according to the guilt involved.

One who understood that principle of God's dealings with humanity wrote, *“Let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might”* (Judges 5:31). The same act of God will scatter His enemies and cause them to perish while it makes glad the righteous and causes them to sing praises to Him (Psalm 68:1-6).

D. The vengeance of God is just (verse 3). It will come on those who deserve it, but will pass by those who are innocent. *“Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints”* (Revelation 15:3). *“The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity”* (Zephaniah 3:5). *“We are sure the judgment of God is according to truth”* (Romans 2:2). So you need not fear if your faith is in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. His blood has covered your sins, so you have perfect and eternal forgiveness. Praise His name, the judgment due you fell on Him on the cross and He paid the full penalty. That means you are free!

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (Nahum 1:3-6)

God is sovereign. We agree with that statement, but what does it mean? To be sovereign means to be *“above all others; superior; chief; greatest; supreme; independent of all others.”* The sovereignty of God is a great Bible doctrine. Observe how it is inferred (not using the term) in the lesson text.

A. God is sovereign over the winds. *“The LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet”* (verse 3). What a majestic description of our great God! He rules the raging of the sea, stilling the waves when they arise (Psalm 89:9; Matthew 8:26, 27). We see His sovereignty in the *“stormy wind fulfilling his word”* (Psalm 148:8). He is our God!

B. God is sovereign over the waters. *“He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers”* (verse 4). That may be a reference to His opening the waters of the Red Sea for Israel to pass safely in her exodus from Egypt (Exodus 14) and to His stopping the waters of the Jordan River for Joshua to lead Israel across (Joshua 3). But what happened once on those two occasions is typical of the power of the one who *“drieth up ALL the rivers.”* Why should He not do that? *“He gave the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment”* in the Creation (Proverbs 8:29). He can do as He wills.

C. God is sovereign over the fields. The flowers grow or die at His command and the mountains melt at His presence as the earth is burned before Him (verses 4, 5). What a great God! He clothes the lilies of the field in a glory unequalled even by Solomon (Matthew 6:28-30).

D. God is sovereign over the whole earth, “the world, and all that dwell therein” (verse 5). It belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1). He created it all (John 1:3). He holds it all together (Colossians 1:17). It exists for His purpose to work out to His glory and according to His good pleasure (Revelation 4: 11).

E. God is sovereign over the creatures of earth “all that dwell therein” (verse 5). He says, *“Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. . . . The world is mine, and the fulness thereof”* (Psalm 50:10-12). Even the wild animals look to God for food and He feeds them (Matthew 6:26).

F. God is sovereign over all powers. *“Who can stand before his indignation?”* (verse 6). The very nature of the question indicates the answer. “No one can stand before Him. He is sovereign God over all.” *“Our*

God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3). “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35).

That is sovereignty! *“By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16, 17).* What a privilege to know Him personally!

III. THE MERCY OF GOD (Nahum 1:7, 8)

A. His mercy is good. There is a world of grace in that statement, *“The LORD is good” (verse 7)*. It describes His nature as good and His actions as beneficial. *“The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Psalm 33:5)*, so we should be able to recognize His handiwork everywhere.

You can know personally the goodness of God. He invites, *“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8)*. Those who have experienced His blessing testify, *“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13)*.

What a privilege it is to belong to a sovereign God who deals in mercy with His people to their good and His glory! That is what we have received in Jesus Christ.

B. His mercy protects. He is *“a strong hold in the day of trouble” (verse 7)*. *“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour. . . . I will call on the LORD who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies” (II Samuel 22:2-4)*. Compare Psalm 18:1-3. Notice the personal relationship involved in His protection: *“He is MY refuge and MY fortress: MY God; in him will I trust” (Psalm 91:2)*.

C. His mercy is a companion to His justice. While mercy is shown to those who trust Him, judgment falls on those who reject Him (verse 8). Do not make the mercy or love of God a weak sentimentality. He who receives the righteous into life eternal also consigns the wicked to everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46). Sovereign mercy and sovereign justice can be combined in only one person, the sovereign God whom we call “Father” in Jesus Christ.

IV. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (Nahum 1:8-12)

A. The judgment of God is thorough (verses 9-11). No sin is overlooked. No sinner escapes. *“God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work”* (Ecclesiastes 3:17). His judgment is so thorough that the wicked are left *“neither root nor branch”* (Malachi 4:1). Even the present heavens and earth of this material creation are *“reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”* (II Peter 3:7).

B. The judgment of God is sovereign. Though men try to hide from Him, they shall be cut down when the Lord passes through (verse 12). Jehoshaphat prayed, *“O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?”* (II Chronicles 20:6). Yes, He is all of that and more. That is why He is the judge of the whole earth. *“The LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else”* (Deuteronomy 4:39). He sits as King forever (Psalm 39:10).

C. The judgment of God is ended for His people. He promises, *“I will afflict thee no more”* (verse 12). Their sins have been judged already in the person of Jesus their substitute. There remains no more judgment for sin, for by one offering He has perfected forever those who trust Him (Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14). Like Noah in the ark, the saint may see the judgment of God about him, but it will bring him no harm.

What conclusions can we draw from this review of Nahum 1:1-12? Let us learn to fear God because His judgments are just. Let us learn to reverence God because He is sovereign over all persons and things. Let us learn to commit to God because He is merciful. Let us learn to serve God because of His justice. Let us learn to worship God in the light of all His glorious attributes.

He is God and there is no other besides Him. And He is our Father by faith in Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What do you know about Nahum?
2. What is the “vengeance of God”?
3. What does Deuteronomy 32:41 mean?
4. What assurances do you find in Zephaniah 3:5?
5. What is meant by “the sovereignty of God”?

6. In what areas of nature is God sovereign?
7. How does Daniel 4:35 show His sovereignty?
8. What is the mercy of God?
9. How can God be just and merciful too?
10. What practical truth have you learned from this study?