

# Route Sixty-Six

*Part Thirty-Four*

*Nahum*

*Keep Our Feast, Perform Our Vows*

*(John 5:39; Nahum 1:15)*

*With Study Questions*

*Pastor Paul Viggiano  
Branch of Hope Church  
2370 W. Carson Street, #100  
Torrance, CA 90501  
212-6999  
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org  
[www.branchofhope.org](http://www.branchofhope.org)  
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**You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).**

**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 (Nahum 1:15).**

## **Introduction**

Nahum can be thought of as a sort of Jonah-Part Two. About one-hundred-fifty years after the Ninevites repented through the preaching of Noah, they had returned to their old ways-their old ways being the vicious, cruel, innovative torture and destruction of any nation or people they viewed as necessary to their prosperity. This included Israel.

Their reinvigorated darkness carried an advanced culpability because they had so recently been a nation that had **“believed God...from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5)**. It can be said that the Biblical principle that **“to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48)** found an application in Nineveh. Nineveh would soon cease to exist.

It may not seem terribly remarkable to hear of the fall of an obscure ancient civilization. Most of us are only acquainted with Nineveh because of the popularity of the story of Jonah. But this speaks more to the severity of God’s judgment than the obscurity of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, whose power was virtually unmatched in the entire ancient world. It may be a fair analogy to imagine that there had never been a Roman Empire or a Greek domination under Alexander.

Nineveh was large and powerful. It was said to be three days journey in circumference, walls of one hundred feet and wide enough to accommodate three chariots side by side. There were one thousand and

five hundred towers to ensure its security. There was perhaps never a city that had such justifiable confidence in its ability to survive. Yet just a few years after Nahum's warning, it would fall to Babylon. And within a couple of hundred years even the site of where it had been was uncertain.

Nahum's three brief chapters are all consumed with the destruction of Nineveh. Chapter one speaks of its certainty; chapter two of its siege and capture and chapter three of the wickedness which provoked retribution. Briefly stated, Nineveh's destruction is *declared-described-deserved*.

One might ask, what value is there in a book whose intent to describe divine retribution? Nahum (after whom-it is likely-that the village of Capernaum is named) means "consolation" and "vengeance". The two words don't seem to fit together. How is it that vengeance can be consoling? How would it be a source of comfort for God's people to know that a nation would be judged?

We will seek to answer that before we're through, but first a brief survey of this short book.

## **Survey of Nahum**

The book seems to begin in full sprint. God is furious with Nineveh. He will dig their grave because they are vile. Let's be careful to avoid thinking of God's anger with the wicked as if He were a fickle Greek deity on Mount Olympus whose had too much wine and reacts in unstable passion. No, along with their effrontery against God, there is the natural and inevitable cruelty and oppression of the poor and weak.

Our lack of ability to appreciate the righteous indignation of God against cruel and vicious tyrants is a sign that we have either forgotten or have never been acquainted with what man will do to man if left to his own devices. It is at the end of chapter one that we read one of the few familiar passages, used by the Apostle Paul in Romans in relation to the preaching of the Gospel.

**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 (Nahum 1:15).**

Paul will use these words, not to speak of deliverance from Nineveh but deliverance from sin and death through saving faith in Christ. But notice the principle. Keep your feasts, perform your vows. Do not allow what appears to be an unquenchable foe, deter you from faithful living.

We can be so easily discouraged when things don't seem to be panning out. Israel had no answer for the Assyrians. We must be vigilant to avoid being overly controlled by our temporal, observable successes or failures. There is something deeper going on.

Shortly after the resurrection of Christ, the Apostle John described the world as lying under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). There were probably about two to four hundred million people in the world and likely less than 20,000 of them were Christians. And those who were Christians were under continual torment and persecution. There was very little, in terms of social advantage, in being a Christian. It was, in truth, just the opposite. What being a believer offered in terms of society, Paul wrote, made us **"of all men the most pitiable"** (1 Corinthians 15:19).

It was during the apex of cruel hatred toward believers that John wrote what would have appeared, in terms of outward observation, nearly unbelievable.

**Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:4-6).**

There is a King over all kings. It is promise of ultimate victory over evil, sin and death that should move us to persevere. There is something much deeper taking place which must govern the souls of men. Addressing the temptation to give in to fatigue, Paul writes:

**And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:9, 10).**

Let us ever keep our feasts and perform our vows, knowing that deliverance comes from the hand of God.

In chapters two and three the destruction of Nineveh is further described and shown to be deserved. Let us ask again, how is it that vengeance can be consoling? How would it be a source of comfort for God's people to know that a nation would be judged?

What we read in Nahum is a bit different from what we read in Jonah. The comfort of God's people is not merely a sense of vindictiveness against evil people. It is more a sense of justice against evil itself. Nahum contains one of the places in Scripture where we read that God will not acquit the wicked (Nahum 1:3). It seems as if God has created us with this intuitive inclination that evil will not prevail. And the comfort offered in Nahum is how God works throughout history to ensure just that.

Years ago, I would play volleyball on the beach with friends who had been in the Viet Nam war. From time to time military helicopters would fly just offshore and my buddies would stop, look and I could feel them thinking. To them, helicopters offered the sound of either deliverance or destruction. For the Israelite to read/hear the words of Nahum was the sound of deliverance.

One thing we learn, especially when we compare Nahum to Jonah is that God will forgive sin repented and battled with, He will not condone sin persisted in. We also observe that wrath restrained can be wrath reserved.

## **Christ in Nahum**

In what respects do we see Christ in Nahum? As already noted, Paul almost verbatim quotes Nahum in regard to the preaching of the Gospel.

**And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news" (Romans 10:15)!**

To be sure, the heart of the comparison vis-à-vis the deliverance of Israel and the deliverance of our souls is the conquering of sin, Satan and death-the application by faith of the righteousness and blood of Christ to our sin-laden souls.

But that Gospel does look like something in the material world. Jesus didn't die on a cross in heaven to redeem and sanctify heaven. Heaven

does not groan the way creation groans. There is an expectation that those in the New Covenant had when they first observed the Christ-child. And similar to the two accounts of Nineveh (the one that repented and the one that did not) the Gospel was shown to contain a rising and a falling.

In the second chapter of Luke we read of a man named Simeon who was **“just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25)**. In certain respects, Nineveh could be thought of as a type of Rome for Simeon and Anna were faithful in the midst of the slavery, persecution and oppression of the Roman Empire. And in a similar way that Israel would be consoled by the prophecy of Nahum, Simeon was promised that **“he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26)**.

Simeon would speak, that which had to be, disquieting words to Mary, that her own soul would be pierced, and the thoughts of many hearts revealed as a result of her Child. Truly, Christ being born into this world would create conflict. This is seen in the words of Simeon:

**Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (Luke 2:34).**

The Gospel can be the **“fragrance from life to life”** or the **“fragrance from death to death” (2 Corinthians 2:16)**. And perhaps the words of Simeon were not all that confusing to Mary, for her dynamic and oft quoted response (after Gabriel revealed God’s plan for her) to her miraculous conception (the Magnificat) includes the anticipation of what the work of redemption through her Child would include:

**He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts.<sup>52</sup> He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, And exalted *the* lowly.<sup>53</sup> He has filled *the* hungry with good things, And *the* rich He has sent away empty (Luke 1:51-53).**

As with Nineveh, God will ever bring His justice into history. It may be hundreds or thousands of years, but evil kings and kingdoms will kiss the Son (that is bow before Him who is good, right and true) or they will (as they always have) perish.

But this word toward us this morning is not the sound of helicopters, but the sound of the Gospel-the sound, taste and smell of the loaf and the

cup. This is our “**appointed feast**”. Let us enjoy it and ever perform our VOWS.

## Questions for Study

1. Explain how Nahum can be thought of as a Jonah-Part Two (pages 2, 3)?
2. How and why did the principle “to whom much is given, from him much will be required” apply to Nineveh (pages 2, 3)?
3. Do you find the righteous indignation of God a difficult concept? Why do you suppose that is (page 3)?
4. How can God’s divine retribution be a source of comfort (pages 3-5)?
5. What do we learn of Christ when we read Nahum? Discuss the historical expectations associated with Jesus (pages 5, 6).
6. Do Christians have an appointed feast or vows? Explain (page 6).