



5

God Judges Nations

Key Theme

- God used men to record His words.

Key Passages

- Nahum 1:1–15, 2:1–3:19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the source of the message of Nahum.
- Connect the books of Jonah and Nahum.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

page 4

Write on the board, “How does God bring judgment?”
Students will work on the Memory Verse Review sheet.

- Memory Verse Review Sheet for each student



Studying God’s Word

page 4

The Lord’s wrath burned against the wicked Assyrians. But before He destroyed them, He sent His prophet Nahum to the capital, Nineveh, to warn them of God’s judgment. The people would not repent like they had when Jonah came 100 years earlier. So God used another nation to destroy Nineveh and the Assyrians.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Read through Nahum.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Jonah Meets Nahum

page 7

Students will identify similarities and differences in the books of Jonah and Nahum and the responses to their messages.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

God works throughout history to accomplish His plans. Nineveh arose as the capital of the powerful nation Assyria. Assyria was a growing power in the region and had taken control of a major portion of the Middle East. God was aware that Nineveh was a wicked city and that evil was pervasive throughout the empire. In His kindness to the heathen nation, God sent Jonah to proclaim a message of judgment against Nineveh and the Assyrians (Jonah 1:2). Jonah's message was received by the people of Nineveh. Even the king responded in repentance (Jonah 3:6–9). God saw that they had turned from their evil ways, and in His mercy, He spared the city (Jonah 3:10).

Their affection for God and His laws did not last long, however. Within 100 years, Nineveh had returned to idolatry. The king at that time was seeking to magnify his own name over God's.

Enter Nahum—at a time in history when Assyria, at the height of its power, was hated and feared by all nations. God used Nahum to deliver a prophecy of doom concerning Assyria: "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'" (Nahum 1:14). God hated the cruelty, sin, and idolatry of the Assyrian nation and was about to smash it.

So now God's judgment was coming on Assyria because of their wickedness and sinfulness. But wait a minute! God was going to judge Assyria for her cruelty and sin, and yet they carried out His will, His judgment on the Israelite nation when they conquered the Northern Kingdom. It had been God's plan that Assyria overthrow Israel and deport them. It doesn't appear just

that God would then turn around and judge the Assyrian nation who carried out His will against Israel.

But God can do no wrong. His plans are perfect, and whatever He does is fair and just and righteous. Although we often don't understand what He does in the Bible and throughout history, we must never accuse God of doing wrong. As Abraham said to God before He judged Sodom, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

The Israelites willingly rejected God and turned to worshipping false gods—their judgment was just. The Assyrians willingly attacked another nation and took it captive, fulfilling their own evil desires for power. Each side sinned, and God used this sin to accomplish His plans without sinning Himself. We could say that God uses sin sinlessly. Just as God warned Israel to return to Him but judged them by sending Assyria to conquer them when they refused to repent, He then used Nahum to warn Nineveh of coming judgment. They chose not to repent, so God judged them by sending another nation, the Babylonians, to satisfy His judgment on them.

Under the leadership of Nabopolassar, the Babylonians rose and conquered the Assyrians about 100 years after they had overthrown Israel. This occurred only about 25 years after Nahum's writing and prophecy of this very judgment.

In most cases throughout the Bible, the judgment delivered by God came at the hand of other people. He delivered the message through people and brought the judgment through people. We are aware, of course, of notable exceptions where God sent fire from heaven (Genesis 19:24) or flooded the entire earth (Genesis 7:17), but God typically acted through people.

Again, let's remember that God can do no wrong. Although we may not always understand how and why God does certain things, He is always faithful to His own character. He cannot sin, and He always conducts

His plans on the earth in a just way—in a manner that brings glory to Himself (Romans 11:36). God is in control, and we can absolutely rest in knowing that the God of all the earth does what is right—His own righteous, unchanging character demands that.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Placing Nahum in the history of Israel is a bit more difficult than most of the other prophets. For example, Amos opened his book with a detailed list of the kings in Israel and Judah reigning at the time of his prophecy. But Nahum didn't give us that historical context. We can, however, be certain of some things. Because Nahum spoke of Assyria and Nineveh in their glory, his prophecy must have been written at a time when Assyria was prospering. Up until the end of the reign of Ashurbanipal, who ruled Assyria from 668–648 BC, Assyria prospered. We also know that Nineveh was overthrown by Nabopolassar in 626 BC, which was the judgment Nahum prophesied about.

The other interesting tidbit in the text is that Nahum calls himself an Elkoshite, indicating where he might be from (Nahum 1:1). There are several different possibilities for this location. One is Al Qosh in Iraq, so it is possible that Nahum or his parents were among those exiled from Israel in 721 and resettled in the north of the Assyrian territories. With all of this in mind, Nahum likely delivered his prophecy against Nineveh around 650 BC at the height of Assyria's power. God used a nation that He prospered to bring judgment upon Israel. And eventually, that nation would be overthrown by the Babylonians who would capture Jerusalem, taking the remainder of God's people captive.

Remember, only about 150 years passed from the time of Jonah—when the entire city of Nineveh

repented—to Nahum and his prophecy. And the fall of Nineveh came only about 25 years after the prophetic proclamation from God through Nahum.

What a reminder of how quickly an entire nation can rebel against God. Or a family! Or a person! Because God is jealous for His own name, He will not leave unbelief and rebellion unpunished. Only in Christ does anyone have hope of being forgiven of rebellion against God. God shows His kindness in sending a call to repentance in the face of judgment (Romans 2:4). Also, Jesus has shown us the kindness of God by placing Himself in our place—trading our sins for His perfection. What a glorious truth to proclaim to others and to cherish in our own hearts.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord, you are the Creator of the universe. You alone deserve my worship and praise. You warned your people and called them to repentance before you brought destruction. You showed them your kindness. In the same way, you are kind to give us your Word to show us the way to be saved from your wrath through Jesus. Oh, how I love Him and the truth of your Word! I want to take your warnings and your Word and the gospel to my family and friends and beyond, as Nahum did. For you've made it clear that in just a short time, if we don't treasure the truth and pass it on to the next generation, knowledge of you will pass away. Help me to impart these important truths to my class this week.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “How does God bring judgment?”
- Students will work on the Memory Verse Review Sheet.



Review

In our last lesson, we looked at the fall of Israel to the Assyrians. Israel had constantly turned to idolatry rather than remaining faithful and worshipping and serving God alone. God’s judgment on Israel was carried out over several years and culminated in the overthrow of Samaria after a long siege.

- ? How does God typically bring judgment to various groups in the Old Testament? *God typically sends other people or nations to deliver judgment. There are surely examples of supernatural judgment, but many cases of judgment come through others.*

God generally uses people to deliver His judgment, but we are going to look at a twist in our lesson today. In the book of Nahum, we see another aspect of God’s

judgment that is important for us to understand.

Before we get started, let’s set the historical stage for the book of Nahum. The nation of Assyria had come to be a powerful empire, dominating land from Egypt to modern-day Iraq. Nahum’s prophecy was likely delivered at the height of Assyrian power around 650 BC. Assyria had already conquered Israel, deporting many Israelites and resettling the land with other peoples they had conquered. Assyria was also oppressing Judah during this time, and we will be looking at some of those events in future lessons.



- Write on the board, “How does God bring judgment?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Nahum 1:1–15 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God’s Word by asking the right questions.

- ? How did Nahum receive this information? *It was given to him in a vision.*
- ? What does it mean by a “burden against Nineveh”? *The message was one of coming judgment. Other versions use “oracle” in place of burden. This is a common phrase for visions of judgment delivered to prophets.*

- ? **Is this prophecy directed against the city of Nineveh alone?** *Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Empire, so the city stands as a representative for the nation. 3:18 directly addresses the King of Assyria.*
- ? **What is revealed about God in the first few verses?** *God is jealous and will bring judgment to His adversaries.*
- ? **What sense of God do you come away with after reading chapter 1?** *There is an overwhelming sense of God's awesome power and majesty in this chapter.*
- ? **How do we know these truths are coming from God?** *Verses 12 and 14 clearly say that the message is from the Lord.*
- ? **Looking at verses 12 to 14, there seems to be a contradiction of sorts. What is the apparent problem in this text?** *Verses 12 and 13 talk about a people being freed from bondage while verse 14 talks about a nation whose name will be cut off and placed in a grave. This can't be referring to the same people.*
- ? **How can this problem be resolved?** *Verses 12 and 13 are speaking to Judah, since Assyria has been oppressing them. Judah will experience freedom from Assyria's yoke, as verse 15 then confirms. Verse 14 is spoken against Assyria for their idolatry and wickedness. This switching between people is common to Old Testament prophecy and can cause some confusion. That is why it is important to read Scripture carefully, asking questions of the text to make sure that we know who is being addressed in the text.*
- ? **What role of a prophet is Nahum fulfilling?** *He delivers a message of judgment to a foreign people.*

- Prophetic texts often switch subjects, so take care in reading them.
- Refer to the Roles of the Prophets Poster.

Discover the Truth

Nahum brought the words of God to the people of Nineveh. The Assyrian nation was about to be judged and overthrown. God put His sovereign power on display in the words Nahum spoke—the mountains quake and sea is made dry at His command. Nahum opens his burden of judgment against the Assyrians with a reminder of who God is and what He is capable of doing so that there is no doubt about the truth of His judgment.



SOVEREIGN

READ THE WORD

We are going to read Nahum chapters 2 and 3 all at once to get the sweeping scope of the announcement of judgment against Assyria. *Have someone read the passage aloud, preferably someone who would read with an intense tone.*

Nahum 2-3

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What does God call the Assyrians to do in 2:1?** *He calls them to prepare for battle. This is a bit ironic since there was no hope of them being saved from their judgment.*

- ? Looking at verse 2:7, were the preparations for war going to let them escape God’s judgment? *“It is decreed” that Assyria will be destroyed, so nothing can change that.*
- ? What types of descriptions are used to describe the fall of Nineveh? *In 2:6, the palace dissolves in a river. In 2:8, Nineveh was a pool that has been drained. In 2:10, Nineveh is empty, desolate, and waste. In 2:13, the chariots are burned and the army (young lions) is killed by the sword. In 3:5, Assyria’s “nakedness” will be shown to the nations. There are several other descriptions, as well.*
- ? What sins is Nineveh condemned for? *There is language of murder and bloodshed in chapter 3, as well as sorcery and idolatry (adultery and harlotries).*
- ? What imagery is used in 3:12 to describe Assyria’s defenses? *The strongholds are compared to fig trees whose fruits fall when the tree is shaken.*
- ? What is ironic/sarcastic about 3:14–17? *Again, the Assyrians are called to prepare for battle and a siege fully knowing that they will be destroyed.*
- ? What does 3:19 communicate about the fate of Assyria? *Their destruction is certain.*
- ? What does the rhetorical question that closes the book tell us about the reason for Assyria’s destruction? *The destruction was for the wicked acts of Assyria.*

Discover the Truth

Assyria was going to be destroyed for their wickedness and their sins against the nations around them. God laid out the case against Assyria, and their sins were many and worthy of punishment.

However, there is an interesting question that comes from the interaction of Assyria and Israel: If God used Assyria to accomplish His plan for judging Israel and destroying it, then why would God be judging Assyria for doing what He had intended them to do?

God called Assyria to destroy Israel, and now He is holding Assyria accountable for doing what He had decreed.

- ? What attribute of God might be called into question in this circumstance? *Just: If God is just, then how can He condemn a people for carrying out what He expected? However, God gets to define what is good and all that He does is fair and just.*

We must be careful not to accuse the judge of all the earth of doing wrong (see Genesis 18:25). The Assyrians were more than willing to sinfully attack another nation to take control over their territory. God didn’t make them sin—they were more than willing. God used the sin of the Assyrians to accomplish His purposes without being guilty of sin Himself. The judgment of the Assyrians was just and showed the sovereignty of God over all the nations.

Nahum had delivered a message of judgment to the Assyrians, and it was a message that would be fulfilled rather quickly. Within several decades of

JUST

Nahum's prophecy, the Babylonians under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Assyrians in 626 BC. Around 100 years had passed between Assyria's overthrow of Israel and their overthrow at the hands of the Babylonians.



Jonah Meets Nahum

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

You may be feeling a little bit of *déjà vu* as we talk about a prophet delivering a message of judgment to Nineveh. A similar message was delivered by Jonah about 150 years before Nahum.

In your Student Guides, find the Jonah Meets Nahum activity. Take a few minutes to think about the connections between Jonah and Nahum in the four categories listed and we will discuss them in a few minutes. As the students work, help them identify any dates or other information they may be looking for.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's quickly review a few of the key similarities and differences.

- ? What difference do we see in the actions of Jonah and Nahum? *There is no indication that Nahum avoided delivering the message while Jonah fled from the Lord's call.*
- ? How did the messages of Jonah and Nahum compare? *Jonah simply delivered a message of coming judgment with no call to repentance. Nahum's message clearly proclaimed many attributes of God.*
- ? How did the response of Nineveh compare? *The whole city, including the king, repented at Jonah's preaching, but there was apparently no repentance at Nahum's message.*
- ? How does God's response compare? *God relented at the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah's day, but He delivered judgment at Nahum's preaching.*



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

It is amazing to think about the way all of history has been woven together with God behind the scenes directing the flow of all things. Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but within 100 years they had turned away from God and destroyed Israel. That should be a reminder to us of how quickly a nation can go from worshipping God to killing His children. And we should also be reminded of how much God hates those who fight against Him and worship false gods.

Today, our idols are not typically little statues that we bow down to, but we can serve money, success, family, sports, education, and many other things above God. We must constantly remind ourselves to look to Christ and call others around us to do the same. As we see the culture around us sliding deeper and deeper into the idolatry and immorality that God hates, we must know that the message of forgiveness and renewal in Christ is the only remedy. As God changes hearts and minds in response to the proclamation of the gospel, we can avoid the judgment that Nineveh received at the hands of the Babylonians and pray for the repentance that God worked under Jonah's preaching.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **As we think of the message of judgment, why is it important to identify the source of the message?** *The source of a message is what gives it authority. Because we know this message comes from God, we know the message has authority. We also know that the message will be consistent with God's character as revealed in Scripture.*
- ? **How does making connections between Jonah and Nahum help you understand God's plan of redemptive history?** *Discuss various answers.*
- ? **In what ways do you struggle with the "fairness" of events in history in light of the attributes and character of God?** *Discuss various answers, focusing on the character of God as the standard for righteousness, justice, and fairness, not what we would do as sinful humans. Let God be God and trust that the judge of all the earth will do what is right (Genesis 18:25).*
- ? **How could you use the connection between Jonah and Nahum as a way to disciple a new believer or someone who is having difficulty trusting God's Word?** *You could sit down with this person and show them some of the connections between these two books, pointing out that God coordinated all of these events to accomplish the plans that He had for each situation.*



MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 42:8 I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for using His prophets to record His Word.
- Praise God for His awesome power displayed in the unfolding of history.
- Ask God for wisdom to proclaim the gospel while He withholds His final judgment.