

+

THE LOOKOUT

AUGUST 2023

Unit: Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk)

Theme: Justice Will Come

Overview: People cry out for justice when justice has been violated. Perhaps that indicates we all have an innate sense of fairness, honesty, lawfulness, and integrity built into us by our Creator. We seem to know that no one gets away with behaving unjustly forever and that only a fair and impartial judge can judge correctly. We all want justice—until it is imposed upon us. Then we want to avoid justice at all costs. The pre-exilic, seventh-century prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk will help enlighten us that God will someday right all wrongs—even wrongs we have committed against him.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF AUGUST 6, 2023

LESSON AIM: **God has the power
and the will to correct
injustice, so take heart.**

UNIT: Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk)

THEME: Justice Will Come

LESSON TEXT: Nahum 1:1-15

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Psalm 89:5-18

POWER FOR JUSTICE

BY MARK SCOTT

Business, school, hospital, and government leaders all face a common challenge: enforcing the rules they have made. Making a rule and enforcing it are not the same. And it's hard to bring justice without the power to enforce rules. God does not have that problem. He can make the rules and has the power to enforce those rules.

Jonah prophesied around 760 BC for the people of Nineveh to repent. They repented. The city was spared from the justice of God for 100 years. But later Nahum came along (663–612 BC) and had to prophecy against Nineveh again. The people had become notorious for their brutality. We know less about Nahum than we do about Jonah. We know his prophecy concerned *Nineveh*, and that he had a *vision* concerning it, and that Nahum was from a village named Elkosh (v. 1). (Jerome the historian said Elkosh was in Galilee, but that is disputed.)

Great Patience/Great Power*Nahum 1:2-3a*

Patience is one of God's greatest qualities. He is *slow to anger* (literally "longwinged"). But no one should think his patience is inexhaustible. His patience is in place to help us repent (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). But God's patience is matched by his great *power* (a word similar to "patience" here; it means "the ability to endure"). The Hebrews writer reminded us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

God is *jealous* (in fact, Exodus 34:14 says Jealous is one of God's names). He is an *avenging* God—a concept mentioned three times in three verses. God is filled with wrath for his *foes* and enemies. He *will not leave the guilty unpunished* (i.e., he will not "clear" the guilty).

His Way/His Creation*Nahum 1:3b-6*

To illustrate God's power in justice, Nahum's vision consisted of aspects of creation (nature). The point is this: If God has his way with creation, then he also has the power to have his way with the people of Nineveh in justice. Those parts of creation are whirlwinds, storms and clouds, water, mountains, flowers, land, fire, and rocks.

God can pack a punch in a *whirlwind* (tempest) and *storm*. Metaphorically, clouds are the *dust of his feet*. He can dry up bodies of water (Exodus 14:21; Joshua 4:21-

24). *Bashan* and *Carmel* are mountains east and west of Galilee; in other words, his power knows no width. The power of God is so great that the *blossoms of Lebanon fade* (this would be to the north). Larger mountains and smaller hills *melt away* while land masses shake. The question is rightly asked, "*Who can withstand his indignation?*" His power is like fire, and *rocks are shattered before him*.

Wicked Plans/Fulfilled Vows*Nahum 1:8-12a, 14*

This section underlines the brutal wickedness of Nineveh. The people *plot* against the Lord—this is mentioned twice in this section. The people of Nineveh devise *wicked* (worthless) *plans*. They have many *allies*, but they will be destroyed. The Ninevites were idolatrous in worshipping *images* in the *temple* of their gods.

Therefore, God will fulfill his vow to bring them to justice with his power. God will make an end of them and *pursue his foes into the realm of darkness*. God will not have to act twice (he *will not come a second time*). They will become *entangled among thorns* (confused), become *drunk from their wine*, and *be consumed like dry stubble*. They will not be able to perpetuate their name (i.e., they would cease to exist; in fact, neither Xenophon the historian nor Alexander the Great knew where Nineveh was only two centuries after it fell). God would prepare Nineveh's grave because they were so *vile* (cursed).

Noble Character/Peaceful Promise*Nahum 1:7, 12b-13, 15*

The one who can enforce the rules, however, can also bring peace to people suffering under the oppressors. *The Lord is good*. In fact, he is a *refuge* (stronghold) for those who trust in him, which would be the surviving remnant of Judah. *He cares for those who trust in him*. God punished Judah, but now he would punish Nineveh for their treatment of God's people.

God challenged his people to look to the mountains for *good news* (another way of saying, look for the messengers coming back from the battle—cf. Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15). This news would break forth in peace. This would allow Judah to celebrate their faith in their typical festivals. God has the power to enforce his justice, but he also has the power to proclaim peace. ■

GOD'S HOLINESS AND JUSTICE ARE MAJOR ISSUES

BY DAVID FAUST

The last 12 books of the Old Testament are known as the Minor Prophets, which might imply these books are somehow inferior. Who wants to play baseball in the Minor Leagues if you could play in the Majors? What actor wants a minor role in a movie if he could be a star?

We call these books the Minor Prophets because of their small size, not because they are unimportant. All 12 books, when combined, equal less reading material than the book of Jeremiah. The ancient Hebrews lumped them all together as one large book, though they were written by 12 different authors.

Big Lessons from Little Books

The Minor Prophets are short in length but large in significance. Here are four benefits of reading these books:

1. *They help us appreciate the contributions of lesser-known servants.* Characters like Nahum, Zephaniah, and Haggai aren't well-known like Moses and Jeremiah, but in God's eyes no one is insignificant. Small contributions matter.
2. *They remind us to respect the gift of conciseness.* Don't you appreciate writers and speakers who express themselves effectively in a few words?
3. *They show us how to exercise the art of confrontation.* The Minor Prophets pull no punches. They speak the truth in love while boldly confronting sins like injustice, hypocrisy, complacency, materialism, idolatry, and corrupt leadership.
4. *They remind us to trust God with the future.* The Minor Prophets reveal that no matter how bad things become, there is still hope when we turn to the Lord.

God's Less Popular Attributes

Nahum's name means "compassion" or "comfort," but his prophecies were hard-hitting. He predicted

God would unleash his wrath on the mighty city of Nineveh. About 150 years earlier, Jonah's preaching led to a far-reaching revival there, but when Nineveh fell back into rebellion and cruelty, Nahum didn't mince words. He said, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. . . . The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1:2-3).

We hear a lot of talk about justice today, but seldom does anyone mention that justice is rooted in the nature of God. And we certainly don't hear much about God's wrath—his righteous indignation toward sin. In his book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer wrote, "To an age which has unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex, and self-will, the church mumbles on about God's kindness, but says virtually nothing about his judgment."

As a result, we have settled for a tame, lame, less-than-biblical concept of God. Many today view God as an easygoing Grandpa in the Sky—a jolly nonjudgmental Santa Claus. But it's not our job to tell God who he is. He tells us who he is. Scripture reveals that God doesn't ignore evil and dismissively wave off injustice.

There are things we don't enjoy thinking about, but we need to think about them anyway. Unpleasant truth is truth nonetheless. God is holy and he cannot tolerate sin. Thankfully, he is a gracious, loving Father who doesn't want to condemn the world (John 3:17), so he sent his Son to save us "from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Nahum caught a glimpse of this good news. He wrote, "Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" (Nahum 1:15). And there's nothing minor about that.

Personal Challenge: Have you ever praised God for his wrath (his righteous indignation toward evil and injustice)? Write or say a prayer and praise the Lord for being holy, just, and fair. Ask him to help you have righteous anger, not the sinful kind, and to show mercy toward others, leaving vengeance in the capable hands of God. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, with whom did you share your (and God's) bad news/good news story?
2. How do you feel about people who pull no punches (that is, speak directly to an issue)?

Ask two people to read aloud **Nahum 1:1-15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.
3. What emotions does this passage evoke in you? (*Do you sense different emotions in different sections?*)
4. What do you learn about God from this passage? (*What do you learn about his power? About his grace?*)
5. What do you learn about yourself?
6. If God has the kind of power and sovereignty described in this passage—and he does!—what does that imply for us humans? (*How then should we act toward God?*)
7. What encouragement do you take from this passage?
8. You are describing God's nature to someone who does not know him, does not know him well, or has some distorted image of him. How would you use the teachings from this passage to give them an accurate portrayal of God (including his great power and his patience, his justice and his mercy, his righteous condemnation and his grace)?
 - Who in your circles needs a more accurate (biblical) view of God (you don't need to use their name if you don't want to), and how will you approach a conversation with them?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. How can God help you this week to have righteous (not sinful) anger and show mercy toward others, leaving vengeance in the capable hands of the Lord?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Habakkuk 1:12-17; 2:1-20**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖