

Nahum 1

2010 March 1st for 30th

Nahum the Elkoshite prophesies against Nineveh. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, has conquered and punished Israel. Nahum gives hope.

“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. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry.”

Also, God takes care of those who trust him, “but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh.”

He will not be fooled. They will be consumed.

“From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the Lord and counsels wickedness.”

He will rescue Judah from the oppression of Nineveh and destroy them utterly, leaving them without descendants. Judah will celebrate festivals and fulfill their vows. “No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.”

Nahum 2

2010 March 2nd for 31st

Nahum’s decree against Nineveh is the poetry of conquest.

“An attacker advances against you, Nineveh.
Guard the fortress,
watch the road,
brace yourselves,
marshal all your strength!

“The Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.

“The shields of his soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of pine are brandished. The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning.

“He summons his picked troops, yet they stumble on their way.

They dash to the city wall; the protective shield is put in place.
The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses.

“It is decreed that the city be exiled and carried away.
Its slave girls moan like doves and beat upon their breasts.
Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away.
‘Stop! Stop!’ they cry, but no one turns back.
Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold!
The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures!
She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face
grows pale.

“Where now is the lions’ den, the place where they fed their young,
where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs, with nothing to fear?
The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate,
filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey.

“‘I am against you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.
‘I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave
you no prey on the earth.
The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.’”

Nahum 3:1 - 11

2010 March 2nd for April 1st

The ancient conquest, as related and predicted by Nahum, is ugly.

“Woe to the city of blood, full of lies,
full of plunder, never without victims!
The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels,
galloping horses and jolting chariots!
Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears!
Many casualties, piles of dead,
bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses --
all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries,
who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.

“‘I am against you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘I will lift your skirts over your face.
I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame.
I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle.
All who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Nineveh is in ruins -- who will mourn for her?’
Where can I find anyone to comfort you?’

“Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her?

The river was her defense, the waters her wall.
Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies.
Yet she was taken captive and went into exile.
Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street.
Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains.
You too will become drunk; you will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy.”

Nahum 3:12 - 19

2010 March 3rd for April 2nd

The derision of Assyria continues and concludes.

“All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit;
when they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater.
Look at your troops -- they are all women! [this is an insult, not a statement of fact]
The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed their bars.

“Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defenses!
Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork!
There the fire will devour you; the sword will cut you down and, like grasshoppers, consume you.

Multiply like grasshoppers, multiply like locusts!
You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more than the stars of the sky,
but like locusts they strip the land and then fly away.
Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day --
but when the sun appears they fly away, and no one knows where.

“O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest.
Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them.
Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal.
Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall,
for who has not felt your endless cruelty?”

So, God dispenses with cruel Assyria and everyone is glad.

This ends the word of Nahum.

Habakkuk 1:1 - 11

2010 March 3rd for April 5th

Like Job, Habakkuk has complaints addressed to God. Like Job, he receives an answer.

The first complaint reminds me of some of my own complaints, except the ones here are far more intense:

“How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?
Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”

God’s answer:

“Look at the nations and watch -- and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.
I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.
They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.
Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk.
Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar.
They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence.
Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.
They deride kings and scoff at rulers.
They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them.
Then they sweep past like the wind and go on -- guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”

So much for my suspicion that God is mainly concerned with individuals and not international politics.

God does not answer the “why” question. What he does seem to say is that he is raising up a punishment that will answer Habakkuk’s complaint and, interestingly, the punishers are not godly people, they are “guilty men, whose own strength is their god.”

Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:20

2010 March 4th for April 6th

Habakkuk has a second complaint.

“O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die.
O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.
Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.
Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.
The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net,
he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.

Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet,
for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.
Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?

“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”

God then gave a reply to this complaint as well.

“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.
For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false.
Thought it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright -- but the righteous will live by his faith --
indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest.
Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied,
he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

“Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying,

““Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long
must this go on?”
Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you
will become their victim.
Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you.
For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

“Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches
of ruin!
You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.
The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!
Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the
nations exhaust themselves for nothing?
For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the
sea.

“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.
You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed!
The cup from the Lord’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.

The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you.

For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies?
For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak.
Woe to him who says to wood, “Come to Life!” Or to lifeless stone, “Wake up!”
Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.
But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

That final line is available for use as a musical introit in churches. Some of the rest of the text, however, does not seem appropriate for our type of worship.

Habakkuk 3:1 - 10

2010 March 4th for April 7th

“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. [Shigionoth appears to be a musical term.]

“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.
Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.

“God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.
His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.
Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.
He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble.
The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal.
I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

“Were you angry with the rivers, O Lord? Was your wrath against the streams?
Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots?
You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows.
You split the earth with rivers; the mountains saw you and writhed.
Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.”

Habakkuk 3:11 - 19

2010 March 6th for April 8th

The prayer-hymn of Habakkuk concludes.

“Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the flint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear.
In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.
You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one.
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot.

With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us,
gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.
You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.

“I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.
Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to
go on the heights.

“For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.”

Indeed!

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