

# Explore: God is

February 11, 2015

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 1 focuses on Nahum 1:1-8.*

## **Introduction to Nahum**

The book of Nahum, just three chapters in length, carries a timely and thundering message. Little, however, is known of Nahum the prophet. His name means something akin to “comforted.” The themes in his writings appear to be connected loosely with the ministry or message of Jeremiah. For instance, Nahum showed great concern for God’s justice for the Jews and contemporary world events, namely the rise of the Babylonian Empire. Accordingly, we can date Nahum’s book near the end of the Assyrian Empire and the fall of Judah (663-600 B.C.).

Nahum’s writing reflects a sense of the dramatic. Some scholars conclude Nahum wrote with a kind of imprecatory style. Imprecatory verses often contain vengeful or violent language in defense of God’s holiness and wrath. Perhaps Nahum wrote in a way that reflected his times, as well as the general feeling toward the inhumane arch-enemy, Assyria. Theologically speaking, Nahum continued to link the sovereignty and wrath of God with the downfall of nations, including Judah. Nahum’s theology fits particularly well alongside Micah and Habakkuk. For further information, please refer to the introduction of the Bible book included in the front section of the resources.

## **God is ... (Nahum 1:1-8)**

Chapter 1 begins with a superscription, or a heading that contextualizes the passage for us. Consequently, we learn Nahum’s oracle specifically concerns the city of Ninevah and generally refers to the Assyrian Empire. Ninevah served as the capitol of Assyria for nearly 100 years, from 704 B.C.

to 612 B.C. The city's name ought to sound rather familiar to Bible readers who may readily identify her with the prophet Jonah. Ninevah's earlier reforms and repentant attitude apparently vanished.

Nahum's oracle immediately follows the superscription. The oracle begins with a type of poem or hymn some scholars refer to as a "theophany" (Nahum 1:2-8). A theophany may be defined as a report concerning the appearance or attributes of God. Most theophanies have to do with God's judgment in the Old Testament. Nahum's poem also appears to be an acrostic in the Hebrew language and illustrates God's direct involvement and intervention in Nahum's contemporary context. The oracle's introductory poem details attributes of God of particular importance to us. We will consider three such attributes in this lesson.

### **The jealousy of God (vv. 2-3)**

Much has been made of God's jealousy in contemporary American culture. Oprah Winfrey even made headlines in 2008 when she asserted her disconnect with orthodox Christianity began when she heard a minister claim, "God is a jealous God." Winfrey's remarks may point to a more generalized uneasiness or failure among many people to comprehend this attribute of God.

Nahum's concept of the jealous Yahweh has a thoroughly comprehensive biblical background (see especially Exodus 34:6-7). In other words, Nahum does not mean to say God acts in a willy-nilly, unloving or petty way toward those whom he somehow randomly chooses to abolish. It is to say, however, God shows intense interest in the furtherance of evenhanded justice in his creation. Nahum even affirmed God's zealousness by remarking, "The Lord is slow to anger and of great might." The Lord, therefore, will react in accordance to his nature against the atrocities of the unjust Assyrians who have provoked God time and time again.

### **The sovereignty of God (vv. 3-6)**

Nahum brought the language of theophany to the fore in these verses as a way of communicating God's ultimate command or charge over all creation. For example, Nahum describes God's wrath as a whirlwind, and God incites fear and awe from dried-up rivers and quaking mountains. In Nahum's spiritual vision, the earth totters on its axis before the Creator. Assyria, therefore, is no match for Yahweh and will be dealt a death blow.

Similar language of theophany is utilized in the Scripture (Psalm 46; Isaiah 54). The reaction of creation to Jesus' death may provide a unique connection for us to Nahum's thought. Consider Matthew's depiction of our Lord's crucifixion: "At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life" (Matthew 27:51-52). Not even death could endure the power of God's judgment on sin. The cosmos itself must respond in trembling due to the redemptive sovereignty of Yahweh. Nahum rightly asked: "Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger?" God is in charge.

### **The goodness of God (vv. 7-8)**

Nahum's mood suddenly shifts from nearly apocalyptic language to words of comfort and encouragement. The abrupt shift may indicate the juxtaposition between the eventual ends of God's adversaries as opposed to the ends of faithful believers who fear the Lord. In fact, the Lord's goodness and patience may further indicate how consistently repugnant the evil-doing of the Assyrians must have been in God's sight. Yet faithful and repentant ones who revere the Lord shall find a refuge, or safe place, from the whirlwind of such wrath. God does indeed provide salvation.