



**Key Passage: Nahum 1:7-8; Habakkuk 3:19**

**Key Thought: The Lord is Sovereign over all, and he is my only refuge in a world of unchecked evil.<sup>1</sup>**

Read Obadiah 10 & Micah 7:18. Two truths that hold together.

### **The Gospel in Nahum:**

1. There was no more dreaded nation in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. When Jonah went to the capital city of Nineveh, he pridefully announced that God would bring judgment to obliterate this mean, wicked, heartless, pagan nation. But the most remarkable—the most unusual thing happens. In two phases. First, this wicked king repents! He doesn't know God's name, but he and the entire nation call upon the name of the Lord. Second, God sees people made in his own image—calling out to him, and he saves the nation from calamity! And Jonah, whose name means "Dove," throws a wicked temper tantrum upset that God is by his very nature merciful and kind, slow to anger, forgiving left and right, and abounding in lovingkindness.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson summarizes or quotes Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, pp. 125-28, 133-36. These notes are compiled from 4 principal sources. In addition to Michael Williams book, notes are also derived from Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

2. But Nineveh's repentance was short-lived. Just one or two generations later, Assyria conquers the northern kingdom of Israel, taking them into captivity. They don't stop their military campaign, extending the borders of Assyrian power all the way to Egypt. Less than a century after Jonah, the lonely nation of Judah sat scared and vulnerable facing the menacing force of Assyria. And this time, God declares through his prophet Nahum that Nineveh will not survive when Jehovah comes down from his mountain and pour out his wrath like fire (Nahum 1:6; 2:13; 3:5).

2. It might seem strange that God would deliver this message through a prophet whose name means "comfort." (of course, Jonah meant 'dove'). But Nahum's message really is a message of comfort. If you have ever been the victim of a terrible crime, you will know that justice can bring comfort. If you are in the midst of a threatening storm, having someone remove the storm brings comfort.

3. Nahum begins by declaring God is a God who is slow to anger, and a refuge for all who trust him (1:3, 7). And when he shows up in judgment against the enemies of God's people, that brings peace and comfort to his own (1:15).

4. We find the same language in the New Testament about the end of all things. Paul says God will return with flaming fire taking vengeance on those outside of Christ, but he says this return in vengeance for them produces "rest with us" (2 Thess 1:6-7). There is rest for us, not because we deserve escape, but because God protects his own, and we are in him. Paul told the Thessalonians "you used to worship idols; but you turned from them to the living God, to wait for his Son from heaven—Jesus Christ who saves us from the coming wrath of God" (1 Thess 1:9-10)

5. There is a hopeful message in this. When your enemy parades themselves as a lion devouring its prey (Nahum 2:11-12), it is helpful to know the kings of beasts is no match for the creator of all life.

6. The result? You can trust the Lord your God. He is your refuge. He was willing to relent and save even a wicked nation if they were willing to seek peace and show a change of heart. But now that they are bent on destroying those whom God has promised to protect, you can trust that God is your citadel, your fortress, your refuge.

### **The Gospel in Habakkuk:**

1. By the time of Habakkuk, Nahum's prophecy had been fulfilled. God raised up another nation—Babylon—to destroy Assyria and to take their place as the pre-eminent world power. Assyria got what was coming to them.

2. But Habakkuk sees the sins all around, without and within. He cries out to God reflecting the prayer of all of God's people: how long will you put up with all this sin? There is violence and injustice among your people, and this is not good. What will people think of God? Can you fix this?

3. Sure, says God. I'll call on Babylon to come and conquer my people.

4. Wait, says Habakkuk. When I said your people have sins, I was pointing out you have a problem on your hands. But if you raise up an even more corrupt nation than this one to judge and defeat your people, then you will have two problems on your hands! How can that be fair? How can it be just? How can it be good for your reputation? How is that keeping your promise to your people? Just...how can it be??

5. Wait, says God. You don't see the end of the story. You don't see all the chess moves. You don't see the whole board. I'll let you in on just a little bit of it.

(a) I am going to let Babylon get what's coming to them eventually as well.

(b) I'm not giving up on my people; I'm teaching them a lesson; it will be good for them; I know what I'm doing.

(c) Finally: I'm God. I'm in my holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silence before me.

6. In Chapter 3, Habakkuk writes out a prayer. In this prayer, he reflects on how God has a long history of knowing what He is doing. He has never let his people down.

7. Final conclusion: comfort comes not from our own understanding. Comfort doesn't come when all the people do all the right things. Comfort isn't found when everything turns out just the way I think they should. Comfort and security are found only in God—who never fails, never disappoints. Never does wrong.

What do we do with Nahum and Habakkuk? When we see evil all around us, will he destroy the perpetrators like he did to Nineveh under Nahum? He might. Or will he show mercy like he did to Nineveh under Jonah? He might. When we see trouble within our own ranks, temptation full blown, will God provide cleansing, healing, and hope like he does so many times in history? He might. Or will he allow us to experience a period of judgment, so that by facing up to the consequences of our actions, we might learn a lesson, or our children and our children's children might go a different way? He might. But whatever He does, it will always be because the Lord loves all people. He promises to ensure that what is best will work its way out, for all things work together for good for those who love God. Comfort and security cannot be found in our prideful arrogance (Nahum tells Nineveh that; and God tells Jonah that). Comfort and security cannot be found in our list of good deeds, or in resting in the name or title we wear (God tells Habakkuk that). Comfort and security come in knowing that God is in His Holy Temple.

Where is the gospel in this? I see it bursting out of every verse! God is at work—and whatever he does is part of a larger story of making things better! He gives glimpses of salvation (but people still die; they are only signposts). He gives glimpses of destruction and judgment (but not for all generations; and even if it ends your life, this life is not the end of your story). He works compassion and judgment—as part of a larger story. A story that culminates in Jesus Christ. A story that finds ultimate fulfillment in the cross of Jesus Christ.