

L E S S O N 4

For December 26 • Page 26

Justice for God's Beloved People

Sandra rationalized that she needed the money. Originally, she thought she would only do it one time. She would take \$500 from the community action agency to help her pay some overdue bills. As the agency's financial director, she figured she could "cook the books." But the first time led to another time, and then another time after that. By the end of the year, it had become a monthly habit.

For almost three years she had embezzled funds amounting to almost \$20,000 when the agency's executive director started discovering discrepancies in budgetary expenditures. He asked Sandra about it, but her explanation sufficiently deflected the blame from falling upon herself. So the executive director brought up his questions about the discrepancies to the agency's board of directors. After an hour's discussion, some of the board members accused the executive director of misappropriating the funds and voted to fire him.

Sandra watched intently the next morning as three board members accompanied the executive director into the agency office. Under their watchful eye, she quietly and sadly cleared out his desk. Sandra felt a strange sense of relief as she saw the executive director leave. She had "dodged the bullet." Maybe now is the time to quit stealing, she thought for a moment. But she didn't. A year and a half later, embezzlement charges were brought against her. Her attorney urged her to plead guilty given the insurmountable evidence against her. And now Sandra is serving a sentence in a state prison.

- 1.** *How do you respond when you experience or see injustice?*
- 2.** *Why is justice needed for all people?*
- 3.** *Do you believe that God cares about the injustice in the world? Explain your answer.*

LESSON FOCUS: God is slow to anger, but justly punishes.

God's Slow but Sure Judgment

Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, KJV

1 The burden of Nineveh.
The book of the vision of
Nahum the Elkoshite.

2 God is jealous, and the
LORD revengeth; the LORD
revengeth, and is furious; the
LORD will take vengeance on
his adversaries, and he reserveth
wrath for his enemies.

3 The LORD is slow to anger,
and great in power, and will
not at all acquit the wicked:
the LORD hath his way in the
whirlwind and in the storm,
and the clouds are the dust of
his feet.

6 Who can stand before his
indignation? and who can
abide in the fierceness of his
anger? his fury is poured out
like fire, and the rocks are
thrown down by him.

7 The LORD is good, a strong
hold in the day of trouble;
and he knoweth them that
trust in him.

8 But with an overrunning
flood he will make an utter
end of the place thereof, and
darkness shall pursue his
enemies.

Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, NIV

¹A prophecy concerning Nineveh.
The book of the vision of Nahum the
Elkoshite.

²The LORD is a jealous and avenging
God;
the LORD takes vengeance and is
filled with wrath.

The LORD takes vengeance on his foes
and vents his wrath against his
enemies.

³The LORD is slow to anger but 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.

⁶Who can withstand his indignation?
Who can endure his fierce anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire;
the rocks are shattered before him.

⁷The LORD is good,
a refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him,
⁸but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh;
he will pursue his foes into the realm
of darkness.

As the KJV puts verse 1, God not only gave the prophet Nahum a vision concerning Nineveh but a “burden”—it would be a difficult message to deliver. But unlike Jonah more than a century earlier, Nahum appeared ready to deliver his

message from the start to Nineveh about its destruction.

The prophet reminded Nineveh that God is “a jealous and avenging God . . . [who] takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies” (vs. 2). By Nahum’s time, the northern kingdom of Israel had been under Assyrian rule for at least 60 years. In addition to oppressing God’s people, the Assyrians had systematically blended idolatry into Jewish culture, deporting Israelites to Assyria and importing other conquered people into Israel (2 Kings 17:24-41). The Lord would not stand for this, and He would judge.

At the same time, Nahum also reminded Nineveh that the Lord is not a capricious god like theirs: “The LORD is slow to anger but great in power.” His judgment is both fair and certain, and His power is already evident in His creation: “His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet” (vs. 3). Again Nahum pointed to God’s power in nature in verse 6: “His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.” No one—and no nation, no matter how powerful—will withstand God’s indignation and fierce anger.

And yet, for Israel, God’s judgment does not simply mean punishment but justice; it is an indication not only of God’s anger but even more so of God’s love for His people: “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (vs. 7). Even in the midst of captivity, God cares for those who trust Him; even now they can find their refuge in Him. However, it would be different for those who oppose Him: “with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness” (vs. 8). God’s goodness can not be separated from His judgment—it is required to make all things good.

4. *How did Nahum describe God’s judgment to Nineveh?*

5. *How did Nahum describe God Himself to Nineveh?*

6. *On the other hand, how was Israel to view God’s judgment?*

The Deliverance of Judah

Nahum 1:12-13, 15, KJV

12 Thus saith the LORD;
Though they be quiet, and
likewise many, yet thus shall
they be cut down, when he
shall pass through. Though
I have afflicted thee, I will
afflict thee no more.

13 For now will I break his
yoke from off thee, and will
burst thy bonds in sunder.

15 Behold upon the moun-
tains the feet of him that
bringeth good tidings, that
publisheth peace! O Judah,
keep thy solemn feasts,
perform thy vows: for the
wicked shall no more pass
through thee; he is utterly cut
off.

Nahum 1:12-13, 15, NIV

¹²This is what the LORD says:

“Although they have allies and are
numerous,
they will be destroyed and pass
away.

Although I have afflicted you, Judah,
I will afflict you no more.

¹³Now I will break their yoke from
your neck
and tear your shackles away.

¹⁵“Look, there on the mountains,
the feet of one who brings good
news,
who proclaims peace!

Celebrate your festivals, Judah,
and fulfill your vows.

No more will the wicked invade you;
they will be completely destroyed.”

God now used Nahum to address the southern kingdom of Judah, which had already withstood many assaults by the Assyrians in the decades after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel—the most famous of them being Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem, and God’s miraculous deliverance, during the reign of King Hezekiah around 700 B.C. (2 Kings 18:13–19:37). Although Judah’s kings had not always been faithful to the Lord, many had; the final decline of Judah and its fall to the Babylonians was still decades away.

Here, God called the nation of Judah to restore their hope in Him. Although Assyria had many powerful allies, “they will be destroyed and pass away” (vs. 12). Likewise, while Judah had been disciplined by God on many occasions—with the Assyrians often being that instrument of discipline in recent years—they could look forward to a day when the Assyrians would no longer be a source of oppression: “I will break their

yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away” (vs. 13).

In verse 15, Nahum looked even past Judah’s current affliction and imminent deliverance, and to a future where God’s people would worship faithfully and joyfully: “Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!” This pronouncement is very similar to Isaiah 52:7 (and echoed in Romans 10:15), where it was used to describe the coming Messiah and King, Jesus. Here, several decades after Isaiah, Nahum used this phrase to describe the good news of God’s liberation of Judah from her enemies, particularly Assyria. There would not only be deliverance, but peace, for God’s beloved people.

At that time, God’s people would respond fully to His goodness: “Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfill your vows” (vs. 15). Because they would no longer be besieged by the Assyrians, Judah could turn their focus from war and self-preservation, and return to joyful faithfulness to God’s ways. Once more, God declared, “No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed” (vs. 15). The people of Judah would no longer be distracted from serving God wholeheartedly, for their enemies would be defeated and destroyed.



This relief of Assyrian soldiers attacking a rival city mirrors what later happened to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, as Nahum predicted.

Photo: © Mike Peel/British Museum.

7. Who did Nahum address in this passage? What was their current situation?

8. What did God call these people to do, through Nahum?

9. What did Nahum describe in verse 15, and what were the people to do in response?

Justice Prevails

Anita and her two friends developed a plan to distract the local store owner's attention away from the back of the store. Then, one of them would quickly put make-up kits inside her backpack. They continued doing this throughout the school year. Right before the last day of school, they had planned to steal double the make-up kits. Unknown to them, the store owner had installed a hidden camera when his inventory kept coming up short. On that last day of school, the store owner arranged for the police to come and watch the video from the hidden camera as the girls entered the store. Just as Anita and her friends were about to leave the store with the stolen make-up kits, the police came out and checked their backpacks. In order for justice to prevail, the girls had to work for the store owner throughout the summer without pay to repay for all the make-up kits they had stolen.

Brother Smith struggles with his secret addiction to pornography. He often justifies his actions by telling himself his wife cannot meet all his "needs." Brother Jones secretly has relationships with the young single women in the church. He justifies his actions by buying the women expensive jewelry and paying their school tuition. Sister Harris starts gossip in the church that leads to many broken homes. She says she is just informing the other women how to pray for their sisters in need. All three have forgotten the Scriptures that say, "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known" (Luke 12:2, KJV).

Whether through parents, law enforcement, or God Himself, justice prevails for God's children. Justice may not be immediate or even here on earth, but our sovereign and just God does bring forth justice.

10. *What role do authority figures have in providing justice in our world?*

11. *Why is it important to believe in a just God?*

12. *How have you seen God bring justice in your life?*

God Loves Justice

Innocent people killed, property being destroyed, the unrighteous prevailing over the righteous and the list continues to move the scale toward injustice over justice. As Christians, we must turn to God's Word and seek His perspective on all that is happening in our world. Psalm 37:28 reminds us, "For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones....The offspring of the wicked will perish."

► *Reflect on a situation of injustice in your life or the life of a family member or friend. Briefly, write a prayer to God asking Him to bring forth justice in this situation. Then take a few minutes and pray this prayer silently and thank God that He will answer this prayer. Do you trust God to bring forth justice in His way and time?*

KEY VERSE

For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.
—Nahum 1:2, KJV

The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.
—Nahum 1:2, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of December 27 through January 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 7:54-60—Stephen Prays for Mercy for His Persecutors.
- Tue.** Matthew 2:1-8, 16-18—Herod's Vengeance.
- Wed.** Revelation 6:9-17—Martyrs Long for Justice.
- Thu.** Psalm 94:1-10—Shine Forth, God of Vengeance!
- Fri.** Psalm 94:11-23—God's Just Acts.
- Sat.** 1 John 3:4-13—Love One Another.
- Sun.** Genesis 4:1-15—Abel's Blood Cries Out for Vengeance.