

# **Jonah and Nahum: God's View of Us & Them**

**A Seven Week Study**

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# Introduction:

The Bible records and describes God's creation of, hope for, relationship with, and commitment to the people. In the Old Testament, God shares great intimacy early on, allowing people to see and hear regularly from their Creator. Soon though, the relationship is strained as people try to find their own path toward significance. It gets even worse as people begin to take their own feelings of frustration and inadequacy out on people around them. God, however, created all creatures to be reconciled to their maker, so God told Abraham, "I will be your God and you will be my people. I will protect and love and guide you. When other people see our relationship, they will understand more about who I am, and they will come to know me."

God's relationship with Israel was fabulous and terrible, mostly because people are the worst at being faithful. We are also pretty bad at humbling ourselves and trusting others. God proved faithful over and over to the Israelites, but they were easily distracted and very prone to peer pressure. Although God always rejected idolatry as a healthy path for people, God did give Israel a King to hear from. These Kings, their people, were also fabulous and terrible, so God gave them special prophets who would serve the King by being a physical mouthpiece and reminder that Israel thrives when they are guided directly by God.

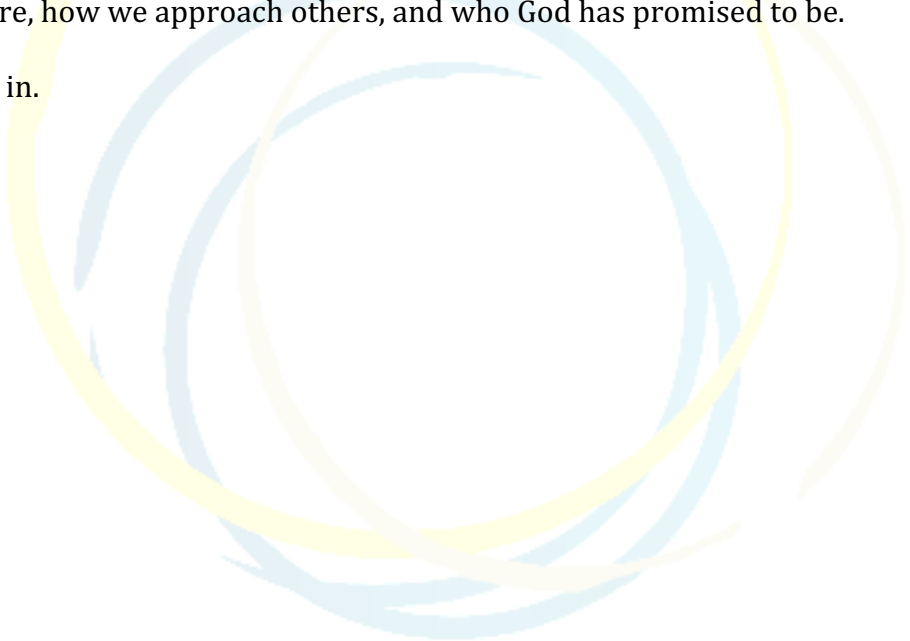
There were a few major prophets in scripture, and the Bible records the work of 12 minor prophets. Jonah was the 5<sup>th</sup> of these (serving between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C), and Nahum served in in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Both prophets deal with God's relationship with Ninevah. Because God loved Israel, and because Israel had proven incapable of actually faithfully trusting God with their hopes and attempts at wholeness, God allowed an environment where Israel became desperate, and very aware of their own need. As we have all learned, desperation is often the best way to inspire devotion to God (and is therefore the best place to operate from if you want to be whole!). God used the Assyrian Empire to accomplish this. They dominated the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and were known as fierce, unethical, brutal warriors and leaders. Ninevah was their capital (so guess how Israelis felt about Ninevah?!).

Jonah had prophesied (2 Kings 14) during Jeroboam II's reign. Jeroboam II's grandfather, Jehoahaz had been full of sin, so God let the Arameans oppress them. They repented, and God spared them. His father had expanded and strengthened Israel, and by the time of Jeroboam II, the Assyrian Empire was weakened and not much of a threat to Israel. Nevertheless, Ninevah was still the capital of the Empire that had damaged and oppressed Jonah's people, the Israelites, for decades. Most scholars think Jonah came home from Ninevah and told his story in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The author of the book of Jonah, however, is unknown, and was written down at some point in the next 500 years.

Nahum was written by Nahum of Elkosh in the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The prophecy of Nahum takes place about 100 years after the events of Jonah's life, and is centered around a prophecy of God's destruction of Ninevah and protection of Israel. Ninevah repented after Jonah came and shared the word of the Lord with them, but by 745 B.C., they had forgotten God. They strengthened in wealth and scope and were at the height of their power when Nahum wrote these words. His writing is considered both prophecy and war poetry, as his words taunt the powerful empire, promising no redemption but only coming destruction.

God used the people of Ninevah and the Assyrian Empire to bring Israel and Judah to repentance. In the book of Jonah, we see God giving Jonah a hard command, space to make the right choice, a second chance, a hard look at his own entitlement, and a chance to develop Godly compassion for people he loathed. In the book of Nahum, we see God becoming a stronghold and a refuge, big enough to handle our problems, and so committed to justice that God took down a violent and greedy powerhouse of an Empire. It is easy to read Jonah, evidenced by the fact that it is studied and told often. Read together with Nahum though, there is much to learn and discover about who we are, how we approach others, and who God has promised to be.

Let's dive in.



## Week One

Jonah, a prophet of the Lord to Jeroboam II, was a man familiar with God's word and with God's ways. He had walked with the Lord for a long time and had seen his people, the Israelites, prosper even though they were part of the mostly violent and terrible Assyrian Empire. Jonah knew God to be relationally driven, committed for the long haul as He patiently cared for all people.

### **Day One: Jonah 1:1-3**

Jonah does the complete opposite of what God wants him to do. He is not just fleeing God, he is also fleeing God's plans for his own wholeness AND the people he is meant to visit.

- Why do you think God wanted Jonah to go to Ninevah? Think about this question throughout our study of Jonah.
- Have you ever felt prompted by God to say something hard to someone important? Do you usually go "straight to Ninevah" in those moments or do you "flee to Tarshish?"

### **Day Two: Jonah 1:1-6**

These poor sailors were desperate and afraid, while Jonah seems fine but withdrawn.

- In times of extreme stress or fear we often instinctively de-clutter, or simplify, our lives/souls/spaces as we cry out to God for help. When is the last time you felt desperate for God to comfort or intervene for you? Revisit that memory, and thank God that He "gave a thought to you."

### **Day Three: Jonah 1:1-6**

- In reading that God specifically called Jonah to go “call out against” Ninevah, that Jonah ran away, and that God then sent a storm to make a lot of people freak out, what do you know about who God is and how he acts? How does this story so far agree with the God you know and pray to?
  
- How does this story confuse or muddle the God you know and pray to?

Offer both of these responses to God, and acknowledge you are open to the mysteries of God as you learn about different parts of who God is.

### **Day Four: Jonah 1: 7-10**

These men react to Jonah by asking him for his story, even as they also yelled at him for endangering them.

- In your relationships are you more likely to respond to bad situations by asking for another’s story or perspective, or by blaming them for making your life harder?

Bring this answer to the Lord: Notice it, confess it, and think about your answer and specific relationships with God.

### **Day Five: Jonah 1:11-16**

I freaking love these men, pagans as they are! Can you acknowledge that God’s truth and goodness can rest on anyone, and that we should at times sit at the feet of anyone who can teach us how to live well with others?

- What do you learn in seeing their commitment to Jonah’s safety? How do you need to be more like them?
  
- Jonah totally owns his own junk too! Are you good at confessing the part you play in causing harm to others, or do you get defensive? Think about this with God.

## Week Two

Jonah contemplates his journey with the Lord, a worthy and worthwhile task for all of us!

### **Day One: Jonah 1:1-17**

- When you review Jonah 1, do you think Jonah's walk with the Lord is primarily about himself? Who has already been impacted by Jonah and his relationship with God?
- Think about your own life and sphere. Who is most affected by your relationship with God right now?

### **Day Two: Jonah 1:17-2:3**

Jonah prays in the past tense. Look closely at his language and what it reveals about his knowledge of God.

- What does it tell you about Jonah's faith that his prayer suggests God answered him already? Do you have that kind of perspective?
- Jonah says he called out to the Lord because he was distressed, but he also says God cast him into the sea, and that God's waves passed over him. Do you allow yourself to pray to God that way? Do you credit God only with good but awkwardly ignore the bad/hard events in your life? What can Jonah teach you here?

### **Day Three: Jonah 2:4-6**

Jonah's prayer contains praise and lament. Most of us have been taught to praise God, but many of our churches overlook the beautiful foundation lament also lays for a life being built on God. Sometimes an honest lament from the heart can be incredibly life-giving, and a true act of worship.

- Does this part of the prayer see faithful or faithless to you? What does it accomplish?

- Do you lament in your life? Do you bitch to friends, whine with your sister, or truly lament to God?

#### **Day Four: Jonah 2:6b-10**

Think about what Jonah remembers as he is going through this hard few days, and think about how you approach difficulty.

- What does Jonah remember about God? Does his current situation have anything to do with intimacy with God?
- Are you likely to feel abandoned by God or very close to the Lord when you are challenged or afraid?

#### **Day Five: Jonah 1:17-2:10**

Reflect on Jonah's journey so far.

- How does your perspective of your own story change when you see what God accomplished in Jonah through the storm and the whale? How can this help you view hard things differently?
- The NIV translation says of Jonah 2:8, "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." To what worthless idol was Jonah clinging? What did he almost forfeit?
- What about you? To what are you clinging? Is it causing you to forfeit a grace God is offering? Sit with this verse and ask God to use it to reorient your life. (be careful...it jacked me up and changed me forever!)

## Week Three

Jonah, reoriented to trusting God, clinging to grace, and obeying God with one step at a time, finally goes to Ninevah, the capital of the brutal Empire that has captured and killed his people for his lifetime. Un-pleasant.

### **Day One: Jonah 3:1-2**

God calls Jonah to the same place, to the same thing, to the same people, even after Jonah's big revelation. Sometimes we run and run only to come back to the same truth. God did not change the hard road ahead for Jonah just because he had a big breakthrough.

- Do you ever want God to give you a big, different assignment after you have learned something that feels huge to you?
- Do you ever find yourself thinking that following Christ is really complicated and confusing? How does Jonah's straightforward assignment sit with you? Are you jealous of the clarity, do you wish God mentioned what the outcome will be, or do you wish God's plans for Jonah did not have to involve a whole other group of mean people?

### **Day Two: Jonah 3:1-3**

The task is hard! Jonah has been called to give bad news to bad people, who have a mean and violent reputation! There is only one of him in a big, giant city!

- How do you think Jonah found the courage to walk in a whole day and then obey God and speak up? (see Jonah 1 & 2)
- Do you have trouble obeying when the odds seem impossible, or when you can't foresee what good will come from it? Think about this with the Lord. What motivates you to obey, and when do you have a harder time?



### **Day Three: Jonah 3:1-4**

- How does this method of evangelism sit with you? Is it annoying or weird or refreshingly honest? Do you ever use it?
  
- Does this make you think maybe we don't understand how God works? How does it impact the way you want to share Christ? How do you share God?

### **Day Four: Jonah 3:4-5**

The Ninevites react in shocking ways! What are the odds?? God can do anything, for anyone, through anyone!

- Spend some time thinking about the "lost causes" in your own life. Can v. 5 renew your hope for them? Can you say, like the Roman soldier, "Christ I believe, help my unbelief?" In whose life do you want God to intervene?

### **Day Five: Jonah 3:6-10**

The powerful, brutal, evil king was convicted by God and radically changed. Amazing! Then he used his power to force his kingdom to consider God. There might be softness in people you don't suspect, and there might be hope when you see none. The king, like the sailors, might have reacted like he did because he had seen the power of God through other Jews.

- What do your "enemies" (strangers, neighbors, others) suspect about God because of their interaction with you? Can you ask God to make you mindful of this?

## Week Four

As the story comes to an end, it appears that God has accomplished his purpose (saving the now reconciled Ninevites, teaching Jonah to remember God is trustworthy and gives second chances, and demonstrating for Jonah and others that his relationship with God does not exist in a vacuum, but that his obedience can have a big impact on the people around him). However, God is not done. In this last chapter he shows us all how hard it really is to care about people we don't really know or like....and how doing exactly that is the way of Christ. Jonah shows his true colors here even as God does the same.

### **Day One: Jonah 4:1-2**

Jonah is ticked off.

- Why is he so mad? Are you surprised by his reasoning?
- Can you relate to those feelings in any relationships? Does God's mercy ever tick you off?

### **Day Two: Jonah 4:1-3**

Think about your answers from yesterday. Take some time to read again and realize who God is.

- What is God like in the way he moves toward others (as in, not you)? How does that make you feel?
- Think with God about how you extend grace to others. This will be most effective if you think about individuals AND large people groups ☺ If necessary, confess to God the times that you actually don't want God to be so steadfast and loving.

### **Day Three: Jonah 4:4**

Wow!

- Does he?
  
- Do you even nurture anger at God or others? Does it help? Confess it and make the determination that you will stop!

### **Day Four: Jonah 4:5-10**

God provides even when Jonah is sassy and rude. More than we deserve 😊

- What does it say about God that he would give this to Jonah? Does he deserve it?
  
- Think about the way you think about what you “deserve”, or what your friends deserve. Are you more like Jonah than you think?

### **Day Five: Jonah 4:1-11**

Review this chapter. Remember all that Jonah has learned, and recognize that he so easily nursed old wounds and fell into old patterns. Just like us. At the core, God approaches people very differently than Jonah does (or than we do).

- What did Jonah believe about the world (and God, and Ninevites) to make him react like he did? Do you lose focus, like Jonah, sometimes, by being focused on pity for yourself or grudge-holding toward others (“forfeiting the grace that could be yours” 2:8?)
  
- Based on the book of Jonah, what does God think about the world and who deserves his pity? Do you think he did this for Jonah, the sailors, the Ninevites...or is there mystery?

## Week Five

This is a prophetic statement about who God has been, is and will be throughout history. We have skipped about a century ahead from where we left Jonah. The Ninevites, although they repented for a bit, have abandoned God, maintained their brutal ways, and increased in power and wealth, becoming self-obsessed world powers. These were troubled times, and God's ways were mysterious. Yet God is always working to help people see that their only hope is in God.

### **Day One: Nahum 1:1-3**

Woah. These are very hard words.

- How does this strike you? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why?
- What kind of life would you have lived to make *this God* comforting to you?
- Can you spend some time confessing to God that you have created Him in your image and that you avoid the unpleasant parts?

### **Day Two: Nahum 1:1-5**

If you look beyond the parts that make you nervous, this is a praise of sorts.

- Can you rewrite this as a praise of God? What is Nahum getting at?

### **Day Three: Nahum 1:1-7**

Read the first 5 verses, feel your feelings. Pause. Be overwhelmed.

Now read verse 6-7. Think about how you approach God.

- Is your approach to God flippant or like its no big deal? Do you tremble and shake? If these verses convict you in this then confess that to God and ask God to show you where you're off base.

- This section shows 2 sides of God. What is he to “those who take refuge in him” (v 7)? Is this comforting to you?
- Even if you feel safe (not in need of a refuge), what can you learn about God being a “stronghold” here?

#### **Day Four: Nahum 1:8-13**

Nahum turns his prophecy to Ninevah, as God promises to completely wipe out anyone who lives against him.

- Do these verses comfort you that God absolutely destroys people who stand against him?
- How do you react to the idea that God comes after those who have acted “as worthless counselors” or who “are at full strength now” (v 12)? Is that scary? Try to name your response: Are you just uncomfortable? Convicted and repenting? Praising God for kicking ass and protecting you?

#### **Day Five: Nahum 1:12-15**

God is talking to 2 different “yous” here. In v12, 13 & 15, he is talking about freeing Israel from the punishing oppression they suffered un Assyria and Ninevah. Remember Israel suffered—a lot—under Ninevah as God brought them back to himself. In v14, he is talking to Ninevah about the fact that God will end their power.

- Do you feel like you need rescuing from any hard or oppressive force? Name it.
- Spend some time thinking about, naming, and praying God would end the perpetuation of evil that you see in your world. In you family, neighborhood, church or society, what do you pray he will end?

## Week Six

Nahum describes exactly how God will destroy Ninevah and restore Israel.

### **Day One: Nahum 2:1-2**

God links destroying Ninevah with restoring Israel. One leads to the other. A lot of us want to be restored, but we do not want to believe in a God who destroys. God is committed to ending evil, and defending life.

- Are you comfortable naming evil when you see it in society or in your life? Naming evil things or instincts that God needs to “scatter” (v1) is different than demonizing people. Think through how you do or don’t name evil, and pray against it.

### **Day Two: Nahum 2:3-8**

This is hard to read (but God inspires gorgeous writing!), and reminds us that justice can be painful and ugly, even as it is also beautiful.

- God promises that those who don’t know him will face judgment. Who do you know who does not know the refuge of God? In the face of this terrible judgment, list them here and pray for them.

### **Day Three: Nahum 2:5-9**

As read about officers stumbling, gates opening, palaces melting, and treasure being plundered, as God to give you eyes to see that no power or wealth or security is permanent. Everything is fleeting.

- Are there places in life where you have put your hope in things that “run away”? Think through your life and confess!

### **Day Four: Nahum 2:10-13**

This is a lament. In America, we are really good at clinging to hope, at needing victory, at good/health/healing/redemption being just around the corner. There is a strong Biblical tradition though that teaches us that sometimes judgment comes. When God's judgment actually comes it will be terrible. These lions, images of the royal class of Ninevah, will be destroyed, and life as they know it will end.

- Can you spend time praying God will give you His eyes? To pity those in power? To lament the pain of injustice and the coming pain of judgment?

### **Day Five: Nahum 2**

As you review Nahum 2, see that there is poetic justice here, even though it is hard to witness. The Assyrians have been horribly brutal, abusing power, accumulating and hoarding wealth, and disregarding others with no compassion. Now, they suffer.

- As this sinks in, ask God to check you. Do you assume you are always on the right side? That you (or your family, tribe, church, party, country) are exceptional, deserving, chosen? Is it possible that we also can be cruel or oblivious to the needs of others, that we can think our status quo is fabulous and we are above judgment or consequence? Bring these questions and answers before the Lord and journal about it here.

## Week Seven

God fully justifies his treatment of Assyria.

### **Day One: Nahum 3:1-4**

- How does God justify the treatment and judgment that Ninevah experiences?
  
- Look at v1 and v4. Can you find yourself here?

### **Day Two: Nahum 3:5-7**

As Ninevah has done, so shall it be done to them. They deserve, in the eyes of God, all the bad. There is a principal here that God brings all our actions into the light, and everything is eventually exposed. Let this reality sink in, and thank the God of Heaven that Jesus has called you to himself and redeemed you, saving you from what you deserve.

- Now look at your life. Are you walking consistently? Are you fully integrated? What could be exposed in you and cause you ruin? Bring these concerns to God as your refuge and shelter. Is this something you do?

### **Day Three: Nahum 3:8-13**

God compares what is happening here to what happened in Thebes. Assyria punished this Egyptian city with no mercy, and now God is doing the same to them. God is reminding them of their own past evil through Nahum here.

- What does God have for you here? Do you treat others the way you want to be treated? Are you more generous to your own motives and actions than you to others? Do you trust in the stuff and power and comfort of your life? Confess and seek God's refuge and changing power!



#### **Day Four: Nahum 3:14-19**

Nahum tells them all their efforts to protect themselves are futile. When God comes after you, it's over. This puts fear and trembling in my heart! What are we to do? I pray we can rush to the stronghold and refuge that is God.

- Can you go to God and trust Him completely? Can you ask God to save you from your own complacency? How do you respond?

#### **Day Five: Review**

Reflect on Jonah and Nahum. Remember that these same Ninevites beautifully repented and were spared by God in Jonah. They knew him for a time! But their lives didn't change. We are all capable of the same great hypocrisy, and we are just as guilty as they are.

- How do you find yourself in the stories of Jonah and Nahum? What will you take away?