

MAJOR ON THE MINORS | HOPE CHAPEL

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

Justice, Mercy, and the Goodness of God
Pastor Andrew Cole | Sunday 10 August 2026 | 9AM Gawler

Big Idea: *The God of Nahum is the same God of the New Testament - slow to anger, great in power, good to those who trust him, and just toward those who perpetuate evil. His justice is not a contradiction of his love. It is the guarantee of it.*

Introduction - A Book Almost Nobody Preaches

Nahum is one of the least-preached books in the entire Bible. It is short - only three chapters. It is fierce. It announces the total destruction of one of the most powerful cities in the ancient world. And it pulls no punches about the wrath of God. Most preachers skip it entirely.

But Andrew wanted to preach it - not to make people uncomfortable, but because Nahum contains something we desperately need to hear: that God's justice and God's love are not opposites. They are two sides of the same character. And a God who never judges evil is not a loving God - he is an indifferent one.

Background - Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire

To understand Nahum, you need to understand Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire - the most feared military power in the ancient world. The Assyrians were notorious for their brutality. They impaled people on stakes. They skinned people alive. They piled heads in pyramids outside the cities they conquered. This was not exaggeration - it was Assyrian state propaganda, designed to terrify any nation that considered resistance.

Most Israelites would have lived in dread of Assyria. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been obliterated by them in 722 BC. Their methods were not incidental - they were intentional terror. Nahum was writing to people who knew exactly what Nineveh was and what it had done.

Jonah and Nahum - The Same City, 100 Years Apart

If you know the book of Jonah, you know that God sent Jonah to Nineveh approximately 100 years before Nahum. Jonah went - reluctantly - and the whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes. God relented from the disaster he had planned.

But Nineveh did not stay repentant. Within a generation, they returned to their violence and brutality. By the time Nahum wrote, the Assyrians had destroyed Israel, besieged Jerusalem, and were at the height of their power. Nineveh's repentance had not held.

Jonah shows us the mercy of God extended to a repentant Nineveh. Nahum shows us the justice of God falling on a Nineveh that turned back to wickedness.

These two books sit together in the canon of Scripture as a complete picture: God is patient and slow to anger, as Jonah demonstrates. But his patience has limits, as Nahum demonstrates. And both are equally true of who he is.

1 | The Character of God - Nahum 1:1–8

Nahum 1:2–3 *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 vents his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.*

This is one of the most concentrated descriptions of God's character in the entire Old Testament - and it holds two truths in one breath that we often try to separate: God is filled with wrath, and God is slow to anger.

We tend to want one or the other. Some people want a God who is only love - gentle, forgiving, never angry, never judging. Others, in their pain and longing for justice, want a God who burns hot and strikes quickly. Nahum says he is both - and the combination is not a contradiction. It is precisely what makes him good.

Slow to Anger Does Not Mean Never Angry

Andrew pointed out that the phrase 'slow to anger' in Nahum 1:3 is the same Hebrew phrase used in Exodus 34:6 - the great declaration of God's character that he speaks over Moses on the mountain. Slow to anger. Abounding in love. Forgiving. But also: he does not leave the guilty unpunished. These are not different Gods. This is one God, fully himself.

A God who never gets angry at evil is not a good God. He is an indifferent one. The wrath of God in Scripture is not divine temper - it is the settled, purposeful opposition of a holy God to everything that destroys, corrupts, and harms what he made and loves.

Nahum 1:7 *The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.*

Tucked right in the middle of one of the most terrifying descriptions of God's judgment in the Bible is this quiet, pastoral verse. The same God who comes against Nineveh with overwhelming power is a refuge for those who trust him. His justice and his shelter come from the same character.

Reflect: *Do you find it easier to believe in a God of love or a God of justice? What happens to your picture of God when you try to hold both together - that he is genuinely angry at evil, and genuinely a refuge for those who trust him?*

2 | The Fall of Nineveh - Nahum 2–3

Chapters 2 and 3 describe the fall of Nineveh in vivid, almost cinematographic detail. Chariots racing, defenders stumbling, the city gates thrown open, the river flooding the palace. It reads like a war correspondent's report - except it was written 50 to 100 years before the event actually happened.

Nahum 2:6–8 *The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. It is decreed that Nineveh be exiled and carried away. Her female attendants moan like doves and beat their breasts.*

In 612 BC, exactly as Nahum described, a coalition of Babylonians and Medes attacked Nineveh. Ancient records describe the Tigris River flooding its banks and undermining the city walls - precisely matching Nahum's description of the river gates being thrown open. The city that had terrified the ancient world for centuries fell in a single season. It was so completely destroyed that by the time Alexander the Great marched through that region 300 years later, he did not even know where Nineveh had been.

Why So Graphic?

Some readers are troubled by the vivid, almost celebratory tone of Nahum's description of Nineveh's fall. Andrew addressed this directly. Nahum was writing to people who had survived Assyrian terror. People who had watched their families killed, their towns burned, their neighbours taken into slavery. When those people read Nahum's description of Nineveh falling, they were not reading gloating. They were reading hope.

The graphic detail is not bloodlust. It is the announcement that the terror is over. The city that made the world afraid has been brought low. Justice has come. The same God who saw every atrocity, every impaled body, every city razed to the ground, did not look away. He remembered. And he acted.

God does not ignore what is done to the vulnerable. He sees every act of cruelty. His justice may be slow - but it is certain.

Reflect: *Is there something in your own life or in the world around you where you are longing for justice - where you have been asking God: do you see this? Do you care? How does Nahum speak to that longing?*

3 | What Nahum Teaches Us About God Today

Nahum is not merely ancient history. Andrew drew three direct lines from Nahum's message into our lives today.

God's Justice Is the Guarantee of His Love

If God never judged evil, his love would be meaningless. A father who watched his children be harmed and shrugged would not be loving - he would be negligent. The same God who holds the universe together, who formed every person in the womb, who weeps over the broken and the poor - that God is also the God who will not allow evil to have the final word.

This is why the cross makes sense. At the cross, God's justice and God's love meet in one place. The penalty is paid. The guilty are forgiven. The righteous requirement is fulfilled. Not because God looked away - but because he looked directly at the sin and absorbed it himself. The justice of Nahum and the grace of the gospel are not in conflict. They are the same God, fully consistent with himself.

Romans 3:25–26 *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement... He did it to demonstrate his righteousness... so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Repentance Is Always the Offer

Nineveh had already received one of the most extraordinary invitations in the Old Testament - the entire city repenting at the preaching of one reluctant prophet. They had been to the mercy of God and turned back.

That door had not been shut by God - it had been shut by Nineveh's own return to violence and evil. But the pattern of Jonah and Nahum together is clear: the offer is always mercy first. Judgment is what comes when mercy has been repeatedly rejected.

The God of Nahum is not trigger-happy. He is patient to a degree that strains human comprehension. But he is not infinitely deferring. There is a point at which wickedness is met with the full weight of his justice. And that is not a failure of his character - it is the fullest expression of it.

The Vulnerable Are Not Forgotten

One of the most quietly powerful things about Nahum is what it meant to its original readers. These were not powerful people. They were survivors. People who had lost everything to an empire that crushed without conscience. Nahum's message to them was not theological abstraction. It was: God saw what happened to you. He did not forget. And justice is coming.

This is still true. The person sitting in a situation of ongoing harm or injustice, wondering whether God sees - Nahum says he does. His timing is not our timing. His patience is longer than ours. But his justice is certain, and the vulnerable are never invisible to him.

Nahum 1:7 *The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.*

The God who brought Nineveh down is the same God who is a refuge in your trouble today.

Reflect: *Is there an area of your life where you have felt overlooked by God - where injustice seems to be winning? How does Nahum's message - slow to anger, great in power, a refuge for those who trust - speak into that place?*

Reading Jonah and Nahum Together

JONAH	NAHUM
God's mercy extended to a repentant Nineveh	God's justice falling on Nineveh's return to wickedness
The offer of repentance is always first	Mercy repeatedly rejected leads to judgment
God's patience is extraordinary	But his patience is not without end

Together, Jonah and Nahum give us the full picture: a God who pursues the most unlikely people with mercy, waits with extraordinary patience, but does not defer his justice forever. Both books are equally important for an honest understanding of who God is.

Conclusion

The God of Nahum is the God of the New Testament.

Slow to anger. Great in power. A refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him.

We do not have to choose between a God of love and a God of justice. We have both - in one person, fully consistent, eternal. The same God who brought the greatest empire of the ancient world to nothing in a single season is the God who is a refuge for those who trust in him today.

If you are in a season of trouble, Nahum 1:7 is for you. If you are watching injustice and wondering if God sees, Nahum is for you. If you have ever struggled with the idea of God's wrath - Nahum, read alongside Jonah and alongside the cross, is for you.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. Nahum 1:3 says God is 'slow to anger but great in power' - and will not leave the guilty unpunished. Do you find it difficult to hold those two things together in your picture of God? Which do you lean toward more naturally - a God of love or a God of justice?
2. Andrew said a God who never gets angry at evil is not a loving God but an indifferent one. Does that reframe help you with the concept of God's wrath? How would you explain to someone else why God's anger at evil is actually a sign of his goodness?
3. Nahum 1:7 says 'the Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble.' This verse sits right in the middle of a terrifying description of God's judgment. What does it mean to you that the same God who brings justice is also described as good and a refuge in the very same breath?
4. Nineveh had already received God's mercy through Jonah and repented - but then returned to wickedness. Is there an area of your own life where you have received grace, but have drifted back into old patterns? What does the story of Nineveh say to you about the seriousness of that?
5. Nahum was written to survivors of Assyrian terror - people who had lost everything and wondered if God had seen. Is there a situation in your life or in the world around you where you are crying out for justice? How does Nahum's message help you trust God's timing even when justice feels delayed?
6. Romans 3:25–26 says Jesus was presented as a sacrifice of atonement so that God would be both 'just and the one who justifies.' How does reading Nahum deepen your appreciation of what happened at the cross?

Key Scriptures This Week

- Nahum 1:2–3 - The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; will not leave the guilty unpunished
- Nahum 1:7 - The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; he cares for those who trust in him
- Nahum 2:6–8 - The river gates thrown open; the fall of Nineveh
- Nahum 3:1 - Woe to the city of blood, full of lies and plunder
- Exodus 34:6 - The Lord's declaration of his own character to Moses
- Romans 3:25–26 - Just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus
- Jonah 3:10 - God relented from the disaster he had planned for Nineveh