

## **Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 22, Micah 6:8 and Nahum**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 22, Micah 6:8 and Nahum.

We've reached a turning point in our study of the book of the 12.

We have spent all of our time in the lectures up to this point looking at the prophets that God raised up during the Assyrian crisis. The first wave of prophets in the book of the 12 are the prophets that you have Amos and Hosea and Jonah from the northern kingdom of Israel. You have a Micah from the southern kingdom.

They warn the people of the judgment that's going to come at the hands of the Assyrians. But then we have a group of prophets that God raises up to prepare the people and warn the people about the impending Babylonian crisis in the century that follows. We're going to begin by looking at the prophets that proclaim judgment on nations other than Judah, Nahum and Obadiah.

Before we do that, I want to take one last final look at the book of Micah. Most of you are aware that there's a very famous verse and a very famous passage in Micah chapter 6, verse 8, he has told you, old man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. I'm just not sure I could sleep at night knowing that we taught through the prophets, and I didn't take at least a brief look at this passage.

It is reflective, I think, of the emphasis and the concern throughout the prophets and justice. What we have in the third section of Micah, Micah chapter 6 verses 1 to 8 is again, a pattern of judgment and salvation. In Micah 6, God reminding Israel what he really expected and required of them.

And then after this passage, here's what the Lord requires that you do justice, you love kindness, you walk humbly with your God. The reality that follows is that Judah is not doing this, and that's why God's judgment is ultimately going to fall. Micah will say in chapter 7, the godly have perished from the earth and there is no one upright among mankind.

They all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net. So doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly before your God, that's what God demanded and God expected. What we have in the last section of Micah is a reflection of the fact that this is not what Judah was doing.

And as a result of this, judgment was going to fall. The conditions in the land are such that there's no righteous on the earth. Micah wails and mourns over the judgment that's coming in light of the lifestyle of the people.

That's the only option that's left there. But then there is the message of hope at the end of the book of Micah that God would ultimately act. God would keep his covenant with Israel.

God would restore them, and God would forgive their sins. Now, what we have in this passage in Micah 6, 1 to 8 is what we call, and we've looked at some of these, a covenant lawsuit where God is going to bring the people into the courtroom. The prophet is like the prosecuting attorney.

You have this whole image and scenery developed in Micah 6. The Lord is going to say, arise and plead your wreath, your lawsuit, your case before the mountains. Let the hills hear your voice. Hear the mountains, the indictment of the Lord, the enduring foundations of the earth.

So, the mountains, the heavens, and the earth that were there as witnesses when Moses established the covenant are there to serve as witnesses in the courtroom proceedings. The Lord reminds the people of his faithfulness to them. He says, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer you, or give me an answer to this.

And then he reminds them of the ways that he's shown his faithfulness to them. I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of slavery.

What reason do you have to not be faithful to the covenant responsibilities that I have placed in front of you? Micah, chapter six, verses six to eight, is going to address the question, again, what really does God expect? And the artistry in the way that this is done is just something that I briefly wanted to focus on. The Lord raises the question of What shall I come before the Lord, and how should I bow myself before God on high? What is it that God really expects? And remember that one of the answers that the people themselves were giving us, well, if we simply fulfill our cultic and ritual responsibilities, we have met our obligations. God will be pleased with us.

God is obligated to bless us. And so, what Micah does to show that that is an inadequate answer is that he lists a number of offerings and sacrifices that could be brought. And rhetorically, he lists a series of offerings that progressively increase in value to show that even the most valuable offerings and sacrifices that could possibly be made are ultimately not the primary demand that God places on the people.

Should I come before the Lord with burnt offerings, one of the basic sacrifices that Israel presented to God, or in the parallel line with an especially valuable animal with

calves that are a year old? Is that really what God wants? The rhetorical question raised. Verse seven: will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with 10,000 rivers of oil? Now we're imagining a sacrifice that no individual Israelite could actually give, but this is the type of sacrifice that a king could present, like Solomon did when the temple was dedicated in 1 Kings 8. If I could present even an offering that is magnificent and expensive, what would please God? Then, finally, the ultimate offering or the ultimate sacrifice, shall I give my firstborn for my transgression or the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? What if I were to give the kind of valuable sacrifice that the pagan religions talked about in practice? What if I even offered my own children? None of those things are what God ultimately wants and desires from his people.

The rituals are important, but they must be accompanied by a lifestyle of justice, covenant faithfulness, the word *hesed* is what's used there, and walking humbly with your God. I believe that the idea of walking humbly with your God is put at the end of this because if they adopted this humble posture toward God, it would always remind them that they needed God's direction to lead them and guide them. It would help them to understand that they could not presume upon God's grace and they had to look for ways that they could always be increasing in their covenant faithfulness.

It also would remind them that they had a responsibility to put God and others first above themselves. So, this driving ethos about the importance of justice and the importance of looking out for others, that's part of the message of Micah. I believe that, again, as we think about how to apply the prophets, I don't feel as a pastor that it's often my job to preach about specific political policies, but it is my job to remind the people and to remind our churches of our responsibility to help those around us.

I do not have to become a politician to live out Micah chapter six, verse eight. I don't have to be a Martin Luther King or a William Wilberforce. I can live out this lifestyle of justice simply by treating people in the right way and meeting the needs of the people around me to whom I have the opportunity to minister.

One writer has said this: the prophets lay before us the question, will we live by justice, or will we live a life where we simply focus on just us? Often, in the evangelical church, we've lost just the call that God places upon us to care for the needs of others. We can go through as individual congregations, who are the people that God is calling us to minister to? Is it underprivileged minorities? Are there people in housing developments who do not have fathers? Is it a ministry that extends beyond the borders and boundaries of the United States? Is it immigrants that are coming into our city that maybe need education or resources or help as they adjust? What do we, as Christians, do about the glut of children who are illegal aliens coming into our country? Our job as Christians is not simply to have the Republican answer to these or the Democratic answer to these, but to allow our ethos to be

informed by the Bible and by the ethic of the Old Testament. Will we, as rich and wealthy and affluent Christians in the suburbs, care about the people, not just in other parts of the world, but for the people that live in the inner city and do not have the resources that we have? The ethos of justice in the Old Testament is not simply giving people what they deserve.

It is ultimately also giving people what they need and we have a responsibility to do that. If you are interested in reflecting on this further, I would recommend that you just think about how we integrate the Old Testament prophets along with the ethics and the teaching of the Old Testament Torah. David Baker has written a book, the title is *Tight Fist or Open Hands, Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law*.

In that particular book, which is an excellent study, Baker focuses on how the Old Testament law reflects, in its context and in its ancient Near Eastern environment, a distinctive perspective on the need for concern for those who are poor and in need of widows and orphans. There is a distinctive message in the Old Testament law about those things. We often hear today that the Mosaic law or the law of Moses is simply another ancient Near Eastern law code.

Sometimes, when we are first exposed to these law codes and maybe we read the Mosaic law, it looks like, wow, the Mosaic law looks just like these other law codes. I can take prescriptions from the Mosaic law and it looks like things from the code of Hammurabi. But what Baker demonstrates is that there are unique perspectives in the law that are not true of these other law codes that reflect the ethos of concern for the poor and justice.

I think this reflects the distinctiveness of the Mosaic law, and we need to be mindful of that. I'm going to just mention a few things that he talks about. He says number one, the penalties for infringing property rights in the Bible are much more humane than elsewhere, and they never involve mutilation, beating, or death, which is what you see in these other law codes.

The same rules apply to all as well, and punishment does not depend on the status or the wealth of the thief or the victim. A second thing, according to Old Testament law, the ancestral land is God's gift to his chosen people and is allocated equitably to each of them. Old Babylonian and Middle Syrian law assert that the ancestral land belongs to the king.

In Old Testament law, chattel slavery is limited to non-Israelites, and the law provides significant protection for slaves. Fugitive slaves are to be given asylum, and slaves are entitled to holidays. In other ancient Near Eastern law codes, slaves are subject to property law, which focuses on the rights of slave owners over their property.

There are other distinctive features of Old Testament law concerning semi-slaves. Temporary slaves are given the option of becoming permanent members of the household at the end of their service. Bonded labor for a limited term was another way of paying off debts and was actually a realistic possibility in Israel rather than in some of these other cultures because of the Old Testament policy of interest-free loans.

High interest rates in other cultures meant that the worker was only covering his interest payments and likely would remain in lifelong bondage. Biblical law also provides a measure of protection to concubines that entitles them to some of the rights of a wife or a daughter, and the kindness toward concubines contrasts with the utilitarian way they are treated in Mesopotamia. The protection of vulnerable people in the Old Testament is considered the divine will and a royal responsibility.

That's true throughout the ancient Near East, but Old Testament law is specifically more concerned with ensuring that widows and orphans are not abused or exploited in law courts or financial dealings. That's another distinctive aspect. Biblical law has distinctive emphases in relationship to just lawsuits.

The principle of impartiality may have been assumed elsewhere, but it's explicitly stated in the Old Testament. Two more, and then we'll tie this all up. The idea that agricultural produce is God's gift to the people means that it is to be shared with all and this is a distinctive of the Old Testament.

This is reflected in specific ways in the laws of the sabbatical year, the triennial tithe, and the principle of gleaning. The biblical laws on gleaning have no parallel elsewhere. In other parts of the ancient Near East, the following takes place for agricultural reasons, and tithes are paid to the temple or to the palace, but neither of these practices is designated as social welfare.

Finally, the Old Testament law on terms and conditions for employment is unparalleled in the other law collections. The concept of Sabbath is unique to the ancient Near East, especially in its emphasis that regular rest and recreation is a fundamental right for all. And so, if you want to understand God's heart and God's concern for the poor and the needy, then look at the Old Testament and spend some time reflecting on how the message of the prophets and the message of the Torah line up and emphasize that.

I think it'll change the way that we look at the poor and needy that are in our lives. Now I want to turn from the book of Micah and now we're going to look at the prophecy of Nahum. We've just talked about a God who is compassionate and concerned for the poor and the needy.

Now, we're going to look at a very different picture because we're talking about a God who is going to bring violence and judgment and destruction on the Ninevites. We can begin by just thinking about Nahum. Nahum is the prophetic counterpart to the book of Jonah.

In the book of Jonah, God spares the Ninevites, but now, 150 years later, God is going to bring about the judgment of the Ninevites. The violence and the way in which God uses human violence in this book is something that has particularly bothered recent commentators on the book. I think it is a book that we should struggle with and we should reflect upon the ethical dilemma that's there.

But one writer by the name of R.A. Mason says this, and he says: will any of us ever have the courage to admit in a popular commentary that the book of Nahum really is rather a disgrace to the two religious communities of whose canonical scriptures it forms such an unwelcome part? I think he kind of reflects what he feels about the book. Other people have talked about the literary artistry of the book of Nahum and have commented that, well, at least, it is a bad book, but it is written well. I want us to take an entirely different perspective on this book.

We should be troubled by the violence that's there. There are some ethical questions and dilemmas and things about God and violence and warfare and all these things that need to be raised. But I want us to read it and approach the book as faithful readers of the text who believe that there is this troubling message that God does use the violence of human armies sometimes to execute imperfect justice in a fallen world.

But the mystery is that we can trust in God to ultimately do this and to do it in a way that is good, fair, and just, even when we do not understand its ways. We believe that there is a God who is ultimately going to make all things right. We believe that there is a God who is ultimately going to redress the injustices and violence that have been committed throughout human history.

And the fact that the 20th century was the most violent century that humanity has ever lived through. I think that message of hope and encouragement is there. We understand that as God executes vengeance on the Ninevites, the vengeance of God is not the same thing as the vengeance of human beings.

Even though God often used human armies, he used the Babylonians and the Assyrians to punish his own people. He uses the Babylonians ultimately to punish the Assyrians and he'll use the Persians to punish the Babylonians. Even though God uses these nations, he remains separate from the evil that they commit.

God is ultimately sovereign, so he uses them to accomplish their purposes. But we believe that the scriptures teach us that God does this without in any way joining in

and participating in their evil. Now, as Nahum focuses on the destruction of Nineveh, we should understand that this is not simply an expression of nationalistic rage on the part of the people of Judah against their enemies.

Sometimes, I read the oracles against the nations and the prophets, and it reminds me of a high school pep rally during homecoming week. We whip the troops up because we're going out, and we're going to fight against the enemy. But these books were not written to express hatred, rage or vindictiveness toward these nations.

It ultimately gives us the hope that a holy God will make things right and ultimately bring about the deliverance of his people. Many people have struggled with the violent God of the book of Nahum or the violence of the book of Nahum. But I want to suggest to us that a greater dilemma and a greater problem is raised for us if we have a God who never addresses the violence and the injustice and the things that wicked empires like the Assyrians do.

If God never addresses that, then God truly is a moral monster. The severity of the judgment that is found in the book of Nahum is reflective of the severity of the crimes that the Ninevites have committed. And a final thing, just to kind of provide a backdrop and background for this, this book is not designed to provide a rationalization for the people of God to execute vengeance or violence or justice on their enemies.

It is talking about something that God will do and that God will carry out. So, with those kind of caveats and understandings in mind and just an acknowledgment of the fact that this is a difficult book, I would like us to look at this as the expression of the judgment that a holy God, who is a God of love, who is a God of perfect righteousness, the righteous judgment that God will execute on those who perpetrate the type of violence and oppression that was reflected by the Assyrian armies. Now, when and why God judges individual nations is an issue of God's sovereignty.

We often do not understand the timing of this, but I think the lasting message of this book is that God is saying that the Lord is going to judge. I am going to judge the Ninevites for their atrocities and their oppression, especially for the atrocities that they have committed against the people of Israel. It is a reminder to us that God promises that he will ultimately bring this kind of judgment against all of his enemies.

The oracles against the nations in the prophets are not just history lessons, but they are a reminder to us that God will judge all nations and all peoples. Now, we've talked about the fact that Nahum is the prophetic counterpart to the book of Jonah. So, I want to just make a couple of brief comparisons about Jonah or of Jonah and Nahum.

In 775 to 760 in the eighth century, Jonah goes to Nineveh. He preaches there, and Nineveh is spared from judgment. The word ra'ah and evil is an important part of what God is doing there.

God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh because of the great evil they have committed. That great evil has come up before him. God, as judge, is aware of these things.

The nations of the earth, not just Israel and Judah, are responsible and accountable to God. But in chapter three, what we see is that when Jonah preaches this message, the Ninevites repent or they turn away from their evil, their ra'ah, and as a result of that, God relents. We know historically that the Ninevites returned to their violent, imperialistic, military-domineering ways very shortly after this.

In fact, whatever repentance took place during the days of Jonah, it hardly appears to be more than a ripple across the pond. What lasting effect did this have? We don't know. By 745 Tiglath-Pileser has established the Neo-Assyrian Empire and he's going to inflict great violence on Israel and Judah and other nations during that time.

So, they repent of their evil. They very quickly return to their evil. And so, in 612, the city of Nineveh is going to be brought down and destroyed in judgment.

God is going to use the Babylonian army to accomplish that. But the reason for that is that they have returned to their evil, their ra'ah. Chapter 1 verse 11 says this, from you came one who plotted evil against the Lord, a worthless counselor.

So, the thing that they repented of and that brought God's mercy in the book of Jonah is ultimately the thing that is going to, as they return to that, the warnings of Nineveh being destroyed, that is going to go back into effect and God's judgment is going to fall. The last verse of Nahum chapter 3, the last verse of the book, there is no easing your hurt, your wound is grievous, talking about the judgment that's going to come on the Ninevites. All who hear the news about you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not come your unceasing ra'ah, your unceasing evil.

So, they repented of that evil in the book of Jonah, were spared of judgment. They quickly returned to that evil. The fact that God waited 150 years to judge them and destroy them is in itself a reflection of his continued mercy and compassion.

But that evil must be redressed and it must be made right. All right. Now, another specific comparison between the book of Jonah and the book of Nahum is that both of these prophets are going to allude and reference the confession about God that is found in Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 and 7. Jonah, why did I not want to go to



Nineveh? I know that you're a compassionate, gracious God, slow to anger, forgiving sins, and relenting from evil.

All right. That passage in that confession is also going to become the basis of God's judgment in the opening chapter of Nahum. Because the second part of that confession in Exodus 34.7 is that God does not excuse the guilty and ultimately holds them accountable for their sin.

And so, in the same way that Jonah alludes to this confession, Nahum does the same as well. Here's what it says in chapter 1 verse 2. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. He has the right to do that because he is a holy God.

Divine vengeance is not the same thing as human vengeance. Paul makes that clear in Romans chapter 12, verses 19 to 21. The Lord is avenging and wrathful.

We are not to take vengeance into our own hands. We are to leave that with God. But here comes the reference to Exodus 34.

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power and that's why God has spared the Ninevites. That's why God relented during the days of Jonah. That's why God has given them 150 years to somehow get their act together.

But the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. And then, as a result of that, in light of their sin, in light of the fact that he cannot clear the guilty, God is about to march on them as a warrior. This connection with Exodus 34.6 and 7 is also part of the reason that we have the book of Nahum following the book of Micah in the Book of the 12.

When we go back to the end of the book of Micah, God is going to restore Israel even though there have not been people who have practiced justice. Even though they have not done the things that God commanded them, God will ultimately forgive them. And the reason for that is God will deal with his people on the basis of Exodus 34:6. Micah says, Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. He will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea.

You will show your covenant faithfulness to Jacob and your hesed to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. So, in the linkage of the book of Micah and the book of Nahum, we have a contrast here. We have God forgiving and restoring the people of Israel and actually waging war on their sins, shredding them under his foot, casting them into the depths of the sea.

God is going to act to restore his people. However, in the book of Nahum, we have the opposite. We have God as a vengeful and a wrathful God executing his justice because the Ninevites have had their chance to repent and have taken advantage of God's grace.

As a result of that, now God is going to declare war as well. He's going to come again as a warrior and he will destroy the Assyrians and fight against them. So, Exodus 34.6 and 7 is important to the message of Nahum.

I want us to think about the ultimate basis and the reasons for God's judgment against the Ninevites. Julie Woods, in an article in the Themelios Journal, talks about the specific sins of Nineveh that are listed in this book. In chapter 1, verses 9 and 11, they are guilty of plotting against God.

In chapter 1, verse 14, they are guilty of idolatry. The judgment that the Lord is going to bring against Nineveh is ultimately going to be a judgment against their idols. Verse 14 says the Lord has given a commandment about you.

No more shall your name be perpetuated. From the house of your gods, I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. So, when God destroys and when God judges the Assyrians, he's also going to judge their false gods.

The Lord also says in that verse, I will make your grave for you, for you are a vile people. So, the third sin, they have committed vile violence. They've done vile acts that are an abomination to God.

Chapter 3, verse 1, they are a bloody city. So, the Lord will judge them for their shedding of blood, their plunder, and the violence that they have committed against the nations. When we see that reference to Nineveh as a place of bloodshed in chapter 3, verse 1, again, it reminds us that the basis and the foundation of God's judgment of the nations is their violation of the Noahic covenant.

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. The Noahic covenant placed on humanity a responsibility to restrain violence and bloodshed. The problem is that empires and armies like the Babylonians and the Assyrians perpetuated that bloodshed.

Isaiah 24, verses 1 to 5, the Lord will judge the earth because they have violated the everlasting covenant. They have not kept its statutes. Then in that same context, in Isaiah 26 verse 21, the Lord will ultimately, the earth will disclose the blood that is in her.

God cannot simply excuse that. The blood is crying out for justice. He's a holy and righteous God who ultimately must make these things right.

Going along with that, they have enslaved other nations. Chapter 3, verse 4, they have committed presumption and arrogance. Chapter 3, verses 8, they have committed unceasing cruelty.

Chapter 3, verse 19. It's interesting that the only two books in the Hebrew canon that close with a rhetorical question, again, another parallel between Jonah and Nahum, are these two books. In the book of Jonah, the rhetorical question is, shouldn't God show compassion to these people and be concerned about 120,000 people? However, the rhetorical question in 3.19 takes us in a different direction.

Shouldn't Assyria and the Ninevites be punished for the unceasing evil that they have committed? And the answer to that is yes. God cannot allow this to go unanswered. Now, one of the things that we see in the judgment speeches against the nations, and again, these are found all throughout the prophets, highlighted especially in Nahum and Obadiah in the book of the 12, is that one of the things that God is going to judge, it's not primarily, it's not just their violence.

It's not just their false gods. The underlying cause of all of this is ultimately the arrogance and the pride of humanity as they shake their fist in God's face. I think theologically, we can go all the way back to the book of Genesis and humanity's rebellion against God in Genesis 1-11.

What's the recurring sin that is committed there? It is the desire to be like God. That's ultimately why Adam and Eve eat the fruit. They want to be like God and make up their own rules.

In Genesis chapter 4, Cain wants to be like God and decide how and why he receives God's blessing and also to make the God-like decision: this is who lives, and this is who dies. Lamech, Genesis chapter 4, makes his own rules about marriage and becomes the first polygamist. Genesis chapter 6, the sons of God come into the daughters of men, and these mighty men flaunt God's rules about marriage and sexuality and attempt to set up, in a sense, a rival race that opposes God.

Genesis chapter 10, Nimrod, this mighty hunter before the Lord, a prototype of the later Assyrian kings who, through violence, will build an empire that's based in Mesopotamia. The Tower of Babel, building a tower defying God, set up an alternate religious system. So, in Genesis 1-11, we have humanity and rebellion against God, setting up a kingdom of man, shaking their fist in God's face and wanting to be like God.

The Assyrians are the epitome of that type of arrogance and pride. And Isaiah talks about this as well when he talks about God's judgment of the nations and the pride

that's the underlying basis of this. When the final judgment falls on the human race, Isaiah says this: enter into the rocks and hide in the dust.

The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low. And so, humanity has exalted himself against God.

In fact, the same terminology that is used in Isaiah 6 to talk about, I saw the Lord seated on his throne high and lifted up, he is ultimately the one that is exalted. That's the same terminology that is used to describe humanity here in their pride in the attempt to exalt themselves against God. And so the prophet Isaiah, when he talks about the judgment of the nations, he specifically is going to focus on their pride.

Chapter 13, verse 11, I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and I will bring low, or I will lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. Verse 19, Babylon, and they're an epitome of this kind of human pride as well. Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, and the splendor of the pomp of the Chaldeans, they will become like Sodom and Gomorrah when I overthrow them.

The arrogant king of Babylon, who thinks that he will rise above the stars of God, expresses his pride. He says I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high.

And in chapter 14, we see him in judgment coming down to Sheol and falling from the sky like the morning star in the early dawn. Chapter 13, verses 6 and 7, it was not just the great nations that did this. Even the people around Israel and Judah, the smaller, tiny nations, and even the Israelites themselves are part of this.

All hands will be made feeble. Every human heart will melt because God is ultimately going to bring down the pride and the arrogance of humanity. We could go through and trace this all the way through the book of Isaiah.

When Isaiah talks about how God ultimately delivered the city of Jerusalem from the Assyrians, the reason for this is because of the arrogance and the pride of the Assyrian king. Isaiah chapter 10, Assyria is the ride of God's anger and God is using him to bring judgment against the people of Israel. But the king of Assyria doesn't realize that.

He doesn't attribute his victories to God. Ultimately, he wants to accomplish his own evil desires. When the Assyrian commander is reminding Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem why they need to surrender, don't think that your gods are going to protect you.

So, when Hezekiah lays the letter of the Assyrian king out before God, one of the things that he points out is the Assyrian king has acted in arrogance against God and believes that his power is greater than God's. As a result of that, he is ultimately going to be judged. So that's part of the underlying message of why God is going to bring judgment against the Assyrians.

Now let me talk a little bit about the historical background and the historical setting of the book of Nahum. We can establish a fairly precise timeline for when the book of Nahum and when the messages of Nahum were delivered. We know that the book of Nahum was written sometime after the fall of the Egyptian city of Thebes in chapter 3, verses 8 and 10.

Because Nahum is going to make reference to this city, the Assyrians themselves were the ones who had captured and conquered Thebes. What Nahum is going to say is the same thing that you did to Thebes, the city that the Egyptians thought was impregnable and inviolable to enemy attack; the same thing that you did to them is ultimately going to happen to you. So, we know that the book was written or the messages of Nahum were delivered after 663 BC.

We know that these messages were delivered before 612 BC because that's the time when the Babylonian army and the Babylonians and the Medes are going to conquer and to bring down the city of Nineveh. So, we can imagine Nahum preaching these messages sometime around the year of 620 BC. And so, we'll just use that as kind of a round date for this.

Now let's go back and let's remember the dealings that Assyria has had with Israel and Judah up to this point. Tiglath-Pileser establishes the Neo-Assyrian Empire 745. Assyria becomes the dominant power in the ancient Near East.

In 722 the Northern Kingdom falls in the capital city of Samaria. They become an Assyrian province. In 705 to 701 BC, Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians.

Sennacherib invaded the land, captured 46 cities in Judah, and would have captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem if God had not defeated his army. However, 701 did not mark the end of Assyria's domination of the nation of Judah. The Assyrian army, the Assyrian empire, the Assyrian king revives and they are going to control and their empire is going to dominate Judah throughout the seventh century until the time that they fall.

Assyria during this time has two very powerful kings. Esarhaddon is going to reign from the year 681 to 669 and then Ashurbanipal from 669 to 627 BC. So they are going to continue even after 701, and even after Sennacherib loses his army, they are going to continue to be the dominant power in the ancient Near East.

Ashurbanipal is going to engage in an ongoing battle with the Egyptians. We also know that during the reign of Esarhaddon, Manasseh, the most evil wicked king that Judah ever had, the Assyrians come to Jerusalem. They shackle him up.

2 Chronicles chapter 33, verses 11 to 13. They are going to take him back as a prisoner, but Manasseh turns to the Lord, and in spite of the fact that he has been this terrible, wicked, awful king, God allows him to remain on the throne. But Assyria had continued to dominate Judah throughout this time.

Now in 640 BC, Josiah came to the throne and this is the time where the Assyrian empire is beginning to go into decline. We are kind of at the last days. Every empire has its day and then ultimately falls and collapses.

So, in Josiah's day, the Babylonians are going to become a power that Assyria is going to reckon with and have to reckon with. As Josiah is looking at this, he sees the rise of the Babylonian empire as a positive thing. He hopes that the decline of the Assyrians will enable him to reestablish the independence of Judah.

Beyond that, I think his desire is to take back territory that was lost in the north and then to carry his religious reforms into the former northern kingdom of Israel. And so, Josiah is looking at this. He sees the decline of Assyria and the rise of Babylon as a positive thing.

Ultimately, Josiah was killed in battle in 609 BC because he intervened in all of this and attempted to prevent the Egyptians from marching up to help the Assyrians in their conflict with the Babylonians. God had warned him not to become involved in this. The prophets are going to warn the kings, and hey look, you're not to look to political solutions.

Josiah, in spite of the great things that he did, ultimately does make a mistake here. He is killed in battle by the Egyptians as they march up to help the Assyrians in 609 BC. He's killed in Megiddo.

The Assyrians take a different perspective on this than Josiah did. They believe that helping the Assyrians and propping up the Assyrians would keep the Babylonians from encroaching on them. But ultimately, the judgment that Nahum is talking about, and God going out as a warrior, these things are going to be carried out by the Babylonians and their king and their leader Nabopolassar.

Babylon had been a thorn in Assyria's side throughout the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. And so, the Assyrians were kind of historically the great power in northern Mesopotamia. Babylon had been at the center of the great kingdom and empire in the southern part of Mesopotamia.

And so, even during the days of Hezekiah, back in the eighth century, Babylon and their ruler, Merodach-Baladan, were looking for a way to throw off Assyrian control. And in Isaiah chapter 39, we have a passage where envoys and delegates come from Babylon. Hezekiah shows them the treasures of the kingdom and Isaiah condemns him for that.

It seems like as Hezekiah is trying to work out what's going on in this Assyrian crisis, he is trying to demonstrate to the Babylonians that he is a worthy covenant partner. Ultimately, Merodach-Baladan was not able to fully or completely re-establish the independence of Babylon. But in the years 627 and 626 BC, that's exactly what Nabopolassar is going to be able to do.

The Assyrians had an appointed governor that they used to rule over Babylon and to keep control there. But in 626, Kandalanu, the Assyrian appointed governor of Babylon, is going to die. As a result of that, there is going to be this Chaldean usurper, Nabopolassar.

He is going to assert Babylon's independence. He's going to drive the Assyrians out of Babylon. Now, this is going to be the beginning of the Babylonian empire, the Neo-Babylonian kingdom.

Ultimately, the Neo-Babylonian empire will replace Assyria, and it will become the bully on the block that Judah has to deal with. It will become the instrument of God's judgment against Judah in the same way that Assyria had been. So, Nabopolassar establishes the independence of Babylon in 626 BC.

Then a further act of brilliant military strategy is going to form an alliance and a coalition with the Medes. As the alliance of the Babylonians and the Medes march against the Assyrians, they're going to be too powerful for the Assyrians to handle. In 614, they are going to capture the city of Ashur.

In 612, they are going to capture and destroy the city of Nineveh. So, they're going to bring it down. That is the fulfillment of Nahum's prophecies.

In 609, what was left of the Assyrian army was defeated at Haran. This was essentially the end of the Assyrian empire. A few years later in 605 BC, Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, is going to lead the Babylonians to a victory over the Egyptians in Syria at a place called Carchemish.

As a result of this, this will establish Babylon as the dominant power in the ancient Near East. He march down after that victory and take away the first group of exiles, and this is going to be the beginning of the Babylonian exile and how God is going to use Babylon to punish Judah for its covenant unfaithfulness. All of this, we could understand it.

We can understand it politically. We can understand it militarily. We can understand, well, this is just part of the ebb and flow of the way that empires rise and fall.

But the Bible gives us a biblical perspective on this. Just as Israel's apostasy was the catalyst of Assyrian imperialism, it is the arrogance, violence, and atrocities of the Assyrians that, in part, became the catalyst of Babylon's rising to power. Archeology and history confirm for us that the prophecy that Nahum makes here about the destruction of Nineveh was carried out.

The Babylonian Chronicles from this period says the city was seized and a great defeat. He, the king of Babylon, inflicted upon the entire population. Many prisoners were carried away.

The city, they turned into ruined hills and heaps of debris. So exactly what Assyria had done to other people and to other nations, that violence comes down on their heads. About 200 years later, there is a Greek soldier who comes through the area and he only hears the name Mespila as being used as a name for this area.

All that's left are the outside suburbs. The city itself has been destroyed. God's word is ultimately carried out and God's word is fulfilled.

Now, as we look at the book of Nahum, it is divided into seven speeches and seven oracles where God brings about the judgment of the Assyrians. The first oracle in chapter one, Yahweh is a warrior who goes out to defeat and attack his enemies. Verse five says this: the mountains quake before him, the hills melt, the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.

So, just like in the book of Micah, when God goes out as a warrior, the earth melts and shakes at God's presence, and he goes out to attack Samaria and Jerusalem, he's going to do the same thing to the Assyrians. The second speech is the judgment of the enemies of God, the judgment of the Assyrians, and that will be the basis of the deliverance of his people. God is not simply carrying out this judgment to inflict further violence on a bad situation.

God is using this violence to accomplish a greater good. The greater good is that God will use the defeat of the Assyrians to bring about the deliverance of his people. So, God can sovereignly use the nations of the earth.

God can use them to accomplish his purposes, but ultimately, it's to accomplish the good of delivering the people of Jerusalem. One of the things that you notice as you read through the first two oracles here is that Nahum's words will go back and forth between judgment and salvation, judgment and salvation because the ultimate goal here is God saving his people. In chapter Two, verses one to ten, what we have here



is a very creative and imaginative prophetic vision of the invasion of the city of Assyria.

So, we can imagine that this enemy army breaches the walls and attacks the city. Here's the image that's given in verse four: the chariots race madly through the streets. They rush to and fro through the squares.

They gleam like torches. They dart like lightning. So, you can imagine them racing around and just inflicting this destruction on the city.

Verse six says this, the river gates are open, and the palace melts away. Sennacherib had built a number of canals and reservoirs against the city. The Cusa River flowed through the city, but to the north, there were dams and canals and a reservoir.

What the Assyrians could do is by opening the levees or by opening the dams, they could control the flow of water. Well, when the enemy army attacks the city, they're going to flood the city. They're going to allow the reservoir to flood the city.

And that's what we have in verse six. The river gates are open, the palace melts away, and the city is overwhelmed by the surging flood of water in addition to the army. Verse eight says, Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away.

And so, in the same way, that the waters of a pool run out and flow away, the armies, the people of Nineveh, are making an attempt to flee from the city. The commanders that are leading the defense and the protection of the city say this, halt, halt they cry out, but none turns back. Plunder the silver, plunder the gold; there is no end to the treasure of the wealth of all the precious things, and the city of Nineveh is going to be destroyed.

Again, the same thing they have done to other nations will ultimately be done to them. In the fourth oracle, which really stands at the center of the book of Nahum, Nineveh is compared to a fallen lion. The city of Nineveh is like a lion's den.

The king of Assyria and his armies have been like a great lion that has gone out. They have ripped apart their prey. But the lion den is going to be destroyed and this great lion is going to be left lying there as a corpse.

There is a total reversal of the greatness of the past with the horrors of the present. Chapter 3, verses 1 to 7, there is a woe oracle where the prophet again prophesies the total destruction that is going to come upon Nineveh. It says this, chapter 3 verse 3, horsemen charging flashing sword and glittering spear, host of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end.

They stumble over the dead bodies that are present there. When I think about the dead bodies and the piled up corpses, again, we think about what the Assyrians had done to other cities. Now this is happening to Nineveh itself.

Ashurnasirpal says this: I captured many soldiers alive, one of the cities that he has conquered. The rest of them I burnt. I carried off valuable tribute from them.

I built a pile of live men and heads before the gate. I erected on stakes 700 soldiers before the gates. I raised, destroyed, and turned into ruined hills, the city.

I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. Now the same thing is falling on Nineveh. Nineveh is compared in this passage to a prostitute.

She has enticed and lured the other nations through her wealth and power into an alliance or a relationship with them. Then she has used that enticement to plunder those nations and to destroy them. God will strip her naked and hold her accountable for those sins.

In chapter 3, verses 8 to 13, the sixth oracle against Nineveh compares her to the city of Thebes in Egypt. Again, this was a city that the Assyrians themselves had captured. It was an impregnable, inviolable, secure city.

It was in a very secure position at a curve in the Nile River. There were walls built there that really protected the city against enemy attack. But ultimately that did not prevent the Assyrians from capturing it.

So, the same thing that they did to Thebes is going to now happen to the city of Nineveh. They thought it was invulnerable. It would not be.

Finally, in the last oracle, we have a lament over the fall of Nineveh and the collapse and destruction of the city. One of the things that I find interesting is just all of the metaphors that are heaped and topped on one another as this final passage talks about the destruction of the city. In chapter 3 verse 13, the women that protect the city, they have become like women.

They are afraid and fearful of what is about to happen. The walls and the fortresses, the city of Nineveh itself in verse 12 has become like fig trees. Their fruit is ripe for the picking and they will be shaken and they will fall into the mouth simply and easily of the Babylonians when they shake the tree.

Chapter 3 verse 11, their warriors are like drunk men and they are going to stagger under the devastating destruction that they experience. Verse 15, the fire will devour you, the sword will cut you off. It will devour you like locusts and your enemies will multiply like the grasshopper.

The same images used in the book of Amos, fire and locusts and lions are the same images that are now used in Nahum to talk about the destruction that is going to come upon the Ninevites. It also uses this image of a locust in a different way because it is going to say in verse 16, you increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens. Now, in spite of the fact that your merchants have become as numerous as the stars of the heavens, they are going to be like locusts.

They are going to spread their wings and they are going to fly away. So, the enemy will be like locusts in the way they consume and destroy. The many people and merchants and warriors that are in Nineveh, they will be like locusts who get on the top of the walls and fly away.

All of this is portrayed in seven different speeches with a powerful number of images, the judgment that God is going to bring upon the Assyrians. While we do have to wrestle with the violence that is found in this book, while we do have to struggle with the mystery of the fact that God uses evil nations and wicked armies and their violence to accomplish his purpose, we are ultimately reminded in this passage of the justice of God and that God's justice will come and that God holds nations accountable for their violations of the Noahic covenant. This is not just a history lesson.

This is ultimately a reminder that what has happened or what did happen to Assyria and what did happen to the city of Nineveh is ultimately the judgment that will be brought upon all of the enemies of God and all of the empires and nations throughout history. There's a warning in this passage as well as a history lesson and a reminder to us of the holiness and the justice of God. Ultimately God would bring about this judgment to save his people.

And so, in the midst of this violence and this bloodshed, there is also the hopeful and comforting message, God will rescue, God will deliver his people. And what will follow this terrible time of judgment and violence is the salvation, deliverance of his people and the peace of God's kingdom. There is judgment and salvation in the message of Nahum, just like what we see in the message of the other prophets.

We will look further at some of the implications of the book of Nahum and connect that to the book of Obadiah in our next video as we continue to talk about God's wrath and God's judgment against nations and his enemies.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 22, Micah 6:8 and Nahum.