

Restoring the Majesty of Jacob

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[0 : 00] Psalm 80, we'll be reading the whole chapter. Hear us, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.

Awake your might, come and save us. Restore us, O God, make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. O Lord God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?

You have fed them with the bread of tears. You have made them drink tears by the bowl full. You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.

Restore us, O God Almighty, make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it.

You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the sea, its shoots as far as the river.

[1 : 18] Why have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Bores from the forest ravage it, and the creatures of the field feed on it.

Return to us, O God Almighty. Look down from heaven and see. Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the sun you have raised up for yourself.

Your vine is cut down.

We will be back in Psalm 80, but for now you can turn to Nahum chapter 2. We're continuing in our very short, brief series through the book of Nahum.

We're going to be looking at chapter 2 tonight. One of those very short, minor prophets. If you see Amos, keep going. Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum chapter 2.

[2 : 46] Well, tonight we're going to zero in on two questions that this text raises for us. Two questions that we must unpack and answer together.

And they're questions that were not just for the original recipients of Nahum's oracle, people of Judah, nor are they questions just for the original enemies of God that are focused on in this oracle, the people of Nineveh, that capital city of Assyria.

We're not gathered together tonight for history lessons, so these questions must be for us as well. Because the God of Nahum, who had dealings with Judah, the God of Nahum who had dealings with Assyria centuries ago, meets us here tonight.

He meets us in His Word and He has dealings with us as well. He is the unchanging, ever-present, eternal God.

So the words that are directed to Judah, words that are written about Assyria, are words that are recorded on purpose for our benefit as well. And that means these two questions are just as important for us to answer as they were for anyone else in history.

[4 : 00] So here are those two questions right up front. Question number one, How does the Lord treat those He is against? And then question number two, How does the Lord treat those that He is for?

How does He treat those He's against? And how does He treat those that He is for? Well, let's answer that first question together, which is the bulk of our passage this evening.

How does the Lord treat those He is against? Now the answer here isn't new. We've seen it already in more of a general fashion in chapter one.

We see the answer is, The Lord pours out His wrath on those that He is against. We saw that back in chapter one, verse six. Who can stand before His indignation?

Who can endure the heat of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by Him. So that very broad general statement in chapter one, now we see worked out in more detail here in chapter two.

[5 : 08] We see this vivid picture of what it looks like for God's wrath to be poured out. So three words help us to wrap our minds around this.

Three words that all start with the letter P. The first word is prepare. God calls His enemies, those He is against, to prepare for His coming wrath.

Read with me just verse one of Nahum chapter two. The scatterer has come up against you. Man the ramparts, watch the road, dress for battle, collect all your strength.

So we see from the jump that God is against Nineveh. So when God says that He's against Nineveh, we must remember all of Assyria is in view here.

That entire empire. God says, I am against you. Now that phrase, against you, we must key in on, because it serves as the boundary markers for our passage.

[6 : 11] Meaning we see it here in verse one of chapter two, and then it shows up again in verse 13 of chapter two. Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts.

The Lord is against His enemy. And that here is the nation of Assyria. Now we've seen already in this book of Nahum that God had used Assyria to discipline and to punish the people of Israel for Israel's sin.

Now God is going to deal with Assyria for Assyria's sin. And in a word, this is what He tells them to do. Prepare. Prepare for battle.

You who have attacked so many others, now you prepare to be attacked. Get yourselves in place at the ramparts, the walls of your city.

Watch the road for the advancing enemy army. Dress yourself for battle. Or your translation might say, brace yourself. You could translate that even more literally to say, gird your loins.

[7 : 19] We never say that. And if we do, you are an interesting person. We never say, gird your loins. What is that about? Well, in ancient times, men would wear tunics.

And a tunic is very impractical for any form of running, any kind of combat in warfare. And so they couldn't just wear their tunic for battle. Instead of changing out of it, they didn't bring their gym bags to battle, they would need to modify their tunic.

So they would pull it up through their legs, they would tie it together at the waist, which is your loin area. And what you had now, instead of a tunic, was like shorts, helpful for battle.

All of that to say, God was telling the soldiers of Assyria, prepare for an enemy invasion. Now we can't forget, it is vitally important for us to remember, this enemy invasion is coming at God's sending.

God is the one who is bringing it. It is according to his plan. It is according to his purposes. Just as God had providentially brought the Assyrians to conquer Israel and then to oppress Judah as discipline for their sin.

[8 : 36] So too has God providentially brought the Medes and the Babylonians to wipe out the Assyrian Empire. God uses means to accomplish his sovereign will.

Everything goes according to plan for God. So this invasion of Assyria that Nahum is recording, this invasion will come according to God's plan.

So when God tells Nahum as a mouthpiece, when he tells Assyria through Nahum to prepare for battle, he isn't saying, prepare to battle your fellow man.

Prepare to meet this army of men. He's saying, prepare to meet a holy, righteous God.

So yes, guard the fortress, watch the road, gird your loins, but you Assyria are no match for the Lord himself.

[9 : 37] Your preparation will be in vain because God is coming in judgment and he will not let the wicked go unpunished. Judgment day for Assyria had arrived in God's perfect timing.

Judgment day will arrive for each one of us as well in God's perfect timing. It will come in one of two ways.

Either we will breathe our final breath or we will see the Lord Jesus coming in power on the clouds. How prepared are you for that day when you will see the Lord?

What kind of preparations have you made? What kind of preparations are you perhaps making today? You can have answers ready to give.

You can have all of the reasons laid out for why you lived your life on your terms. You can have your excuses for your sin. You can prepare like a high school senior trying to get into Harvard, but there is only one way to truly be prepared to meet this holy, righteous God.

[10:51] You must be in Christ. You must have Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Any other preparation will be in vain.

Your end will be like that of Nineveh. God, destruction awaits. If you are not in Christ this evening, if you have not turned to Him as your only hope of salvation from the wrath of God for your sins, destruction awaits.

Turn to Christ tonight. You need forgiveness, and He is the only one in whom you find it. Now, for us who are Christians, we will not face God in judgment as Assyria did.

We will find God ready to welcome us into His eternal kingdom because of the shed blood of His Son. But we need to be careful to remember our place before God.

Job forgot. You know Job. Job forgot his place before God. He questioned Him. He, in a sense, demanded answers.

[12:01] I want my hearing. And do you know what God said to Job in chapter 40, verse 7? God said, Dress like a man for action. You know how that could also be translated?

Gird your loins. Now, Job was a righteous man. Job knew God. God was not against Job. God was for Job. And yet God was saying to Job, Prepare to meet a holy, righteous God.

He was going to rebuke Job. He was going to discipline Job in love. So Job had been demanding that audience, and now he was going to get it, and it was not in the way that he had expected.

It wasn't as though the Lord warmly greeted Job and said, You share your thoughts, your complaints with me. I welcome those complaints. Let me hear them. Sit down with me.

Let's have a chat. Now, God spoke out of the whirlwind. That alone tells you the Lord is here to rebuke Job. And the Lord said to him, Dress for action like a man.

[13:08] And he told Job, I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? You tell me.

Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. And of course Job didn't. Job was put to silence.

He was brought low, humbled before the Lord. He said, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. Job had been called to prepare himself to meet the Lord.

And in that meeting, he was brought low. So as Christians, how we relate to God greatly matters.

We too, like Job, can face God's loving discipline if we forget our place.

If we in pride begin to say, God, I think I know better. God, you have some explaining to do. Humble yourself, lest you be humbled by God.

[14:13] So we come into his presence, just as we sang tonight. We come into his presence saying, your will be done, not mine. We come into his presence, not demanding an audience, but overflowing with awe and with wonder that we have an audience with God, that he draws near to us because of Christ, that he inclines his ear toward us because of Christ.

We bring nothing but a humble heart before him. So if you are not in Christ tonight, you though need to be prepared to meet this God.

So if we're to answer that question, how does the Lord treat those he is against? We see first, the Lord calls them to prepare. Now we see the second word, plunder. Prepare to meet God.

And for Nineveh, see your city plundered. Follow along as we begin reading in verse three of Nahum 2. The shield of his mighty men is red.

His soldiers are clothed in scarlet. The chariots come with flashing metal on the day he musters them. The cypress spears are brandished. The chariots race madly through the streets.

[15:30] They rush to and fro through the squares. They gleam like torches. They dart like lightning. He remembers his officers. They stumble as they go. They hasten to the wall.

The siege tower is set up. The river gates are opened. The palace melts away. Its mistress is stripped. She is carried off. Her slave girls lamenting, moaning like doves and beating their breasts.

Nahum is like a pool whose waters run away. Halt, halt, they cry. But none turns back. Plunder the silver. Plunder the gold. There is no end of the treasure or of the wealth of all precious things.

So Nahum here brings us down into Nineveh. And through these events that are yet future for the people of Judah, he paints this picture for us as though it's happening right now.

The enemy is advancing. The road that was to be watched for the enemy is now filled with this enemy marching towards Nineveh. They've arrived in full force.

[16:37] The Medes, the Babylonians, the Scythians, they're here. Their shields, their armor, their weapons are stained with the blood of their defeated foes.

This is striking fear into the heart of the people of Nineveh. And in verse four, we see that they've overrun the settlements that are outside of the city. They've left panic and chaos in their wake.

The chariots are racing through the streets. And then in verse five, the invading army reaches the walls of the city. And the leader of this army, he summons his officers.

It could also be translated, he remembers. Almost giving this impression that the commander of the army is so caught up in the battle that he's forgotten to delegate responsibility.

He is so bloodthirsty that he's forgotten his officers. And when he does delegate to his officers, they're stumbling over one another with eagerness to join in the battle.

[17:36] They run to the walls. They lay siege to the walls. They have their shields over them to protect them from the Assyrians who are likely throwing objects off the wall upon them.

It's an impressive army that has come to attack. But for as impressive as this attacking army is, the destruction of Nineveh doesn't primarily come from the attacking forces of men.

Rather, it's the waters of the river described in verse six. A tributary of the Tigris River flowed through Nineveh. And the attacking army, it seems, has stopped up the water upstream.

And they've let it collect and collect and collect. And now the floodgates are opened so that that water can now come rushing into the city and wipe out everything in its path.

So the palace collapses. The people are captured. And those who aren't captured, they flee. No amount of shouting from the commanding officers can stop these soldiers from deserting.

[18:43] Halt! Halt! They cry. But no one turns back. And so Nineveh, in more than one respect, is like a pool of water that is draining out.

The waters are literally draining from the city and the people are fleeing as well. And then as the city dries, that invading army revels in its victory and takes all of the spoil.

Years and years of Assyria plundering its enemies. Enemies like Israel and Judah. Now that all is given into the hands of another.

This was to be the great city's end. And the history books tell us just of that. They tell us just of what Nahum prophesied even before the fall of Assyria.

Look at the ruin that is to come. This city, once a source of great pride, a place of great splendor and beauty, is going to be destroyed.

[19:44] And that brings us to our third and final word that begins with the letter P. Perish. How does the Lord treat those He is against? Though they prepare, their city and all of their security is plundered and ultimately they perish.

Read with me beginning in verse 10. Desolate. Desolation and ruin. Hearts melt and knees tremble. Anguish is in all loins.

All faces grow pale. Where is the lion's den? The feeding place of the young lions. Oh, where the lion and lioness went. Where his cubs were with none to disturb.

The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled prey for his lionesses. He filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh. Behold, I am against you declares the Lord of hosts and I will burn your chariots in smoke and the sword shall devour your young lions.

I will cut off your prey from the earth and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard. So fear has filled the enemies of God.

[20:56] Their hearts melt. Their knees tremble. That next phrase there in verse 10 the NIV reads bodies tremble. It could also be said in this way anguish is in all their loins.

That should remind us of verse 1. Prepare for action. Brace yourselves. Gird your loins. Those loins that had been girded are now filled with anguish and understandably so.

The city lies in ruins. It's been plundered. It's been pillaged. It's been stripped. All of its worth and value taken. Now what's left? Smoldering ruins.

The black smoke of extinguished fires are just billowing up. And then Nahum mocks the king's household. And this extended metaphor beginning in verse 11.

Like ravenous lions the king and his powerful army had wiped out nations. They had brought the spoils back to Nineveh. His palace was filled with treasures of those he had conquered like a lion filling his den with prey.

[22 : 06] His armory too was filled with weapons and with supplies. He was like this lion enjoying his kill. Now that metaphor makes sense. It is common for great rulers to be thought of as lions.

I mean after all the lion is called the king of the jungle. But these Assyrian kings history tells us especially associated themselves with lions.

So much so that there are reliefs on palace walls that are now in museums. You could see them online. You could see them if you went to these museums where these reliefs show kings of Assyria hunting lions.

And they show them killing lions. It was known that they would hunt them in sports. They would capture them. They would bring them back to the city and they would put them into the arenas. And there in the arenas they would make a show of killing these lions. The kings conquering lions. And then they would call themselves lions.

[23 : 08] As one king of Assyria once said, I am king. I am lord. I am praiseworthy. I am exalted. I am important. I am magnificent.

I am foremost. I am a hero. I am a warrior. I am a lion. I am a lion. Who could face the lion of Assyria?

Nahum says, God can. God is a match for the might of Assyria. And we can't help but think of another lion who is to come.

The lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ himself. One day, every enemy of his will be destroyed. Their dens will be plundered.

Their pride of lions will be put to the sword. Their roars will be silenced. The voice of their messengers heard no more. They will lie silent in the grave.

[24 : 09] And the lion of Judah will roar with triumph. One day, every enemy will be destroyed just as Assyria was. Now for Nahum's original hearers, the people of Judah, this destruction of Nineveh was still future for them as they heard this oracle.

All these verses about Nineveh's destruction as though it were unfolding before their eyes, it was in the future. But it had a very present feel to it. The chariots are racing madly through the streets. The people of Nineveh are fleeing like waters draining from a pool. Our mind's eye can see all of this. And yet, all of these events for Judah lie in the future.

It hadn't happened yet when Nahum spoke these words. We see that in verse 13. Verse 13 transports us back to the present for the people of Judah. And the Lord says this, Behold, I am against you speaking to Nineveh.

And I will burn your chariots in smoke. And the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth.

[25 : 23] And the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard. So this event had not yet happened. And yet, it was as good as done.

Why? Because God had set himself against Nineveh. Because none can stand against the all-powerful, sovereign king over all the nations.

It was as good as done. Isaiah 40, beginning in verse 15, says, Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as the dust of the scales.

Behold, he takes the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him.

They are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. If this is said of the nations, how much more is it also said of the kings of those nations?

[26 : 27] And that's just how Isaiah 40 continues. Verse 23 says, The Lord brings princes to nothing. He makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth when he blows on them and they wither and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

If you are not in Christ tonight, do not think that you can stand before God. If nations are accounted as nothing, if the kings of nations are accounted as nothing, how much are we to be accounted?

If the God of Nahum is not your God, then he is against you. You must see that he is against you because you have set yourself against him.

There are only two realities. We are either in Christ or we are outside of Christ. there is no middle ground. There is no place of neutrality.

[27 : 36] Jesus said, whoever is not with me is against me. So there is no place for saying things like, well, I am just not all that interested in Jesus or I am going to stay out of this.

I have decided religion isn't for me. I am not interested in what the Bible has to say, but it is okay if you are. If you say that, say anything like that, what you are showing is that you do oppose God. You are manning the ramparts of your heart. You are girding your loins. You are collecting all of your spiritual strength, preparing yourself to do battle with the Lord.

And it will always be a losing effort. The enemies of God will ultimately perish. Those that God is against, he shows his wrath towards them.

So that is the answer to the first question. How does the Lord treat those that he is against? Let's consider now the answer to the second question.

[28 : 45] How does the Lord treat those that he is for? If he showed his wrath to those he is against, he shows his goodness to those that he is for. We saw his wrath in chapter 1 on display, verse 6.

We see his goodness on display in chapter 1 as well in verse 7. Look at Nahum 1, verse 7. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.

He knows those who take refuge in him. So that verse in chapter 1 is said in a very general fashion. And now we see it in chapter 2 in a more vivid detail.

Because look at chapter 2, verse 2. For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel.

For plunderers have plundered them and ruined their branches. Just one verse that we had skipped over. In all of the ways that we see how God is against his enemies, that is the main focus of the verses, this verse stands out to us in verse 2.

[29 : 54] Because now he's shifting his attention from those he's against to those that he is for. And in this one verse, we see this wonderful promise of future restoration for Israel.

God's goodness towards Israel, it was wrapped up in that promise. Remember, Assyria had come. They had plundered. They had captured the northern kingdom.

They had literally carried off their wealth, their goods, the very people themselves. The nation was in ruins. The people of Israel confessed this in Nehemiah 9.

Behold, we are slaves this day. In the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins.

They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please and we are in distress. So what did the people of Israel need?

[30 : 59] They needed to be restored. And that's their cry in Psalm 80. The verses that we read as an introduction to the sermon. In Psalm 80, we hear their voices raised saying, restore us, O God of hosts.

Let your face shine that we may be saved. And that refrain is repeated three times through the psalm. Save us. Restore us.

We're beginning in verse 14 of Psalm 80. Turn again, O Lord of hosts. Look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted.

So how was God to bring about this restoration? How is it that He was to restore the splendor of Jacob as Nahum 2 says?

By defeating His enemies. Isn't that what we see being told here in Nahum 2? God's salvation of His people, those He is for, He is for, came through the judgment of His enemies.

[32 : 01] Those He is against. Assyria had to be defeated in order for Israel to be saved. The exalted in pride brought low so that the low, the humble, might be exalted.

That's how God promises to show His goodness to His people here in Nahum. The plunderers will plunder no more. The ones who had brought Israel to ruin will themselves be ruined.

And so in bringing His wrath down upon His enemies, God is showing His goodness to His people. We need to hear these words just as much as Israel.

Because for us who are in Christ here tonight, God is for us. And yet, at one time, His wrath was against us.

We were hell-deserving sinners. God was against us due to our sin. We were His enemies. We deserve the same end that Nineveh met.

[33 : 12] So we need passages like this here in Nahum chapter 2. We need to read even in graphic detail of God's righteous wrath being poured out on Nineveh.

Because it reminds us of just how horrid sin is. It reminds us of just how horrid our sin is. And it reminds us of how harsh a penalty sin merits.

And yet, this shows us nothing of the horrors of hell. The destruction of Nineveh, physical death that are shown here, pale in comparison to what is to come for those outside of Christ.

Eternal damnation. That is what we deserved. And yet, we've been saved from that. Because Christ took the penalty for our sins. Christ bore the wrath that we deserved.

So God is now for you because His wrath was poured out against His Son. Turn over to Romans chapter 8. Perhaps the most well-known chapter of Scripture that teaches us this truth that God is for us.

[34 : 30] If He is for us, who then can be against us? Romans chapter 8. We are going to look briefly at the beginning of Romans 8 and at the end.

So Romans 8 verse 1 begins with these words. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

No condemnation. No guilty verdict. God is not against you. Why is that? Because in our place condemned Christ stood.

Romans 8 begins with no condemnation in Christ and then it ends with the same theme. No condemnation. Look at verse 34. It circles back to this truth.

It puts it to us as a question. Who is to condemn? And the clearly implied answer is no one. Why?

[35 : 34] Because Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us.

There is only one who can truly condemn to hell. Satan cannot condemn someone to hell. The world cannot condemn someone to hell.

No man can condemn another man to hell. Only God can condemn. But Christ stood condemned in our place and he rose again and now he is at the right hand of his father interceding for us.

He's right there. He's not standing far off shouting to God his father hoping that he can hear him over the muffled sounds of a crowd.

He's right there at his father's right hand. He has his father's ear. His father is listening intently to him. Here are your people.

[36 : 34] You are for them. Graciously give them all things. Show your goodness towards them. You are for them because their sins are paid in full.

So we can be sure God will never condemn those who are his. That's what verse 34 teaches us. No charge can be brought against God's elect that would bring about the verdict of guilty.

No surprise reversal to come. No new evidence that warrants new charges. There's no double jeopardy with God. You will not be put back on trial for your offenses.

Not today, not tomorrow, not on the day of judgment. The price has been paid. It's been paid in full. If God is for you now, he will never be against you because he did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

That truth must never grow old or stale to our hearts. As though we know it or we've mastered it, we're ready to move on from it, to move beyond it.

[37 : 50] The God who was once against us, whose face was hidden from us, who counted us as his enemies, that same God is now for us, his face shines on us, and he counts us as his beloved people.

Because Christ was condemned in our place, the judgment of God fell on him and not on us. So if we should never move on from remembering this truth and rejoicing in our God, so too should we never move on from singing our praises to him, from bringing our praises to him and laying them as tribute at his feet.

How deserving he is, how good he has been to us undeserving rebels as we are. Let's pray together. Our heavenly father, we bring you now our praises.

We enter into your courts with thanksgiving. We come with glad hearts singing our praises to you for you have been so very good to us. You have made us to be your people undeserving as we were.

You are for us. Your face shines upon us. We pray, that we would have many thoughts of you even this week remembering that you are for us. Sustain us, we pray, give us grace for every trial that comes, remembering that you are a good heavenly father, that you look after us, you care for us, you shepherd us, and you bring us to our eternal home with you.

[39 : 24] We pray all of these things in Christ's name. Amen. Numbers 6, 24-26, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. We are dismissed.