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Nahum / Sovereignty; Humility; Pride / Nahum 2

Series Number: 2

Readings:

- Nahum 2

- 1 Peter 2:4-10

- Luke 1:46-55

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®

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# Introduction

## Introduction Proper

In our old house, we were privileged to look after our landlord's cats. Well one Banjo, the black and white tuxedo cat - caught a mouse while we were trying to eat our breakfast.

Of course he didn't just kill the poor mouse and be done with it. He played with it for a good while first. Our kids had never seen this before, so of course they all ran to the window to get a good look.

And it was very hard for them to focus on eating their breakfast, which is what Verity and I wanted them to do, rather than squishing their faces up against the glass being mentally scarred by the violent scene outside.

But you know it can be a bit like that for us living in this world, can't it? We see horrible, violent, and troubling things in the news, we see countries invading other countries, we see prices rising everywhere and it can all be a bit much sometimes. Fear and anxiety grip us - what if *that* happens *here*? It can be hard to focus on what God wants us to do.

We can imagine the ANZACS also felt quite fearful and anxious as they sailed to Gallipoli and other places where they risked their lives for the peace we enjoy today.

And at first glance, it seems even worse with our sermon passage, [Nahum 2](#)! It describes a violent invasion in some detail - its not a peaceful passage at all! If we put ourselves in the place of the invaded, it can feel terrifying!

Well do you know that's exactly the *opposite* effect its supposed to have on you? In fact, get this, [Nahum 2](#) is supposed to mainly be a *comforting* passage for God's people! But how?

Well here's what it shows us: God is sovereign above every empire, oppressor, and world event. He lifts up the humble and casts down the proud. So we humble ourselves under the sovereign God who reverses human fortunes.

## Review

Before we go into our first point, let's quickly review last week's sermon.

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We're in the middle of a 3-week series on the Old Testament book of Nahum, written by Nahum the prophet around 615 BC. The great world power at the time was the vicious and powerful empire of Assyria.

Israel was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, the little green blob below Israel on the map.

Assyria had already destroyed Northern Israel. They'd tried to invade Judah as well, and they'd subjugated them under heavy financial pressure.

So God speaks through Nahum the prophet, and you'll notice that he speaks a message of judgment *to* Assyria. But really, we know the main audience is *Judah*. You see, God wanted to comfort his people who were under Assyrian oppression (Timmer 2020, 44-45).

And last week we saw that our loving God is an avenger, full of wrath and judgment. And even though that seems to contradict him being a God of love, it *actually* fits right into his loving nature, because he cares enough to do something about evil and rescue his people.

So that was [Nahum 1](#), let's now look at [Nahum 2](#).

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## The Pride of Assyria

# State the Point

To start with, let's look at the pride of Assyria.

## Show from the Bible/Explain

Now of course, I'm a dad, so I love a good pun. I mean pride, as in arrogance, but I *also* mean pride, as in a group of lions!

See the Assyrians sent out a lot of propaganda, and it seems they thought quite a lot of themselves.

Their kings talked about themselves as shepherds, defending their people *from* lions. But they also talked about *themselves* as lions, raging at their enemies, rampaging and violent in battle.

That's why you see a lot of lion imagery from verses 11-13 - Nahum is using their propaganda against them (Timmer 2020, 49-50, 139-141). But more on that in our next point.

The Assyrian kings also talked about themselves as a *flood*. The king was like an overwhelming deluge of water coming upon his enemies in battle, unstoppable, unbeatable, and he wipes them all out.

That's why you see some water and flood imagery in verses 6-8. Again, Nahum is using their propaganda against them (Timmer 2020, 129-132).

We also see in verse 9 that the Assyrians had plundered gold, silver, and endless treasures from many ancient civilisations. And they were pretty happy with themselves about that too (Timmer 2020, 135-136)!

## Apply

But although this all seems so blatantly proud and arrogant, so hostile and violent, it isn't actually uncommon. You see it in pretty much every ancient and modern empire, you see it across history and culture.

In fact, the root of arrogance in Assyria's kings is in all of us - but we don't like to see it.

Assyria's kings wanted to believe they were mighty and sovereign over the ancient world. And you can see that attitude in many world leaders today. A man called Lord Acton once said that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (Wikipedia 2026, "John Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton")

But why is it that power corrupts humans so easily?

Its because we're *all* already proud. It isn't that power corrupts, it just brings out what's already inside us! Unlike the Assyrian kings, though, most of us just don't get as many opportunities for power, so it stays more hidden.

You see we all want sovereignty, even over others to some degree. We want to rule our own lives, we want things our way, and we don't like anyone telling us what to do.

A man named Greg Koukl once said "the most difficult calisthenic is to bow the knee."

When things aren't going our way, we find ways to take control. Sometimes we're overt about it - we bully, we shout, we get violent, we steal. But sometimes we're more subtle. We emotionally manipulate, we deceive, we hide information, or we get other people to do it for us.

When we succeed, we become arrogant, and it always ends up hurting others. When we fail, we get angry.

So when we come to the Bible, and we see God's moral law, even though we *know* its good, we don't want to obey it. Our pride stops us from submitting to it because it requires us to set aside our sovereignty.

## The Plunderers Plundered

### State the Point/Explain

But what happens if we don't? Well, let's look at the Plunderers Plundered. We learn from Nahum that God humbles the proud and casts them down in judgment.

### Show from the Bible

Now neither Nahum nor God delights in violence, so why is this passage so detailed? Well, its for good reason.

Assyria struck terror into God's people, Judah, for decades, even centuries. They terrorised many other societies, and they tried to invade Jerusalem, but they failed because God rescued them.

**Nahum 2:10 NIV**

<sup>10</sup> She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale.

This passage is talking about the Assyrian capital city, Nineveh, and it seems designed to strike terror back into Assyrian hearts.

But remember its mainly written to *Judah*. So God is showing his people that the very terror Assyria wielded over other people, he was going to inflict on *them*.

Now notice v1 - “An attacker advances against you, Nineveh.” Chapter 1 describes God, as a warrior, so we know this describes him. But it also refers to the Babylonian army God would use to destroy Nineveh, Assyria’s capital. This ended up happening a few years after Nahum was written, in 612 BC.

Now look at v3 - the invading force is decorated in red. Interestingly, the Babylonians were known for wearing red, so this is an excellent predictive prophecy here isn’t it? (Bailey 1999, 202)

But notice the vivid descriptions Nahum goes into. Its like reading a report of a battle that’s already happened! That’s deliberate. Its meant to show Judah that Assyria, their great enemy, is 100% definitely going to fall. It is set in stone, written out in detail (Timmer 2020, 138).

This shows us God’s sovereignty, doesn’t it? He predicts what’s going to happen because he’s planned it all out.

He knew the Assyrians were going to be awful and oppressive, and he knew the Babylonians were going to overthrow them.

For anyone living during that time, these are momentous, unpredictable, life-changing events. For Judah, this was hugely significant.

But none of it was a surprise to God. He is absolutely in control of every circumstance.

And since God is in control, what does he do with his power?

Well, earlier we read in Luke:

**Luke 1:51–52 NIV**

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

God lifts up the poor, humble, and oppressed, but he casts down the proud and arrogant.

In Nahum, the powerful Assyrians are being crushed. The mighty are being invaded. The plunderers are being plundered.

In [Nahum 2:3](#), we see the terrifying Babylonian army. But verses 4 and 5 describe the hapless Assyrian defenders - the chariots that they were known for are madly, aimlessly rushing about, and the soldiers are stumbling around.

Just like they captured and exiled other nations such as Northern Israel, Assyria is being exiled here. It's their turn to mourn.

Although the Assyrians described themselves as a flood, in [Nahum 2:6](#) Nahum describes Nineveh's dams being broken and water threatening the royal palace.

Although the Assyrian kings described themselves as fierce lions, in vv11 Yahweh asks "where now is the lions' den" - Nineveh? And he says in v13 "the sword will devour your young lions."

The pride has fallen. Assyria is judged.

But at the start of v13 we hear the most terrifying words of all: "I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty."

## Apply

Those are scary words. We all have the root of pride within us, just like the Assyrian kings. We, too, hoard our wealth and selfishly deprive others to prop ourselves up. We try to be sovereign over ourselves and others.

That makes us the proud that God judges and humbles. God judged the Assyrians, and history proved Nahum's prophetic word to be accurate and effective.

So when we hear "I am against you", *our* hearts should melt, *our* knees should give way, *our* bodies should tremble. Can we stand against the judgment of God?

If you know that's you this morning, and you want to escape that judgment, listen on a little longer to hear what you should do.

But for those of us who are in Christ here this morning, we can take comfort in God's sovereignty. We don't have to shake and shudder at what we watch on the news - each new war, disease, and global event that threatens to take down civilisation.

God is in control. He has planned out every event, and none of it is a surprise to him. We can trust him.

## The Pride of Israel

# State the Point

Let's talk now about the Pride of Israel - and we'll learn that God restores the fortunes of his humble people.

## Show from the Bible

Let's look at:

**Nahum 2:2 NIV**

<sup>2</sup> The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.

This verse is talking about Judah, God's people. The Assyrian oppressors have plundered them, they've been humbled, but now God is going to restore them to their former glory.

## Explain

But what about us? We're not Jews living in Palestine and we don't face Assyrian oppression, right?

Well we, the church, are God's people now. We saw in our reading in 1 Peter that through Christ we are "God's special possession". In fact, the Bible says the church is Jesus' bride - we are incredibly special to him.

To be a true part of his church, though, requires great humility. Becoming a Christian means laying all our own claims to goodness aside as *worthless*. We confess that we have that root of pride in us, that we have lived for our own sovereignty and not God's, and we deserve his judgment.

We accept salvation as a free gift from God - God gives us his *own* righteousness, a righteousness earned by Christ.

We commit to following Jesus - the words he uses is that we *take up our cross*. Just as Jesus was crucified for us, we must be prepared to endure persecution, suffering, and hate for our faith.

Jesus' disciples were mocked, pursued, and killed for their faith.

The early church was filled with sufferers: Polycarp, **Felicitas**, Ignatius, and the many Christians that fled to the catacombs.

Later, you have Jan Huss, Wycliffe and the Lollards, and the martyrs of the Reformation.

Today, Christians suffer in Iran, North Korea, China, Nigeria, Indonesia, and more, and we're even humiliated and mocked on TV and in workplaces and schools here in Australia, in Adelaide. I know I have been.

God's people have always been oppressed, humbled, and harassed. It doesn't always *feel* like we're God's chosen people, his special possession, does it?

But God casts down the proud, but he also lifts up the humble.

And he promises that one day, another lion will enter the scene. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation chapter 5, he is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah". That Lion is Jesus Christ, the *true* king. And it says "he has triumphed".

He is going to come back and rid the earth of all evil, and he will restore his people, his bride, in a new kingdom in a renewed world.

**Revelation 21:2-4 NIV**

<sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [that's the church]

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

<sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

We must humble ourselves to enter that kingdom. We are humbled now as we *wait* for that kingdom. But one day we will be an empire that can never be invaded because God himself, the divine warrior, will defend us. Now we are humbled, but soon he will lift us up.

## Illustrate

Back in school, I entered a robotics competition - I had to program a robot to follow a little racetrack using little sensors on the front.

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A little like that one.

Despite lots of hard work, my robot always waddled much slower than everyone else's.

So when the day for the big robot race arrived, I was a bit nervous! The first racetrack was easier for the robot to follow - the black line it had to follow wasn't too bendy. Well of course everyone else's robots flew ahead of mine. Everyone was laughing at how slow mine was.

Then we tried the second racetrack. It had heaps of bendy lines in it, so it was much harder for the robots to follow. Well, again, their robots were much quicker than mine, and they raced ahead. But theirs got all lost and confused, and they had to take them off the track!

But my little robot kept going. Slowly, slowly, limping along, trying to follow that wriggly black line. But finally, it inched across the finish line! It was the *only* robot finish the hard racetrack! So I ended up winning the prize!

Just like me and my little robot, God's church is humbled now. We are afflicted and oppressed. But one day we will win - Christ is coming back to restore us.

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## Apply

So how do we respond to a God that is completely sovereign, a God that casts down the proud but lifts up the humble?

We humble ourselves and follow Jesus - even into persecution. We give up on our own sovereignty, and we submit to his commands.

And we give up on the idea that we can earn our way to him by our good deeds. Rather, we trust him to forgive our misdeeds and trust that he gives us a righteousness, a goodness that comes from *him*.

We come to him empty-handed, trusting that he will lift us up.

## Conclusion

The book of Revelation introduces Jesus as a lion, so at first we might think of him as just another selfish king like the king of Assyria. But *immediately* afterwards it says "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne..."

Why do we hear about a lion, but then see a lamb?

Because Christ is *not* like the arrogant king of Assyria. He is not violent, oppressive, or a selfish hoarder.

He is humble. He is loving. He is gentle.

And get this. Because we have the same root of pride as the Assyrian king, we deserve the judgment that Nahum prophesies for him.

But Jesus is the lamb that was *slain* - he willingly died on a cross. Why? To suffer the devastating judgment that we deserved when God says to us, "I am against you". Our judgment was poured out on Christ.

*That's* why God can forgive us. *That's* why he can give us his righteousness - because Jesus was slain for our sin and pride.

Our king casts down the proud and lifts up the humble. And our king sacrifices himself for his people.

Is he not the true lion, the true king worth following? Is he not worth *all* our devotion, all our worship, and *all* the suffering we endure until he returns?

Whatever we see on the news, whatever happens to us in this life pales in comparison with the kingdom he bought for us with his own blood. We need not stress and worry - rather, we trust his sovereignty, hope in the kingdom to come, and humble ourselves before our great God.

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