



Journey to a
**Courageous
Calling**

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Journey to a Courageous Calling (ESV® Edition)

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Preface

Jonah and Nahum were both Israelite prophets sent to warn the city of Nineveh about the coming wrath of God. Beyond that, these books could not be more different.

One of the challenges of teaching through the book of Jonah is people's familiarity with the story. There are so many studies and sermons available that it seems as if there is nothing new to say. However, one of the things people appreciate about our *Journeys* is the interactive format and simple teaching style. So, I decided to take a fresh read through the book, look at the best commentaries, read a lot of ancient history, and synthesize it all together in our simple arrangement of study.

On the other hand, Nahum is the complete opposite. While there are some good commentaries, the number of sermons and study guides are sparse indeed. I had trouble finding a single sermon preached on the book. During this "journey," you will discover why modern preachers mostly skip over Nahum.

All this makes for a fascinating study, comparing the two prophets and the messages they preached. Along the way, we get to know the LORD God in a deeper way.

As always, these studies are a team effort. Thank you, Pamela, Virginia, Martha, Carolyn, and Ashly. Each of your fingerprints are on this book that will be used in homes and churches all over the world.

Peace and hope,

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“...whenever you hear a
word from my mouth,
you shall give them
warning from me.”

Ezekiel 3:17



1. Charting Our Journey

Introduction to Jonah and Nahum

The two prophets, Jonah and Nahum, each delivered messages of God’s coming wrath to the great city of Nineveh. The first message resulted in deliverance. The second message resulted in destruction. In our study of these two prophets, we will see how a **Holy God** uses **hesitant messengers** to warn **hapless sinners**. This will be a *Journey to a Courageous Calling*.

Preachers preach about salvation. And they should! Most Sunday sermons revolve around the subject of salvation. Yet, most preachers rarely explain exactly what we must be saved from. Jesus made it very plain. What does our Savior say we sinners must be saved from in the following verse?

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not _____ the Son shall not see life, but the _____ of God remains on him. (John 3:36)

How does the apostle Paul explain our salvation in Romans 5:9?

Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the _____ of _____.

In short, we sinners must be saved from the *wrath of God* on Judgment Day. This was true in ancient times and is true today.

We usually tell the story of Jonah in children’s classes. On a basic level, it is a fun, fascinating narrative. That’s why everyone remembers the plot. However, we should not leave Jonah on the children’s bookshelf. Only when a mature Christian meditates on the details of the story is the fuller message revealed.

As mentioned earlier, Jonah and Nahum’s books describe the interactions of a holy God, hesitant messengers, and hapless sinners. Most Christians, like you and me, can be described as “hesitant

messengers.” Yet, each one of us was once a “hapless sinner.” So why do we hesitate sharing God’s love and message with our lost family, friends, and neighbors?

One goal of this study is to lessen the common Christian’s hesitancy for preaching the Gospel to their community. To be saved, hapless sinners must be warned of the coming wrath of a Holy God. Fill in the blanks of the following verse.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not _____? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never _____? And how are they to hear without someone _____? (Romans 10:14)

Let’s begin by answering **three** general questions about these two books: **Who is this Holy God? Who are these hesitant messengers?** and, **Who are these hapless sinners?**

First...

Who is this “Holy God”?

Both Jonah and Nahum call this Holy God by the same name—“Lord.” In most English translations, this name is sometimes spelled *Lord* and other times *LORD*. This is not a typo. The Hebrew word אֲדֹנָי (Adonai) is translated *Lord*, meaning “ruler and owner.” The Hebrew word יְהוָה (Yahweh) is translated *LORD*. This is the unique name of the God of the Israelites.

In Exodus 3, God calls Moses to be His prophet at the “burning bush.” He commands Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Moses asks God: “*If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’*” (3:13). How does God answer the question “What is your name?” in Exodus 3:14a?

The LORD God is the great I AM, who has no beginning or end. But there is more to this Holy LORD God...

What is the dominion of the LORD, according to Jonah 1:9?

Now, let's examine the character of this Holy God. Fill in the blanks of the following verses from *Jonah* and *Nahum*.

... for I knew that you are a _____ God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in _____ love, and relenting from disaster (Jonah 4:2d).

The LORD is _____, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he _____ those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete _____ of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into _____ (Nahum 1:7-8).

This Holy God's name is LORD (Yahweh). He has no beginning or end. He created and rules the sea and land. He is patient and loving. He will protect those who take refuge in Him. But He will utterly destroy all those who stubbornly oppose Him. Psalm 2 describes the LORD's relationship to human nations—

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us (2:1-3).

What is God's response to the kings of the earth (Psalm 2:4)?

This is the Holy LORD God who Jonah and Nahum are writing about. Now, the second question...

Who are these “hesitant messengers”?

Jonah’s name means “dove.” He lived in a small village near Nazareth from around 800 to 750 BC. Nahum’s name means “comforter.” He is called an Elkoshite, but the location of his home is unknown. He lived from around 700 to 600 BC. Though they lived about one hundred years apart, these two men were both called by the LORD to deliver a message to the city of Nineveh.

God chose these ancient prophets to deliver His messages. The Hebrew word נָבִיא (nuh-BEE) translated *prophet* means “one who is called to speak, or a spokesperson.” By God’s direct revelation, these prophets predicted events, proffered counsel, and proclaimed judgments. God gives a clear job description of a prophet in Ezekiel 3:17. Fill in the blanks of that verse:

Son of man, I have made you a _____ for the house of Israel. Whenever you _____ a word from my mouth, you shall give them _____ from _____.

A *watchman* was assigned to a high lookout and yelled out to the people when an enemy approached. Likewise, a prophet was assigned to high calling and yelled out when the judgment of God approached. This is why people were often afraid when they saw a prophet approaching. How did the people of Bethlehem respond when Samuel entered their community (1 Samuel 16:4b)?

This is why true prophets were often avoided by people and lived lonely lives. Kings often dismissed God’s prophets who were moved by God’s Spirit and instead listened to false prophets moved by political winds. Political incorrectness caused prophets to be imprisoned, mocked, and even killed. Ironically, this persecution came primarily from God’s people, not Gentiles.

The prophets Jonah and Nahum were chosen by God and given a message for the Gentile people living in Nineveh. Fill in the blanks in the verses below that highlight God’s message:

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and _____ shall be _____!” (Jonah 3:4)

The LORD has given commandment about you: “No more shall your _____ be perpetuated; from the house of your _____ I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your _____, for you are _____.” (Nahum 1:14)

Both potent prophecies warned that God was about to unleash His wrath on the “hapless sinners” of Nineveh.

This leads us to our third question...

Who are these “hapless sinners”?

God sent these prophets to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were named for their national god Assur--a god of power and war. Therefore, Assyrians are famous for their armies, violence, and oppression. How is the arrogance of Nineveh described in Zephaniah 2:15a?

Historians tell us the ancient Assyrians organized one of the first professional militaries and armed it with iron weapons. Fueled by a warfare-honoring religion, it’s easy to see how the Assyrians became a fierce world power. They were equally feared and hated by their subjects. The dominance of their empire went up and down for 700 years (1300 BC to 605 BC). Researchers know these details because of large archeological discoveries found in the city of Nineveh. The most famous of these are displayed in the British

Museum. (For links to articles and websites, see references at the end of this study.)

From Scripture, we know Israel experienced the fierceness and oppression of the Assyrians on several occasions. Anyone who refused to surrender to the Assyrians was tortured and put to death. Those who did surrender were forced to pay high taxes. How did King Menahem of Israel convince the Assyrians to spare his kingdom, according to 2 Kings 15:19-20?

This growing Assyrian oppression squeezed tighter and tighter around Israel's borders. Finally, in 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel (not Judah). As they conquered the fortified cities of Israel, the leading citizens were carried off into captivity in foreign lands. What else was done, causing Israel's hatred toward Assyria to grow (2 Kings 17:24)?

By the time Nahum is born, Israel is in complete collapse—every city conquered, many Israelites exiled, and foreigners relocated into their homes. So, how can we call these powerful Assyrian people “hapless sinners?” Here is how King David explained it:

“Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright” (Psalm 20:6–8).



Help for Living Your Courageous Calling

Recently, a friend of mine said fear of hell led to his false conversion as a child. He was scared by a “hellfire” sermon and thought “getting saved” required: walking the aisle, praying a prayer, and getting baptized. So, he did those things. Thinking he was “saved,” he went on about his life with no real change. Several years later, he realized he had never understood the true Gospel and only then was able to have a “true conversion.”

Fear of God’s coming wrath is a good thing and can lead people to listen carefully to the Gospel message. However, when fear of God’s wrath gets people’s attention, we must then share with them the Gospel of Jesus. Read the following verses and answer the questions below.

Jesus said: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”* (Luke 9:23–24).

How can a preacher warn about the reality of God’s coming judgment while also clearly sharing the message of God’s grace?

How should meditating on the coming wrath of God motivate us to share our faith with “hapless sinners?”



Now the word of the
LORD came...

Jonah 1:1

