

Nahum 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Analysis

Nahum balances God's wrath with His patience: "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." The Hebrew YHWH erekh appayim ugdol-koach venaqreh lo yenaqqeh YHWH besupah uvise'arah darko ve'anah avaq raglav (וְהַתֵּה אָרָךُ אֱפִים וְגָדְלֵכָם בְּנֵקָה לֹא יָנַקֵּה וְהַתֵּה בְּסֻפָּה) reveals God's character governing His justice.

"Slow to anger" (erekh appayim, אָרָךُ אֱפִים literally means "long of nostrils"—the Hebrew idiom for patience (delayed breathing associated with anger). God doesn't react impulsively but waits patiently for repentance. This explains the century between Jonah's ministry (resulting in Nineveh's temporary repentance, c. 760 BC) and Nahum's announcement of irreversible judgment (c. 650 BC). God gave Nineveh time, but they returned to violence.

"Great in power" (ugdol-koach) uses koach (כַּח), strength or might. God's patience isn't weakness but strength under control. "Will not at all acquit the wicked" (venaqreh lo yenaqqeh) uses emphatic Hebrew construction (infinitive absolute + finite verb) meaning "will certainly not clear the guilty." God's patience has limits; unrepentant wickedness will be punished.

"The LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm" (besupah uvise'arah darko) depicts theophany—God's visible manifestation in natural forces. Supah

(הַרְסָס) is whirlwind or tempest; se'arah (שָׁעָרָה) is storm. God controls these forces, using them to accomplish His purposes. "The clouds are the dust of his feet" (ve'anah avaq raglav) presents majestic imagery: what seems vast to us (storm clouds) is merely dust kicked up by God's feet—emphasizing His transcendent greatness.

Historical Context

Nahum prophesied between 663 BC (after Assyria's conquest of Thebes, mentioned in 3:8) and 612 BC (before Nineveh's fall). For over a century, Assyria had terrorized the ancient Near East with brutal military campaigns. They destroyed Israel's northern kingdom (722 BC) and nearly conquered Judah during Hezekiah's reign (701 BC). Assyrian inscriptions boast of horrific atrocities—impaling victims, burning cities, deporting entire populations. Nahum announces God's judgment against Nineveh for their violence and cruelty. Unlike Jonah's earlier message that brought Nineveh to temporary repentance (c. 760 BC), Nahum declares judgment is now irreversible. The prophecy was precisely fulfilled in 612 BC when Babylon and Media destroyed Nineveh so completely that its location was lost for over 2,000 years.

Nahum demonstrates God's sovereign justice over nations—He judged Israel for covenant unfaithfulness through Assyria, then judged Assyria for exceeding their mandate with excessive cruelty. The book assures God's people that He sees oppression and will vindicate them. While fierce in judgment against the wicked, God remains 'a stronghold in the day of trouble' for those who trust Him (1:7).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Nahum 1:3 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי לֹא יָנַצֵּחַ הָיָה אֶרְאָה אֶפְרַיִם וְגַדּוֹל כִּי כִּי הָיָה אֶנְצַדֵּחַ הָיָה לֹא יָנַצֵּחַ
The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and acquit H3808 acquit H5352

H3068 H750 H639 H1419 H3581 H5352 H5352

וַיֵּצֵא יְהָוָה בְּסֻרְעָה וּבְשָׁעַרְתָּה וְדַרְכֵי יְהָוָה וְאֶלְעָנָן הָיָה
The LORD in the whirlwind and in the storm hath his way and the clouds H6051

H3068 H5492 H8183 H1870 H6051

אֲבָדָה כְּגָלִים
are the dust of his feet

H80 H7272

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 147:5 (References Lord): Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.

Psalms 104:3 (Parallel theme): Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:

Nehemiah 9:17 (Parallel theme): And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.

Psalms 145:8 (References Lord): The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

Psalms 103:8 (References Lord): The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

James 1:19 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

Isaiah 66:15 (References Lord): For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

Job 9:4 (Parallel theme): He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?

Zechariah 9:14 (References Lord): And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.

Numbers 14:18 (References Lord): The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.