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The Vengeance Of The Lord

Let's turn to the Book of Nahum. Nahum addresses one of the forms of the so-called problem of evil. So each time we meet we'll do a little work with the problem of evil and then we'll go to the verse-by-verse. It's a very prominent objection to the Christian faith today and I hope you don't relegate this to simply a problem that relates to unbelievers and how I answer unbelievers, how I do apologetics. We shouldn't be naïve, we may be Christians but we still have the flesh and if you've faced a suffering situation then you know this problem can rear its ugly head in your own soul. And so I hope our answer to the problem of evil can be applied personally to the evil and suffering we face.

But most of our discussion will revolve around the challenge of the unbelieving world. It doesn't do any good to learn the Bible if you can't see how it applies to the conflict with the world. You can memorize all the verses you want but if you don't see how it applies to the real world around you then it's no use. It's like someone putting a shovel in your hand but you don't have a clue what to do with it. It's a problem I see Christians face when they learn the Scriptures; they don't have a clue so far as what's going on in the world around them how to apply it. And the reason is partly due to the education system. The education system has trained us to isolate faith from knowledge and these are two spheres. Faith, that's something out there, something mystical, something that has no evidence, you just believe it, that's your private religious beliefs, and on the other hand we have knowledge, that's something down here, something real, something that is backed by evidence, that's something we know, that's public scientific fact and these two are said to operate in different spheres. What this separation does is separates our faith from the real world around us. Then we go out into the real world with this idea, because pastors are just as bad as the secular people, they've

bought into this dichotomy of faith and knowledge, and rather than correct it they teach it. They are part of the problem and their people go out in the world and they don't know how to talk to the world, they don't know how to communicate the gospel, they don't see how all the little religious beliefs really make a hill of beans difference in the real world. Everything is compartmentalized. And what Satan has done here is very shrewd because it's cut us off from the world; it's cut us off from carrying out the Great Commission. How can you share the gospel and actually communicate it if you've got faith separated from knowledge?

So I hope you get from my ministry here that Christianity does not separate faith from knowledge. Faith is not some I hope so kind of thing and I hope so despite the facts that surround me. Faith is looking at the facts and listening to God's explanation of the facts and being convinced that His explanation is true knowledge. We're saying I'm convinced that God has spoken truly regarding any and all facts concerning Himself as Creator and His creation. This is knowledge. And this opens up everything because it says that Christianity is the only true knowledge, it encompasses every fact. We can allow no fact to be interpreted autonomously or independently from God's interpretation of the fact. Every fact is what it is by virtue of what God says it is. And so we can investigate every area of life. Christianity is not just another religion, it's a revelation of the Creator about His creation. And so we are in a conflict, open conflict with the world over; not the facts, but the interpretation of the facts that is proffered. Everybody shares the same facts, but everybody does not share the same interpretation of the facts. God has His interpretation which is knowledge, and man has his interpretation which is imagination. So this brings the gospel into conflict with the world at every point. And so we ought to be bringing every fact and every interpretation of every fact to bear testimony to the One with whom we have to do. So we have to come out and learn how to dialogue with the great ideas and demonstrate that only Christianity has an answer, this isn't maybe they have a few answers, maybe they got a few things right and we're just going to add a few more things to what they already got right. Christianity is not a tack on. Christianity is the only answer; it has exclusive rights to the truth. So if that's the case then any non-Christian system has no answer, no truth. And so our role when someone comes after us is to make them give an answer, make them give a defense, without borrowing from Christianity, make them do it from within their own belief system, and push them and push them and

push them to give an answer until they either refuse to be pushed any further, because they see where it logically leads, and they're unwilling to go there, or they admit they don't have an answer and they ask you for the answer. And if they're asking you then by that point you've dialogued enough with this person to know how to give them the gospel. We're not using the technique of ramming, cramming and jamming the gospel down people's throats. Some people think that's their responsibility in life; to ram, cram and jam. People don't genuinely come to Christ through the ram, cram and jam method. People come to Christ when they realize they have a need only He can provide. So our dialogue has to generate in people's minds that they don't have it all together, that in fact they don't have anything together, and when they realize the faulty nature of their ideas then you've created a void, or God the Holy Spirit has. He's created a void in their soul and they see their need and they're hungry for an answer. You don't put food down in front of full people, you put food down in front of empty people. So you empty them of all their folly and then you fill them with the gospel. 95% of it is just getting people to realize they're hungry. So we'll have a few words to say each week about the problem of evil and how the world doesn't have an answer, the grass is not greener on the other side.

This week let's just spend a few minutes introducing some vocabulary because vocabulary is a tool for understanding. Vocabulary words are like keys that unlock understanding and so if you don't have the keys you don't get the understanding. So we always want to make sure we're understanding the terms being used lest we misunderstand.

The buzz word you want to key in on, that goes around in academic circles and debate halls, that describes this problem is *theodicy*. Theodicy comes from two Greek words *theos* meaning "God" and *dike* meaning "justice." So it means God's justice but what these people are really aiming at is how do you justify the existence of God and evil? If you have a God over here who is all loving and all powerful, how do you on the other hand explain the existence of evil? I can see how we could have one or the other. But seeing that evil clearly exists I don't see how the God you're talking about can exist simultaneously? So how do you justify your claim that God is all good and all powerful and yet we have all this evil down here? So theodicy is dealing with a justification, an explanation for God and evil. And so that's a little vocabulary word you want to know if you get in discussions about this or you do a little reading or you

listen to a debate, you'll hear that word *theodicy*, understand it has to do with a justification for the existence of God and evil.

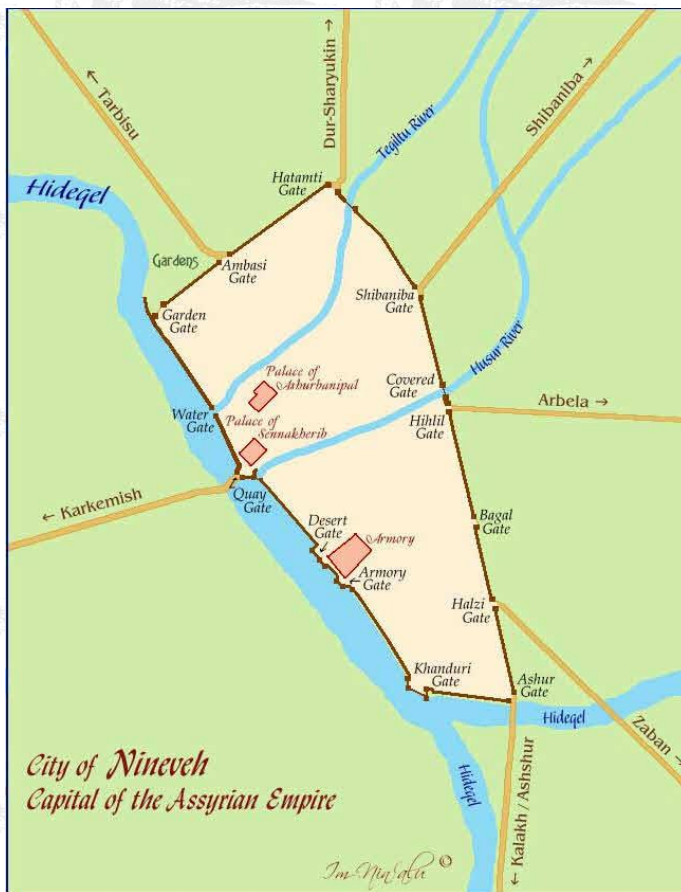
Alright, let's turn to the verse by verse. We've already seen that the northern kingdom of Israel has gone into Captivity to the Assyrians, now the southern kingdom of Judah, and the house of David are under the thumb of Assyria and Assyria's arrogance has worked out into tremendous evil, to the point they were thematic in their warfare. They'd cut heads off and pile them at the gate, they'd make the women carry their husbands heads for hundreds of miles, they'd pin people to the ground and skin them alive like animals, that's the kind of evil Judah was facing on the eve of Nahum's writing and they were crying out to God.

In verse 1 let's make some observations. First, **The oracle of Nineveh**. The word for **oracle** can also mean "burden," and we said that what it communicates is the idea of heaviness, and so something heavy is coming upon **Nineveh**, and as we read the rest of the book we see the something heavy is God's wrath. God is going to judge Nineveh. Second, it's **The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite**. Nahum wrote it; we don't know much about Nahum. We know he's of Elkosh but we don't know if Elkosh is his home town or a family name. If it was his home town it hasn't been discovered by archaeology, if it's his family name we haven't uncovered any evidence of this family. So all we know is that he was a prophet of Elkosh and he ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah between the years 663 and 654BC. That's the time frame. We know this because Nahum mentions the destruction of Thebes, an Egyptian city by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 3:8-10 and we have a firm date for that destruction in 663BC. So we know he wrote after 663BC. And we think he wrote before 654BC because Thebes was restored in that year. And the letter wouldn't have much impact if Thebes wasn't still in a state of desolation. So in that narrow nine year window God sent Nahum with this burden concerning Nineveh. A third observation, the reason He sent Nahum is to console Judah. Nahum's name means "to console" and it was at this time that Judah was increasingly under Assyrian evil and so this book was written to console them, to say that God knows what is going on but God is doing something with the Assyrians and when He's done doing that then He'll judge. The fourth thing is the mode of revelation. There are about eight different modes of divine revelation. The mode involved in Nahum is **vision**. This Hebrew word focuses on the visual

aspect of the communication. If we were to put this in modern terms, we'd say Nahum watched a movie about Nineveh's destruction. In fact, when we get into the vision you'll see it's a lot like the Book of Revelation in that it's very vivid. Both Nahum and John saw movies of battle scenes, and you can tell that Nahum saw the whole battle unfold right before his eyes. Fifth, we note that the vision pertains to **Nineveh**. And so here we want to pause and develop the city of Nineveh. Nineveh is first mentioned in the Bible in Gen 10:11-12. It was built by Nimrod in what is now northern Iraq on the east side of the Tigris River (aka Hideqel) and opposite the modern city of Mosul.



It was a large metropolitan city in Jonah's day and was made the capital city by Sennacherib. His father, Sargon II had his capital in Khorsabad but Sennacherib decided to go all out and remodel Nineveh, the city beloved of the goddess Ishtar.



It became one of the most powerful cities of the Middle East; the hub of the ancient civilized world. Sennacherib built bridges and a city wall that was 7 ½ miles in circumference. He built 15 gates, each of which was named after an Assyrian god which protected the city. He decided to build a new palace on the Tebiltu River, which you see here, but the surveyors noticed an earlier palace foundation that had been eroded by the river. So he had the river diverted. His inscription says, “The river Tebiltu, which had flowed by the palace and during floods had caused much damage, I changed its course to water farm land instead.” After he solved this problem he constructed the palace foundations. He says, “I made the platform of the old palace larger and higher. To make sure that the platform was not weakened over time or by flooding, I surrounded the foundations with great stones.” So he built it higher to avoid flooding. As far as the building materials are concerned he says, “Palaces of gold, silver, bronze, alabaster, ivory, cedar, pine for my royal residence I constructed. Beams of cedar and cypress, whose scent is pleasant and which come from the snow-capped Amanus Mountain, I placed there. Doors of cedar, cypress and pine I covered with silver and copper, and I set them up to frame the doorways.” It was very costly. It had 27 entrances and

at least 80 chambers, halls and rooms lavishly and expensively adorned with massive sculptures weighing up to 30 tons, relief-carvings depicting battle scenes, impalings and Sennacherib's men parading the spoils of war before him, glazed brick paneling, winged bulls and lions of bronze. He says, "With slabs of alabaster I surrounded the palace walls, I caused them to be a wonder to look at. I called it, 'The Palace without a Rival'." Outside the palace he says, "I planted a great park beside the palace, like that of the Amanus Mountain, with all kinds of herbs and fruit trees which came from the mountains and from Babylonia." Because there wasn't enough water for the gardens he says, "To increase the area for planting, I dug a canal with pickaxes and directed it through high and low ground ... using irrigation ditches I led the water among the orchards." We go into great detail with this palace because in the destruction Nahum describes aspects of the destruction that relate to the majestic palace and the intricate canal system. His son Esarhaddon and grandson Ashurbanipal both enlarged and built up the city turning it into a city with wide boulevards, another feature depicted in Nahum. Ashurbanipal's palace housed the famous library of such importance for the study of Assyriology. He sent scribes all over Assyria and Babylon to gather and to copy tablets, so that tens of thousands of tablets accumulated. Among the tablets discovered were 7 that preserved the Babylonian creation story, *Enuma Elish*, which you're familiar with if you were here when we compared and contrasted it with Genesis 1; and 11 tablets which bore the Babylonian flood story, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, which you can compare and contrast with Gen 6-8. So there was a great library that archaeologists discovered in the ruins of Nineveh. Finally the city was turned to ruins in 612BC by the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians.

With that introduction in verse 1 let's look at the depiction of God starting in verse 2, **A jealous and avenging God is the LORD. Jealous**, Heb *qanno* (pronounced kan-no), is an adjective used only of God. Some people think jealousy is always wrong. It's not. Let me explain. This word has behind it a legal contract defining one's property or possession(s). For example in a marriage contract the husband owns his wife, she is his property or possession. So within marriage is it right for a husband to be jealous for his wife? Yes, she's his possession, she belongs to him and there's nothing wrong with desiring or wanting exclusive rights to one's own possessions. However, outside of marriage it is wrong for a husband to be jealous for another man's wife because she is not his possession. So it may be right or wrong depending

on whether the object is one's possession or not. It may prove helpful to think of "zeal" as the original idea from which derived the notions "zeal for another's property," which equals "envy" or "zeal for one's own property," which equals "jealousy."¹ The question in this context is why is God jealous? What does He possess to be jealous for? Especially since Israel is not directly in view but Nineveh is in view. Well this gets back to the history we've covered involving Sennacherib and his propaganda boys, Rabshakeh and company, down at the walls of Jerusalem. Remember the arrogance. We went into all the lands and we defeated them utterly and we defeated their gods and who do you think you are Hezekiah and who do you think your god is that you are going to stop us. Your god is no different than all the other gods and goddesses. And that's where they crossed the line. See, they brought the Creator down to the creature and they made Him equal to all the other gods and goddesses. Now when they did that, let's think about this. If God is equivalent to all the other gods and goddesses then to understand what they're saying about God we have to understand what the other gods and goddesses were like? And what were they like? Well, every nation had their gods and goddesses and those gods and goddesses were local, they ruled over certain limited area, certain property but they didn't reach into the territory next door. So if that's the case and Sennacherib and his armies have been out conquering all these other territories then what are they saying about their victories over those other territories? Your God Hezekiah, had nothing to do with it. Your God is just a local god over your territory. Yet how does God answer Hezekiah's prayer? He says, "Long ago I did it; From ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps." What is God saying? He's saying, "I am not a local god like all the other gods and goddesses you people conjure up in your imagination, I am sovereign over all, I write history and I control history and I gave you all the military victories, I put fear in your enemies and here you little pipsqueaks down there are taking all the credit for what I did. And in that case God says I'm jealous, I'm jealous because credit is not being given where credit is due.

You know, God is very serious about us giving credit to Him. And when we run around and take the credit for ourselves what it does is it builds up arrogance in our soul and eventually God says that's it, your stealing My glory and I will have to shut you down and show you who is boss. And He does. So all that is embedded in the expression **A jealous God** in verse 2.

But that's not all, **A jealous and avenging God is the LORD.** God is the **avenger**, a verb *naqam*, He takes vengeance and again, people think this is wrong, but when it's used of God it means "requital, recompense," and the idea here is that damage has been done that requires recompense. It's not vengeance killing. God has been offended. There has been wrong incurred and holiness demands that the wrong incurred be paid back. What's the wrong incurred? It goes back again to Sennacherib and the propaganda boys. They said, "Where is your God, Hezekiah?" implying what? That He is not there, maybe He's on vacation, maybe He's taking a nap, and so they were impugning God's character. It's the same thing people do today, they talk a lot of smack, "Where is Jesus' coming?" I don't see any coming? I see nature, I see constants in nature, but I don't see any major interferences like Jesus coming on the clouds of the sky. It's impugning God's character. And by doing that they're incurring a wrong and so this word *avenge* really means to pay back recompense, to make a wrong right. The LORD does not permit creatures to impugn Him forever. He will reach down and require recompense for those who malign His character.

So two things highlighted in verse 2. One, God has exclusive rights to credit. He gets all the credit and we are to give credit where credit is due lest God become jealous and bring about the second thing, recompense, by not giving credit where credit is due we malign God's character, we offend Him and He requires payback.

Then, having described the nature of this God, who is **the LORD**, he then begins to describe the actions of the **LORD**. He says, **The LORD is avenging** or avenges **and is wrathful** out pours forth wrath. The word **avenging** is the same word as before, *naqam*, it means He deals out retribution, He requires recompense for offenses. The word **wrath** is the noun *hema* and the basic meaning is "heat," physical heat, as when you get a fever, but the meaning here is an inner, emotional heat, an intense displeasure. God is aroused to great heat because He, as a jealous God, desires His own glory and when He doesn't receive glory for the things He has done He becomes hot with anger until eventually He judges the thing that doesn't give Him glory. And only then, when He has judged this thing that is causing hot displeasure, is His hot displeasure assuaged.

So he says, **The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries**, the word **vengeance** is again, the same word translated avenging twice before, *naqam*. So three times he emphasizes the vengeance of God upon **His adversaries**, thus the title of the lesson, The Vengeance of the LORD. The three-fold reference to the unspeakable name of the LORD, YHWH clearly identifies who this God is as contrasted to all the gods and goddesses of pagan imagination. The true God, YHWH takes vengeance on His enemies.

And He reserves wrath for His enemies. A very important point, **wrath** is reserved for **His enemies**. It is not poured out indiscriminately. We're in the doctrine of judgment/salvation in these verses and when God judges, one of the subset truths we pull out of that is that God discriminates. It's part and parcel of judgment/salvation. If some people are going to be judged then some people are going to be saved. That's discrimination. And what this verse is saying is that when God discriminates none of His people get caught up in the wrath, only His enemies get caught by the wrath. His people are excluded. And in the NT who are His people? The church? Are they going to go into the wrath of the day of the Lord? Of course not, God's wrath is reserved for His enemies. The Church is not His enemies, the Church is His bride and the bride's destiny is to obtain salvation. And so the Church will be raptured out of the world before the world, God's enemies, enter the wrath. Right now what is God doing with the world? He's storing up wrath just as He was storing up wrath for the Assyrians. So what we have here is description of a coming day of the Lord, a past day of the Lord where God poured out His wrath on Nineveh in a local way which foreshadows the future day of the Lord where He pours out His wrath on all nations.

There are past days of the Lord that foreshadow the future day of the Lord. And the battle Nahum describes as looming on the horizon for Assyria is one of the past days of the Lord. And right here we want to nail down a principle for interpreting prophecy. These past days of the Lord look forward to and foreshadows the future day of the Lord. Now, if that's true then what impact does that have on how we interpret future day of the Lord passages? In other words, if this prophecy regarding a past day of the Lord was fulfilled in a straightforward manner and it foreshadows a greater prophecy of the future day of the Lord then how should we interpret future day of the Lord prophecies? In a straightforward manner. So if I read in Nahum of physical chariots and physical shields and physical death and physical water and

physical fire and the physical destruction of a physical city named Nineveh and that was all fulfilled straightforwardly in the battle of 612BC and then I read prophecies in the Book of Daniel and Revelation that depict war and bloodshed and fire and water, destruction and so forth, how should I expect them to be fulfilled? In a straightforward manner. See, the earlier prophecy is giving me a tool for how to interpret the latter prophecy. There is no justification for expecting a different kind of fulfillment. Yet here is where we're met with opposition. For example, Vern Poythress, one of the top Covenant Theologians, holds that there is a difference between how we should interpret past prophecies that have already been fulfilled vs future prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled. His basis for arguing that there's a difference is how the NT authors quoted the OT, which is a whole topic in and of itself. Suffice it to say now that how the NT authors quoted the OT is a historical issue and not an interpretive one. How did Peter and Paul and other Jewish writers quote the OT? In the same way they had seen it done by their rabbis in the synagogues. But the Covenant Theologians are trying to get us to believe that what they're doing is telling us how to interpret OT latter day prophecies. In other words, when I see in the NT the word fulfillment, or a so called fulfillment formula, they want to say that the NT authors are jettisoning the straightforward understanding of the OT passage and giving a new spiritual interpretation. We're saying, no, the rabbis quoted the OT in four different ways, and they used fulfillment or fulfillment formulas to introduce all four of them. What you have to do is look at the context and figure out which of the four ways they're quoting. The difference is that when the apostles did it to write the NT they did it under divine inspiration, unlike the rabbis. In any case, when they use the term fulfill, just because they use the word fulfill does not mean it always refers to a straightforward fulfillment. They could be making an application because of one point of similarity, they could be showing a type or analogy, a pattern they saw in Scripture or they could just be summarizing what the OT taught, but what they did not do is change their expectation for how latter day prophecies were to be fulfilled. That's what the Covenant Theologians are saying we should do. And what we're trying to do is show that when you see battle language; blood, death, destruction, that language when used in past day of the Lord fulfilled prophecies retains its meaning when used in future day of the Lord prophecies, and therefore the prior is informing us how to interpret the latter.

A second thing to observe is the up for God's enemies. The word means to hold a grudge, to store up wrath and it implies it is stored up over a long period of time. And so what's going on here is starting to answer the problem of evil. It's not that God doesn't want to judge evil, or that His character does not require judging evil, it's that there are other aspects of His character that delay the judgment that He is reserving for His enemies. So it's this time delay that people get upset about. Why doesn't God just take care of the evil, get it over with? Of course, when you describe how God is going to get rid of it, by judgment, and all the blood and guts, they don't like that, oh, we don't like that solution, we want a nice, friendly solution, we'd like to sit down and have a peaceful negotiation with God. Go ahead, let's set it up. He's not going to sit down at a negotiating table with one of us, He's not one of us, He's infinitely greater than us and He is not going to sit down and discuss things with us as if we're all equals. The thing is human beings want justification, they want God to say, alright, here's why I'm doing it and after God has explained himself then man says, alright, here's an approval letter, we'll let you do that. God doesn't do that. God doesn't need your approval, God doesn't need your vote, God is not interested in your opinion.

God's going to do what God's going to do. And what God is doing is He's reserving **wrath**. And that's a good thing because what does it imply? That there's a time element involved. And if there's a time element involved what does that imply? That there's time to repent. So this implies God's grace. God is gracious toward His enemies, allowing them time to repent. He could have judged long, long ago when man rebelled in the Garden. Did God have to keep man around? He said in the day you eat it you will surely die? Did Adam die? Sure, He died spiritually. Did He die physically. No, 930 years later He did. But God could have squashed down that time gap and just said, phooey, I'm not messing with you guys, I leave you alone in the garden for five minutes and you blow it. But He didn't. God is gracious, He gives man time to repent.

So God is being very gracious to the Assyrians. They repented in Jonah's day, maybe they'll repent in Nahum's day. Surely they have delegations going back and forth between Jerusalem and Nineveh. Surely they can get the gospel to the officials and they can carry it back to Nineveh. Maybe they'll repent.

In verse 3 he expands on this time delay. And this is the theme verse of Nahum. This is one of the most eloquent answers to the problem of evil. Particularly the problem of the persistence of evil. Why does God allow evil to persist? Why does He allow it to continue for so long? For so long is subjective, who says what is a long time? But anyway, this answers. **3The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.** We said there are three attributes here, the first one is **slow to anger**, we'll call that grace, the slowness to anger is a word for God's grace, it doesn't mean God isn't going to judge sin, it means that God is overlooking it for awhile. But in the meantime God is getting angry. The word for anger is the word for nostril. Hebrew is a very concrete language, everything is associated with some concrete reality and here's a word picture for you. When you get angry what happens to your face? Your nostrils begin to flare. They do that because somebody ticks you off and your adrenaline starts pumping and you need more oxygen so your nostrils open up. That's your angry face. And so it's saying God is slow to put on His angry face. He has a long fuse. He puts up with His enemies for a long time, he's long of anger. The idea is that God takes a long, deep breath as he holds His anger in. God is holding His breath so to speak before letting out His anger. And the time He's holding His breath we call the day of grace. God took a deep breath after Jonah's day and held it for four generations before He decided to let it out in fierce judgment. So God will do that, God is slow to anger and He'll give a family or a nation about four generations, generally speaking. We don't have all the data, but after ~four generations He'll cut that family or nation off. And during those four generations He's giving those people the opportunity to repent, if they'll just repent then God will keep holding His breath. So this is a wonderful aspect of our God that He is slow to anger because it gives men time to respond to His grace. Second attribute, He's **great in power**, not only is He gracious but He's omnipotent. So these two attributes together, grace and power explain why God let's evil persist. It's not that God doesn't have enough power to destroy it, it's that God is gracious and giving man an opportunity to repent. He's done this before so man has no excuse. God gave 120 years of grace before judgment before the Flood. God gave Pharaoh an opportunity to let the people go before each judgment. God gives people life and breath and food and habitation before judgment. That's all grace. The oxygen you breathe is His oxygen. He made it. It's not yours; He graciously gives it to you. So always grace before judgment. But don't be lulled to sleep by the grace, the ethics of grace do go

on but they do not go on forever, they go on for awhile and then suddenly, without warning, the day of grace ends and the day of judgment begins.

Verse 3, **The LORD is slow to anger and great in power** and then third, **the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.** This consoles, if you're in Judah this consoles because while we have to live in a deplorable mess where evil surrounds us, God will not leave the guilty unpunished.

Every wrong will be recompensed and every evil made right. The evil problem will be resolved in God's timing. In the meantime He has a purpose for letting the evil persist. But He will not let it persist forever. He will judge and bring it to an end. He will separate good from evil.

And in v 3b He begins to describe the manner in which He judges and causes the separation; He judges by nature. The means God uses to judge man is always nature. From Genesis to Revelation God judges man through nature; and we make a point to include angels in nature. Angels and nature are very closely related in Scripture to the point we could argue that in a biblical cosmology, angels are assigned to different parts of nature, under God's sovereignty of course, but that they are somehow involved in what we term nature forces. That's why you see in the Book of Revelation so much involvement of angels in the judgments. When you look at the judgments they're judgments on man, but what's the means of judgment? Nature. The sun and moon go dark, the rivers dry up, the grass burns up. And yet who is instrumental in carrying out these judgments? Angels. Angels are more intensely in the Book of Revelation than any book in the entire NT. And what it shows is that the invisible angels are somehow involved in the background behind what is going on with visible nature. They are that closely related

But why does God always judge man through nature? Because God at Creation placed man over nature and told man to have dominion over it; not to destroy it, to develop it, to cultivate it, to bring it into the service of man for the glory of God. So the authority order was originally God over man and man over nature. Now when Satan came in the garden how did he incarnate himself? As a man? No, as a snake. What's the position of the snake? Nature. So in Satan's incarnation we have nature acting as lord over man. It's a reversal of the original order. It's nature over man asserting himself over God. So when man rebelled against the original authority structure and obeyed nature rather than God, God said, you want to do that, fine, now nature is going to rebel against you. Why are there deficiencies and

mutations in nature? Because man is deficient before God. So man will learn through nature what it is to rebel against God. Nature is full of lesson plans. I was spraying some weeds yesterday, walking my drive which is a few hundred yards and it's just weed after weed after weed and it's the same lesson over and over and over; nature is rebelling against you and I cause it to do that because you're rebelling against Me. Get it through your thick skull that you're a sinning rebel. And so when God judges He uses nature and the invisible angels behind nature, to teach us the lesson, to wake us up to His authority as our Creator and our responsibility to Him as His creatures.

And so at the end of verse 3 he starts to describe these judgments through nature. And remember this language is setting you up; it's setting you up for understanding latter day prophecies. There's a continuity of usage, this language is used and it's maintained down through the corridors of time so we know how to interpret. **In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.** He's going to pick up the three spheres of His creation. What are the three spheres of God's creation? They correspond to the first three days of creation. So on days 1-3 He creates spheres or rooms, on days 4-6 He fills the rooms. It's the work of an engineer. An engineer creates domains and fills those domains and that's what God is doing on days 1-3, He's creating domains and on days 4-6 He's filling those domains. So you have on day 1 the creation of the heavens, on day two the creation of the seas, on day three the creation of the land. So in v 3 He starts with the heavens, the atmospheric heavens. Who controls the atmospheric heavens? Who controls air moisture content, temperature and all the factors that cause supercell storm clouds to form? Who controls the formation of tornadoes? Who controls the formation of thunderstorms? Rain and hail? This is the way God judges.

Verse 4, the second sphere from which He judges, **He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither.** These were the lush areas of vegetation, abundant water supply; Carmel, Bashan and Lebanon and God says, I **rebuke** it, notice that's a command of personal address. What do you mean you rebuke the sea and the rivers? The sea isn't a person. But if He's addressing the sea and rivers as persons who does that suggest is behind the sea and rivers? Personal beings. Who are they? The angels. God tells one angel to turn down the water flow in that region and it dries up, that's

judgment. See how this changes your view of nature dramatically? Nature is not impersonal forces, there are personal beings behind nature, lurking in the background controlling.

Verse 5 he turns to the third sphere of creation, the land. **Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve;** What's He talking about here? Geological catastrophes; earthquakes, volcanoes, the earth is full of evidence of these disasters, evidence of His great power in judging. Angels are involved here too. **Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence. The world and all the inhabitants in it.** When we see these things occur in the heavens, the seas and on land what are we reminded of? Natural law? Molecules banging around? No, God's **presence**. God is personally controlling nature because He is the Lord of all.

Verse 6, **Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him.** You can't stop these disasters, you can't stop volcanoes, you can't control rainfall. If these judgments are coming upon you you can't do a thing in the world to stop it. It shrinks man down, it cuts man down to size. You're not that big, Assyria thought they were big. They weren't big, they were small.

But verse 7, and here's the contrast, **The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him.** ⁸**But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness.** So God saves and God judges, doctrine of what? judgment/salvation. Always when God is judging God is saving. So watch for that, we see it at the Flood, when God is judging the earth and it's inhabitants; He's saving the Ark and it's inhabitants. We see it at the Exodus, when God is judging the Egyptians He's saving the Hebrews in Goshen. There's always perfect discrimination when God judges and saves. We see it at the Cross, when God judges those who reject His Son He saves those who accept His Son. So always, always, always judgment is linked with salvation. And here it is again. When the **day of trouble** comes He's **a stronghold** to those who receive His grace, but to those who reject His grace, He's **an overflowing flood** to them. He picks up the universal Flood language to describe how He pursues and destroys His enemies. There is no escaping His judgment. You can't run and get in a cave and escape. He

pursues them **into darkness**. And the point of consolation is that God will resolve the problem of evil, He will separate good and evil by judgment. So it may appear that evil is winning the battle but when the Lord breaks into history with angelic judgments through nature no man can stand before His indignation. God is a jealous God, He desires glory to be given to Him for His works in history and when it's not He reserves wrath. He stores up wrath to be unleashed when the day of grace comes to an end. So it's a very serious thing to take advantage while there's still time to repent and to give up on good works and meriting the merit of Christ and put your faith in Christ alone.

¹ Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (802). Chicago: Moody Press.

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