



The Implications of Nahum 1:12-2:2 for the Case of Religious Discrimination in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The book of Nahum is full of the news of God's judgment upon Nineveh; this book looks gloomy and hopeless, but one will find the theme of restoration as well. This article analyzes Nahum 1:12-2:2 as a basis for addressing the problem of religious discrimination in Indonesia. Using the literature study method, the results from this article are divided into theological and practical implications. Theologically, the text of Nahum 1:12-2:2 provides believers with hope for restoration from the One who brings true restoration: God himself. Practically, this text encourages God's people to remain steadfast and not despair but have hope, for there will come a time when God restores them. In addition, when true restoration occurs, believers should return to God and not continue to indulge themselves in pleasure and self-satisfaction.

Keywords: Nahum; Reflection; Religion Discrimination; Restoration

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INTRODUCTION

There is restoration news amid the gloomy report of the Book of Nahum (judgment and punishment to Nineveh; Bruckner, 2004; Gunn et al., 2019). Snyman (2020) said that the Book of Nahum is a prophetic work of hope. Bruckner (2004) said that the Book of Nahum darkly promises the redemption of Judah from the oppression and violence of Nineveh. Bruckner (2004) also indicates that just as Nahum's name can mean "comfort" (consolation, satisfaction, enjoyment, comfort), the Book of Nahum also contains consolation for the people of God. This book also is a declaration that God is a Protector amid difficulties (1:15). Robertson (1990) says that the Book of Nahum contains the perfect redemption of God, which will be declared to God's people (Nah. 1:14). Robertson also notes a theme of salvation which is related to the judgment of God (Nah. 1:15). Both the judgment and the restoration of Judah are themes that are seen in this book.

The restoration theme acts as a fitting jump-off point for this author to discuss the matter of religious persecution in Indonesia, which is especially pertinent today. Having been faced with COVID-19, Indonesia is still rife with problems of religious discrimination (Simandjuntak, 2021). On the *World Report 2023* website, one of the things highlighted are the cases of discrimination against religious minorities due to laws related to customs (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Ihsani (2021) alludes that this is also due to the diversity of Indonesia. Mu'ti and Burhani (2019) state that discriminatory attitudes and groups are unconsciously born from the Pancasila ideology. Also, discriminatory attitudes can threaten Indonesia's diversity and religious freedom (Tampubolon et al., 2022).

In January 2023, on the Kompas.com page, the SETARA Institute stated that there were 573 cases of religious disturbances against minorities starting from 2007-2022. It was also stated that intolerance and discrimination increased in 2023 (Hakim, 2023; Trianto, 2023). The SETARA Institute views this as one of the reasons why there are still policies that provide opportunities for the public to reject and limit religious rights, known as SKB 2, regarding the requirements for establishing places of worship (Dhf, 2023; Hakim, 2023). Apart from the difficulty of building a place of worship and the closure of many places of worship (Abdillah, 2022; Batubara, 2023; Syarif & Umasugi, 2022a), cases of discrimination also occur in the field of education. On the JPNN website, it is stated that there were cases of religious discrimination in 10 schools in Jakarta involving the forced use of the hijab (Syarif & Umasugi, 2022a, 2022b). This proves to show that the problem of discrimination still exists in Indonesia.

Several research journals discuss the issue of discrimination in Indonesia. Hasse J. (2011) discussed discrimination against the non-official Towani Tolotang religion; Soedirgo (2018) discusses the possibility of active involvement of Indonesian state actors in discrimination against minorities; Mu'ti and Burhani (2019) argue that the intense discrimination and intolerance in Indonesia is related to the ideology of the first principle of Pancasila; Mubarrak and Kumala (2020) discuss discrimination in Banda Aceh;

Hidayat & Sauki (2022) looked at the problems that exist in a remote village in West Nusa Tenggara; Jannah et al. (2022) discuss the case of discrimination di Pati, Central Java. These cases are being increasingly made known through the existence of digital media (Sulastiana, 2017; Windar et al., 2022).

Because of the problem of discrimination of minorities in Indonesia, the author is interested in connecting this issue to the theme of restoration found in the book of Nahum. Previous studies have not touched upon this topic. The question that the author will try to answer in this article is, "What are the implications of the theme of restoration in the book of Nahum in relation to the situation of religious discrimination in Indonesia?" Please note that the author limits the discussion to Nahum 1:12-2:2 as the theme of restoration is found in this passage. The results of the literature study will be used as implications.

METHOD

The author used the literature study method (Zaluchu, 2021). The author collected literature to interpret the text of Nahum 1 and 2 related to the theme of restoration and presented reflections that can be drawn from interpreting these texts. It should also be noted that before the interpretation section, the author begins by showing the chiastic results of Nahum 1:12-2:2 (Breck, 1987). The authors deliberately included this chiastic analysis to strengthen the evidence that, although vague and brief, the theme of restoration can be seen in Nahum 1 and 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chiasm of Nahum 1:12-2:2

Chiasm is a sequence of components repeated in reverse order. Chiasm is derived from the cross pattern of the Greek letter chi: X. The repetition pattern itself can be judged on the same sound level, identical or synonymous words, grammatical equivalents (such as object, verb, subject) or conceptual equivalents. Examples of patterns are as follows: A, B, C, C', B', A' or a bifurcated scheme and A, B, C, D, C', B', A' or a scheme with an isolated centre (Longman III & Enns, 2008).

As the author alluded to in the method, the chiasm in 1:12-2:2 is relevant in this article because a brief analysis of this chiastic clearly demonstrates the theme of restoration in Nahum 1 & 2. The following is the chiasm in Nahum 1:12-2:2.

A 1:12, Nineveh is whole, but will be destroyed; Judah will be humbled no more

B 1:13-14, God will deliver Judah from the bondage of Nineveh (13); Nineveh will be destroyed (14)

B' 1:15-2:1, The message of peace is proclaimed because the enemy has been destroyed (1:15); The demolisher goes up against Nineveh (2:1)

A' 2:2, God restores Judah because the destroyer has corrupted it

1:12 parallels 2:2. In 1:12, the enemy (Nineveh) will be destroyed. Although they are 'whole' and numerous, destruction is inevitable (12a). In contrast, God's people, whom God had humbled in the past, would not be humbled again (12b). 2:2 is also good news for His people. God restored Jacob's pride, which had previously been undermined. There are similarities in the message of restoration in Nahum 1:12 and 2:2.

The chiastic highlight is the parallel between 1:13-14 and 1:15-2:1. In these texts, there is a clear comparison between God's people and Nineveh.

| B (1:13-14) | B' (1:15-2:1) |
|--|---|
| <i>God's People Restored</i> “And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart.” (13, ESV) | <i>God's People Restored</i> “... the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; ...” (15, ESV) |
| <i>Nineveh Destroyed</i> “No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.” (14, ESV) | <i>Nineveh Destroyed</i> “he is utterly cut off. The scatterer has come up against you. Man the ramparts; watch the road; dress for battle; collect all your strength.” (last sentence in v. 15-2:1, ESV) |

Table 1. Parrarel of B (1:13-14) and B' (1:15-2:1)

From Table 1, verse 13 has parallels with most of verse 15, while verse 14 has parallels with the final stanza of verse 15 up to 2:1. Verse 13 and most of verse 15 shows God's people being restored, and there is a message of peace. God's people are delivered from the bondage of their enemies. Whereas verse 14 and the final stanza of 15 to 2:1 show the contrast; namely, Nineveh will be “utterly” destroyed.

Based on the chiasm in 1:12-2:2, this author believes the comparison between God's people and Nineveh (1:13-14 and 1:15-2:1) is being highlighted. God's people will be restored while Nineveh will be destroyed. However, the message of restoration is even stronger seen in contrast of the enemy's situation. God did not remain silent as he will punish and destroy Nineveh.

Preinterpretation

Concerning the theme of restoration, the author follows the division of Veitch and some other interpreters. In his book, Veitch (2016) states that Nahum 1:12, 13, 15 and 2:2 should be read together because these verses share a common theme. So, in his order, Veitch "omits" or separates Nahum 1:14 and 2:1. Veitch sees these verses, which include 1:15 and 2:2, which are the subject of this article, as an intermission. The author assumes

that Veitch views this passage as an intermission amid the main news of Nineveh's judgment and fall.

Some books interpret this based on the theme or message of the verse. An example is in *The Interpreter's Bible*. In their exegesis and exposition, Charles L. Taylor, Jr. and James T. Cleland (1956) interpret separately; verses 10, 12, 15, 2:1, and several other verses relating to Judah are separate from verses 11, 14, 2:1 and several other verses relating to Nineveh. Similarly, Warren W. Wiersbe (2010) separates the interpretation between 1:9-11, 14 and 1:12-13, 15. 1:9-11 and 14 have the subtheme "God speaks to Nineveh". Whereas 1:12-13 and 15 have the subtheme "God speaks to Judah". While this does not directly refer to 1:15-2:2, it suggests to the author that there are several ways of interpreting the verses in Nahum, especially related to Judah and Nineveh.

Based on how some scholars interpret these verses, the authors will also share and "ignore" some verses that focus on the judgment of the Ninevites. The authors will break down the verses related to the theme of restoration: verses 1:12, 13, 15 and 2:2.

Verse-by-verse Commentary

Nahum 1:12-13

The phrase "these are the words of the Lord" and the use of the first person indicate that this message is directly from God. Bruckner (2004) also agrees that these are words from the mouth of God. Alluding to the first-person writing, Dietrich (2016) also says this is a direct prophecy from God. Walton et al. (2017), consider this as God's message through His prophet. Robertson (1990) argues that the phrase reinforces the statement that Nineveh will be overthrown. Therefore, it is clear that the words following the phrase "thus says the Lord" are a message from God.

God's words in verses 12 and 13 comforted the people of Judah. In the first part, there is the fact that the Ninevites, though in good fighting shape and ready for battle, would still be destroyed. Roberts (1991) says "whole" refers to the fact that the Assyrian army was in good health - full force. However, Nineveh's "ripe" existence would not exempt them from the judgment they would receive. Bruckner (2004) writes that Nineveh is shown as a mighty enemy still, God will destroy them. Roberts (1991) says, like a bush, Nineveh will be "cut down" and destroyed. Nineveh will be "purged" until there is nothing left. Veitch (2016) even says that Assyria's defeat is total - it will be erased from the pages of history and will no longer be remembered.

In the second part, in verse 12, God made a promise to the nation of Judah. The nation of Judah had previously received judgment from God because of sins committed against the Lord. God humbled His people. As Walton et al. (2017), argue, "humbled" refers to centuries of subjugation and suffering - in this case, God's people were humbled

under the rule of other nations. However, in verse 12b, God promises He will no longer humble His people. God will deliver His people from centuries of suffering.

Then verse 13 also states, that the Lord will break the shackles that are burdensome to the nation of Judah (a prophecy that Isaiah also calls for - Isa. 10:27 and 14:25). Robertson (1990), Dietrich (2016) and Snyman (2020) share the same opinion regarding axles and shackles which refers to political liberation, liberation from the bondage of other nations. Snyman (2020) notes that this liberation from suffering is within arm's reach and will come anytime (referring to the word 'now'). Robertson (1990) suggests that the implications of this liberation refer to the future. More profoundly, whoever the main enemy of God's people are in the future, God will bring judgment on them like He did with Nineveh. Thus, there is a promise that God will no longer degrade or humiliate His people and deliver them from the "bondage" of attacks from the nations. Robertson (1990) sees this as evidence that God has never abandoned or forgotten His people. God is not insensitive to the suffering of His people. In His time, God will help and deliver His chosen people.

This is also what the author sees and concludes from the existing literature. The promise of restoration in these two verses shows that God promised to destroy the Ninevites even though they were in good condition. Their name will no longer exist in history, for they will be destroyed. As for God's people, they will no longer be despised and will be freed from their chains.

Nahum 1:15a

There is a significant textual link between Nahum 1:15 and Isaiah 52, "How beautiful it is to see from the tops of the hills the messengers coming, who proclaim peace and good news, who bring glad tidings and say to Zion, 'Your God is King'" (Isaiah 52:7). The record of a messenger who brings good news is also recorded in Isaiah. Dietrich (2016) gives verse 1:15a a Deutero-Isaianic tone, a repetition of Isaiah. Walton et al. (2017), mention that, regarding the message of peace, Nahum has a strong correlation with Isaiah (Is 9:6-7; 32:17; 53:5; 54:10,13; 55:12; 57:19). Therefore, it is evident in Nahum 1:15 that Nahum is related to Isaiah.

Quoting Veitch (2016), the author imagines a herald hurrying from the battlefield with news of Assyria's defeat. Veitch explains that news, whether of defeat or victory, is delivered by a herald (2 Sam 18:24). What is attractive based on Veitch's (2016) explanation is that if the news is terrible, the herald will be killed. In contrast, if the news is encouraging, he will receive blessings.

It needs to be made clear who is the herald. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* mentions the possibility of a prophet delivering the message - referring to Isaiah 52:7 (Guthrie, 1978). According to the author, the identity of the herald is optional. It is also

possible that Nahum did not intend to find out who the messenger was; he just wanted to describe someone coming to deliver a message.

This messenger preached *peace*. Walton et al. (2017), mentioned this as a picture of joyful and complete restoration for God's people. Concerning the theme of peace, there are different views on how to respond to this peace. Robertson (1990) suggests that this public proclamation should be seen in the context of full shalom. This peace implies health and fullness of blessings throughout life. Snyman (2020) also suggests a deeper understanding of *shalom*. In the text of Nahum, peace transcends the oppression of enemies. God's people will be whole or complete, bestowed with health and vitality due to God's justice.

Others suggest that this peace is related to political liberation. In *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition* (Carson, 1994), the news of peace is related to victory in war and the cessation of oppression and prosperity being established. Wiersbe (2010) notes that this good news is the news that the enemy has been defeated; God has destroyed the wicked nation. Veitch (2016) states that this peace is a political peace when referring to the context of Nahum. "The message of shalom delivered by the herald from the battlefield ushered in a new era of political tranquility and social good".

From the two views above, the author concludes that this peace includes political deliverance from enemies and profound blessings. The message of peace promised Judah's government a new era of political tranquillity and an excellent social life. However, more broadly, God's people will be "equipped" and "blessed" with life's blessings.

Nahum 1:15b

Judah received the excellent news and a command or invitation to *celebrate the feast and pay the vow*. Robertson (1990) notes that this celebration may have had an obligation element. God's people were obliged to give thanks for deliverance from tribulation. Snyman (2020) notes that what feast the herald is referring to needs to be clarified such as the feast of Passover, Pentecost, and or Tabernacles.

Veitch (2016) considers this an opportunity for Judah to give thanks and rebuild a relationship and obedience with God. Carson (1994) states that celebrating holidays is an opportunity to enjoy the celebration of victory. Deitrich (2016) mentions that it is an opportunity to re-gather at God's house; there is fellowship with God again. So, this celebration has a sense of obligation. The celebration of this festival is a form of thanksgiving for the people. God's people are grateful for the gift of victory and – more precious – the restored relationship.

Carson (1994) relates paying vows to the incident of Jephthah in Judges 11:30-31, who vowed to God that he would eventually have to give his daughter as a burnt offering if God gave victory against the children of Ammon. Thus, it is addressed to those who have vowed to God before going to war - that they should fulfil their vow if God

grants victory or deliverance from the enemy. Snyman (2020) suggests that this can be understood as Moses' directive in the Torah where the people commitment to celebrate feasts and pay vows because the time of Assyrian oppression would be a thing of the past and never return.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that paying vows is for those who had vowed before or during the oppression so that they would fulfil them immediately because God had brought peace and delivered them from an evil nation. This also follows what Moses directed in the Torah. This is a message of hope for those who believe in God, as Bruckner (2004) points out.

Nahum 2:2a

Ultimately, the truth that God's people will be restored is clearly stated. "The LORD restores the pride of Jacob, as the pride of Israel". In their book series, Walton et al. (2017), write that "pride" or splendour has negative and positive connotations - negative refers to pride, while positive refers to majesty seen in strength and power. Of course, in this case, "splendour" means that God's people will be lifted or exalted again by God; they will be exalted.

Robertson (1990) mentions that God did the impossible, restoring His people in total - whom the enemy had previously destroyed (2:2b). The majesty His people once felt will return in full. Veitch (2016) mentions that Judah will regain its former pride and greatness after the oppression it experienced. The poet envisions Judah's restoration as Israel will experience (Hos. 14). Therefore, the poet conveys that Judah's pride will be like Israel's.

Nahum 2:2b

This is the reality of why restoration must occur. "The destroyer has corrupted and destroyed its branches." Judah was "spoiled"; the Assyrians oppressed them. Veitch (2016) says that Assyrian rule had caused "severe injury" to Israel's social, political and religious life. Judah is described as a vine whose branch has been destroyed. Like a grape without a vine, Judah could not "bear fruit" because of the oppression of the Assyrians. This was the reason for the need for restoration; God's people had previously been oppressed and corrupted by its enemy.

Theological Implications

God's People Will Be Restored from Discrimination

From the texts discussed, the most obvious truth is the restoration that God's people experience. As a "book of hope" (Snyman, 2020), it can be seen that God's people have hope amid despair due to violence and oppression. There is peace for God's people

where they will celebrate victory, thank the Lord, and enjoy prosperity (1:15). After experiencing oppression from an evil nation, God restored God's people. God's people who were once corrupted (2:2b) will finally be restored and exalted by God (2:2a).

God does not merely leave His people in oppression, specifically with the issue of discrimination. God will make restoration for His beloved people; this is God's prophecy to His people. Evil and immorality cannot oppress anymore - neither will the evil of discrimination be allowed to oppress His people. As Bruckner (2004), puts it, God "will not erase the consequences of the guilt of the unrepentant wicked (1:3b,8-9,15b)." The enemy will be eliminated to bring about God's promised restoration. God's people will experience restoration and not forever experience the oppression of discrimination.

God Is the One Who Restores Discrimination

Restoration comes from God; no one else can provide restoration. Robertson (1990) writes, "the hand of God alone can be the source of their (God's people's) deliverance." Walton et al. (2017), mention that the book of Nahum is a clear testimony to God's saving work. God saves; He is the source of restoration. Nahum 2:2 clearly states that the Lord restored Judah's pride. Thus, the source of restoration is God himself. God is the hero of justice (Bruckner, 2004) who punishes enemies and restores His people.

God works so that there is peace (1:15). God restores so that his people can have victory (1:13; 2:2). A God who restores His people so that they can have fellowship with Him again (1:15b). It is God who restores His people and removes the enemies that oppress his people (2:2). Restoration comes from God.

Practical Implication

Restoration Is an Incentive to Be Steadfast in Hope Amid Discrimination

Suffering cannot disappear from the lives of believers. Followers of Christ also share in His suffering. Likewise, suffering related to discrimination is often faced, such as favouritism of government regulations, restrictions on space for movement and others (Mubarrak & Kumala, 2020, p. 42). However, there is hope for believers, namely, that believers in Christ will not forever experience oppression and hardship. There will be a time when God delivers and restores believers who suffer discrimination, whether during their time on earth or the final restoration - when they meet the Father in heaven. What needs to be known is that the suffering God allows is not beyond the ability of His people (1 Corinthians 10:13), all discrimination that occurs brings good (Romans 8:28), and there is hope of restoration from God (Revelation 7:14-17). Believers will not always feel this "oppression" of discrimination - that is the hope in the Book of Nahum. God's people can freely put their hope in God and the restoration He promises. He will restore and exalt His people again above ongoing discrimination.

News of Restoration Is an Encouragement for Us to Return to God

The poet's cry in 1:15b is that there will be a restoration experienced by God's people so that they can celebrate the victory, give thanks and reconnect with the Father. According to the author, thanksgiving and reconnecting with the father is crucial. God's people are restored to give thanks and reconnect with their Lord. There are times when believers experience discrimination. However, discrimination will not always be with us as God promises; there will be a time when God will bless and restore His people. This is important because the purpose of restoration is so that His people can return to Himself. God restores His people from discrimination, not so that His people live for themselves and their fulfilment. God restores so that His people know God's help and providence; His relationship with His people is also restored. Therefore, God's people must not forget their Creator in the joy of passing through or amid discrimination. The blessings, joy and restoration all come from God, and he wants His children to continue to come to Him in gratitude because of our relationship with Him.

CONCLUSION

Nahum 1:12-2:2 is one answer to the struggle of discrimination in Indonesia. The biblical passage in Nahum 1:1–2:2 offers believers hope for restoration from the only source that can deliver true repair: God. Practically speaking, this verse exhorts God's people to hold fast to their faith and not give up on their hope since God will eventually make restoration. Additionally, the final restoration, when we meet God face to face, should inspire believers to turn back to God rather than engage in selfish pleasure and satisfaction.

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