

## The Message of the Minor Prophets The Message of Nahum

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Our talk today is looking at the book on Nahum, the seventh book of the minor prophets. Before we begin to see what we can learn from this passage of Scripture, we need to fill in a little of the background to this story.

Nahum follows on from the book of Jonah, in which God told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh, which was possibly the largest city in the world at that time, and preach to the people that Nineveh was to be destroyed in 40 days. God used Jonah's preaching, which had a significant effect on the people from the least to the king of Nineveh, and they repented of their sin and believed in God. We read in Jonah that God saw that their repentance was so real, that He held back His judgment on the inhabitants of Nineveh. In the book of Jonah, we see the mercy of God and how He is not willing that any should perish. Likewise, today there is opportunity for everybody to repent of their sins and to trust in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross where He paid the price for all sin. John 3 v.17 says,

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire and dominated the eastern lands as far down as Egypt. A century had passed from the time of Jonah till we came to the prophecy of Nahum. The Ninevites had again turned their back on God and over the years had slipped back into their evil ways of rampaging throughout the lands, killing, raping, and pillaging wherever they went. All peoples were in fear of them, especially the nation of Israel. The Northern kingdom of Israel which was made up of ten tribes had fallen to the Assyrians and had been taken captive. The two Southern tribes known as Judah were still in their land but were being persecuted by the armies of the Assyrians.

Nahum prophesied during the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. between the fall of the Egyptian city of Thebes or No Amon in 666 B.C., and the capture of Nineveh in 612 B.C. He never went and preached to the people of Nineveh, but his message from God was for the people of Judah. Nahum, whose name means comfort or consolation, and by his message of the future fall of Nineveh and the overthrow of the Assyrians, would have brought some comfort to King Hezekiah and the people of Judah.

Now let us read the first 8 verses of chapter 1:

The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies; the LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers.

Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, and darkness will pursue His enemies.

These first eight verses of chapter 1 bring before us some of the best verses that describe the character of God. There are three truths that everyone should take heed of, and it ought to bring about repentance from the sinner and should cause every saint of God to rejoice. We read in verse 2 that God's justice is set and that He will deal with all men fairly and without partiality. As a holy and righteous God, He demands nothing less and His enemies deserve it.

We read that He is a jealous God. We often think of jealousy in connection with envy, but with God, His jealousy is pure, and He demands our loyalty and exclusive worship. We must remember that God is without sin and hates sin. Whereas we might overlook some sin, for God to be holy and just He must punish sin thus preserving His glory. We read in Deuteronomy 4 v. 24,

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

We also read that He is an avenger. God takes vengeance, not by being vindictive or malicious, but because He is faithful and He keeps His promises to those that love Him and also to those who despise Him. Without fail His wrath will come upon His enemies and His adversaries. We read in Deuteronomy chapter 32 that He takes His vengeance against those who are enemies of His people and of His land.

The next thing that we see is that He reserves wrath or He keeps wrath. In Hebrews 4 v.13 we read that no one can escape the eye of God because all things are open and naked before His eyes. The objects of His wrath are enemies and adversaries and those who are disobedient to His ways. There is no wrath like divine wrath which should make everyone consider where they stand in relation to God.

Secondly in verse 3 we read that He has great power. Unlike men who would take vengeance immediately, God is slow to anger. He withholds His power in executing judgement because He gives the opportunity for repentance so that no one can have any excuse when they come under the power of God. Romans 2 vv. 4-6. sum up these thoughts,

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds.

Nahum in verses 4 and 5 brings out the absolute and unrivalled power of God in the natural world, His creation, and how He controls everything that man is unable to control. The wind, the seas, and the rivers, looking back at how He opened up the Red Sea as a means of escape, and looking forward to when the Lord could calm the seas with His command. Earthquakes, volcanoes, famines - all are under His power - are used to warn and to destroy those who oppose Him. Also, in these verses there is the thought of not only the fall of Nineveh but also looking forward to the end times. His power will ultimately be executed in judgement when it will reveal the answer to the question in verse 6, "Who can stand against Him?" No one is able to stand against the Almighty God and there will be no excuse for those who deserve the punishment.

The third point in verse 7 of chapter 1 brings a cheer to the heart of every believer – “The LORD is good.” We often sing the words of a hymn, “Who is a pardoning God like thee or who has grace so rich and free?” There is complete safety for those who come under the goodness of God. The only place of safety from the wrath of God is to come now to the One who is the Rock, and a shelter in times of storms by putting our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows those who belong to Him. 2 Timothy 2 v. 19 says,

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: the Lord knows those who are His.

Do each one of us rejoice in the full assurance that when we trust in Him for our salvation our eternal destiny is secure?

God’s message to the Ninevites, was that the city of Nineveh was going to be totally destroyed with an overflowing flood. The river Tigris ran along-side the walls of the city and it provided a good defence against their enemies, but what they took comfort in, God was going to use against them. As we will see later the river flooded its banks and undermined a large part of the walls of the city, enabling the Medes and the Babylonians to overrun the Assyrians.

These first 8 verses in the book of Nahum are thought provoking but also a comfort to those of us who trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. We have seen that God is slow to anger but that He will not hold back his wrath.

Before we look at the rest of the book of Nahum, I want to go to the very end of the book where we see that it ends in a question. The book of Jonah ended with God asking a question: “Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city?” Now Nahum closes his prophecy against Nineveh in the last two verses of chapter 3 as he sums up their defeat, how is it possible for God not to bring judgment upon the wicked and unrepentant nation? Why should they be spared? God is light and God is love. A century earlier Jonah had witnessed the mercy of God when the Ninevites repented of their sin; they experienced the grace of God when He spared them from His judgment. Here in Nahum, we learn that the enemies and adversaries of God will undoubtedly come under the wrath of God and will be destroyed. God’s righteousness demands He must judge and condemn all those who refuse to accept His offer of salvation - that His only begotten Son the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross to secure salvation for all who will believe and trust in Him. God hates sin and the only way for us to come into his presence was that there had to be a penalty for sin. We read in Romans 8 v. 32,

He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.

The Lord Jesus in love for us and for His Father gave himself and was willing to die on the cross. We read in various places in the Bible of how Jesus suffered at the hands of mankind, and we can know a little about how He suffered then, but we will never fully understand what He went through in the three hours of darkness on the cross. The Lord Jesus had to suffer all that Satan could muster against Him, but more also the wrath of a holy and righteous God, so that we may have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sin. For those of us who have put our faith in the Lord Jesus, when we understand what He went through for us, we should be obedient to his word and give Him the praise and worship He deserves. To those listeners who are still in their sins and knowing the wrath of God, you have an opportunity now to accept the mercy of God. 1 John 1 v. 9 says,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

All the wrath of God fell upon the Lord Jesus as He was made sin for us. This is the reason that God is justified in bringing judgment upon all those who refuse His Son. The warnings from the Book of Nahum remind us that there will be a day of reckoning. God has been gracious and has for over 2000 years made it possible for mankind to turn from their sinful lives. But there is a day is

coming, sooner rather than later, when it will be too late to find salvation.

The closing verses of chapter 1 draws a picture of both judgment and salvation. The judgment of Assyria brings about deliverance for Judah. In verses 9 to 11 we read that there will be no need for further battles as the Lord will bring about their total destruction. God's patience with Nineveh had been exhausted. He had heard the cries of the people tormented by the evil of the Assyrians, seen the bodies of the dead piled high, and witnessed the famine and pestilence left behind by the Assyrian army. The promise of an utter end to Nineveh was ultimately because of their vain and boastful attitude towards the Lord. Psalm 2 tells us what will happen to the nations that set themselves against God, and how the Lord Jesus will be the victor over all of them. Many nations have turned their back on God including our own nation today, but for the individual in them there is blessing for those who put their trust in Jesus.

In verse 10 we see a picture of how helpless and powerless they will be when the time of judgment comes, tangled like thorns and staggering about like drunkards. They will be defeated as easy as it is to burn dry stubble. The wicked counsellor referred to in verse 11 was Rabshakeh, the chief political officer of the Assyrian army who we read about in 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19. Rabshakeh ridiculed Hezekiah, his religion, and his God. He spoke in Hebrew which would suggest he was an apostate Jew. In verse 35 of 2 Kings 19 we see the tide start to turn against the Assyrians as the Lord passed through their camp outside of Jerusalem and slew 185,000 of their army. After this they retreated back to Nineveh. The yoke of bondage had been broken for Judah and the Lord promised that the Assyrians would never again be used to afflict God's chosen people. God promised then that He would destroy King Sennacherib, who was a vile man, and his family. Sennacherib was murdered by his own sons while he worshipped his gods.

In verse 15 Nahum anticipates the delight in Judah of the news that finally they were free from the tyranny of Assyria forever. The messengers ran from place to place heralding the news that there was peace at last now that Nineveh was gone for ever. Their newfound freedom gave the opportunity for God's people to once more be able to go to the temple and worship God. The apostle Paul uses the same imagery that Nahum used to refer those who proclaimed the good news of the Gospel in Romans 10 v. 15,

How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,  
who bring glad tidings of good things!

For us, the good news of Christ's victory over sin and death at the cross and his subsequent resurrection has freed us from sin and opened up the way for our worship to God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Nahum chapter 2 vv. 11-13 we read,

Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness and lion's cub and no one made them afraid? The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, killed for his lionesses, filled his caves with his prey, and his dens with flesh. "Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of hosts, "I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more."

The opening verses of chapter 2 tells us of the judgement that will come upon the city of Nineveh and just as they had done to others, the same fate would come their way. Nahum begins his prophecy at the point where the combined forces of the Medes and Babylonian armies had already advanced through the countryside of Assyria and were camped all around Nineveh. Under the hand of God, the scatterer was invincible, and they were going to empty all the treasuries that were in Nineveh, just as the Assyrians had done to Israel and other nations. The next verses

describe the enemy dressed in blood red and the bright steel of the chariots glistening in the sunlight. Confusion and panic had set in as the chariots charged back and forth in the city streets where the Assyrians who were demoralised and running in fear, were being cut down as there was no escape. The City walls that were said to be thirty metres high and wide enough for three chariots side by side, and the large moat that surrounded the city, was what the Ninevites relied upon for their safety, but they could not withstand the flood water from the river Tigris. The rivers and canal that ran through the city destroyed the gates and part of the walls allowing the advancing forces to enter and overcome the king's palace taking captive a queen.

Verses 9 to 13 tell of the sacking of the city and the tables turned upon them as they had to endure what they had done to others. All the treasures that they had taken were now being plundered by the invaders. The Assyrians, normally the predators, were now the prey and the question "where is the lion's den?" suggests that the den is empty and the predator is defeated. Assyria once used by God to strike at disobedient Israel - as told in Isaiah 10 vv. 4-6 - now becomes the object of God's anger. While it was the Medes and Babylonians who carried out the battle, it was because God was against the Assyrians that they won. To be on the wrong side of God can only mean certain defeat and there will be a day of reckoning coming, when all who are on the wrong side will be sure of certain defeat and damnation.

The last chapter Nahum further emphasises what Nineveh deserved because of their sins against God and humanity, and that they would endure the horror of battle with mounds of dead people littering the landscape. Hebrews 10 v. 31 tells us that,

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.

Nahum describes Nineveh as a harlot, a city full of whoredom, witchcraft, and idolatry. They took captive their enemies and traded them as slaves. Again, we read that God is against them and that He will bring them to utter shame, exposing them to the world, where instead of the glory they once knew, everyone would mock them, and they would become a spectacle of shame, and no one will give them sympathy.

What comes around goes around. What the Assyrians did to Thebes or No-Amon was what was going to happen to themselves. They thought that their city was invincible, but it would have the same fate, and they had no friends or allies to help. The cruelty and barbaric things that they inflicted on others was about to be their own destiny.

The prophecy ends with insults that add to the scorn of Nineveh and the weakness of its leaders who through their drunken orgies led to the ease of how they would be overthrown. Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled about fifty years later when the great city of Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. The Assyrian nation became a forgotten people and the ruins of Nineveh remained hidden for centuries that it became like a myth until it was discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The last two verses of the book tell us sum this up for us,

Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles rest in the dust. Your people are scattered on the mountains, and no one gathers them. Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on The Message of Nahum, talk number T1439.

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