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The Mission

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Nahum Review

Since it's been some time since I taught I'm going to take tonight and more or less review what we've already learned from the Book of Nahum. I started this book before Christmas but much has happened since then and so I'll catch us up tonight and then we'll move on from there next week.

So this is a book that's fairly obscure when it comes to preachers teaching and preaching on it. And many preachers have never even preached a sermon from it, but since it's the word of God, it's in the Bible for a reason. And it is the word of God and it is a reliable book, contrary to what some would say, and the reason is because it passes the test by which we grade prophets and prophetic writings.

And the test is whether or not they come true or are obviously coming true. And we know from history that this prophecy which Nahum made years before it happened, did eventually come to pass. And it came to pass just exactly like Nahum predicted. And of course Nineveh was judged and the Assyrians were defeated by

the Babylonians and were never again a threat to the people of Israel or Judah or any other people for that matter.

Now, this is a very brief book. It's only three chapters long and therefore it's considered a minor prophet, but it has a major message and a very important message, which was not only important to the people back in Nahum's day, but is also important and relevant to us today especially in America.

Now, like we learned, Nahum makes three declarations about God and Nineveh.

First, in chapter one we're going to learn that God is jealous and that Nineveh will fall.

Second, in chapter 2, we're going to learn that God is also the Judge and the administrator of justice and we're going to learn how Nineveh will fall.

And then thirdly and lastly in chapter 3, we're going to see that God is just and Nahum is going to tell us why Nineveh will fall.

Now, again, we don't know very much about the prophet Nahum who was also the writer of this little book. All we really know is that he probably was born in the northern kingdom of Israel and that at some point and time he moved to the southern kingdom of Judah.

We also know his name means comfort or comforter. And since he was predicting that the enemy of Judah at the time, which were the Assyrians, would be defeated and destroyed by another nation, well, that message, no doubt had to be a comfort to the people of Judah.

And by the way, this book for the most part, is about the judgment of God; and it shows us how sometimes the judgment of God, can actually be a comfort to God's people.

When God's judgement is against the enemies of His children, then knowing that judgement is God's way of protecting us, then that ought to be a comfort to us. And it would have been for the people of Israel and Judah during this time in history.

Because when this prophecy was first given by Nahum, the Assyrians were still in power. And like we learned in past studies, these were ruthless people. They were bloodthirsty people and they had no compassion whatsoever on the people they set out to conquer.

And they had already defeated and exiled the Northern Kingdom, which was Israel, and they had their sights set on the southern kingdom of Judah. In fact, they had tried to take over Judah and had it not been for a miracle of God where He sent His angels to slay some 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, they would have taken them over as well.

And so, even though it would be another forty or fifty years before this prophecy would actually come to fulfillment, this message from God to the people of Judah through this prophet Nahum, had to bring them at least some level of comfort. If nothing else, to know that God hadn't forgotten about them! And that He **would get** His vengeance one day, just like He promised.

And so that's **one** of the truths that we need to learn from this book. That even though God is a loving and merciful and kind God, He is also a God of justice and judgement. And eventually He's going to right all the wrongs that go on in this world. And He will, in His perfect time, set straight the crooked ways of our enemies. But it will only come in His time, and in His way.

Now, to understand the book of nahum, we have to understand the book of Jonah, which we studied a few months back. And if you were here for that study, then hopefully you remember that God's remedy for the people of Nineveh, wasn't what Jonah wanted to see.

In fact, when God first called Jonah to go and preach to the people in Nineveh, Jonah rejected that call. He got on a ship headed in the opposite direction and it wasn't until God sent a great storm and the sailors on the boat realized that Jonah was the cause, they threw him overboard and left him to drown and

then a big fish swallows him up and while he's in the fish's belly, he has a change of heart.

And so the fish spits him out and he gets a second chance and so he goes, ever so reluctantly to Nineveh and he preaches and though his heart's not really in it; God blesses the preaching of His word; and He draws the people of Nineveh to Himself and the entire city was saved.

And to everyone's surprise, including Jonah's this was the greatest revival of all times!

But of course it didn't last and the nation reverted back to their old ways and so God pronounced judgement on them. And even though they had been in power and had ruled the world for over two hundred years, God decided that their time was up.

Their chances had run out. They had crossed over the line one too many times. And I know most people think that America is somehow different, but the truth is, we serve the very same God that judged the Assyrians and many other nations before and since. And to think we're any better or any different is just to play into the hands of the devil.

In Vernon McGhee's introduction to Nahum, he quotes the words of a United States Senator who was talking about this issue. And he stated that the average life of every heart nation of the past is around two hundred years. And then he goes on to say that

everyone of these nations progressed through the following stages.

They went from bondage to spiritual faith. Then from spiritual faith to courage. Then from courage to liberty. Then from liberty to abundance. From abundance they digressed to selfishness. And from selfishness they digressed even further to complacency. And then from complacency to apathy and then from apathy back to bondage.

Now, our nation has passed that 200 year mark. In fact, this year is our 250th year since we became a nation. And so what stage do you think we're in today with respect to the things of God?

Do we see complacency? Do we see apathy?

I think if we would be honest, we'd say absolutely! All around us we see both those attitudes, and especially in the church.

And so how long before bondage again?

Well, that's up to God.

There's a line drawn somewhere and that somewhere is wherever God has chosen. But when we cross over it, there's no turning back. When we cross over it as a nation God will bring down judgment on us. And that truth not only applies to nations, it also applies to individuals. When we cross over that line, God will judge us.

And it's not that God's grace can't reach us, it's that we can't reach out and receive it. People who cross over that line have so hardened their hearts that they can no longer receive the grace that God wants desperately to give them. And it's of their own accord that they will die lost in their sins.

And so God through the prophet Nahum some 100 or 150 years later has pronounced judgement on the city of Nineveh and on the nation of Assyria. And no doubt Jonah though he's already in heaven, was probably beside himself when he heard about it.

Because all along, that's what Jonah wanted God to do. He wanted God to go in there and wipe them off the map. But instead God chose to give them another chance, which they just squandered away.

And so the **time** of Nahum's writing is probably going to be somewhere between 663 B.C. and 654 B.C. And since we know that Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., then this would have been somewhere between 42 and 51 years prior.

Now, we also know from history that it was around this same time period that the Babylonians began to rebel and to take power from the Assyrians. And so from 626 B.C. to the final battle which was around 609 B. C. the Babylonians fought to take control as the new world power and they were eventually successful.

And then in chapter one again we learned that God is jealous and that Nineveh will fall.

That was in verse 2 of chapter 1.

2 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;

So God is a jealous God. But not in the way you and I get jealous. He's not envious or wanting to possess what others have. I mean, after all He already owns everything. And so this is not a jealousy that envies, but rather a virtue where He wants to protect what He's already given to us.

And we used the example of a faithful husband or wife to describe that type of jealousy or protection.

And that's why God prohibits the worship of idols, because he knows that idols or the things of this world will take away from what He wants to give us. And so one of God's attributes is that He's not willing to share the people whom He has chosen to save with false gods, no more than a good husband or wife would share their spouse with a neighbor.

And because Nineveh was a city that God had spared and saved during the time of Jonah; God was jealous. And now because as a nation, they had returned to their old ways and to

their false gods, now they would receive God's judgment and God's vengeance.

And though God is loving and kind and patient and long-suffering, and not willing that any should perish, eventually His patience will run its course and He WILL take vengeance on those who reject His love and kindness and offer to give them eternal life.

Now, some folks might ask, how can God be a God of love and a God of mercy and God who saves people; and then at the same time be a God who brings judgment down on people.

Well, Gary Hamrick in his teaching on this book gave a good example of how God can be both ways. He brought a lamp on to the stage and he set it on a table and then he took the shade off of it and plugged it in and turned it on.

And when the light bulb lit up, he commented on all the good things about electricity. And how almost everything physical in our church services depends on electricity. The heat and the air, and the sound system and the lights and the tv's and so on and so forth, they all depend on electricity. And so from that standpoint he said, electricity is a good thing!

But then he unscrewed the light bulb from the socket and he stuck his finger in his mouth and he wet his finger and then he acted like he was going to stick his wet finger in the light socket.

And when nobody stopped him; because I guess they all wanted to see what was going to happen; well he stopped himself. And then he said, now what would have happened if I had followed through with that action? He said, well the sermon obviously would be over and you'd need to form a pulpit committee, because that same electricity that we deemed as being good for all these other things would have all of sudden become bad, at least for me!

And then he explained, that it wasn't the electricity that was all of sudden bad. The electricity hadn't changed. It was how I approached the electricity.

And he said, it's just the same with God. The nature of God never changes. It's how we approach Him that changes.

And so the God that Nahum introduces us to in this first chapter is a God who has spared the people of Nineveh and in His mercy had saved the people of Nineveh and proved that He is a good God who cares for His people, but who now is also a jealous God who is angry at sin because the people now have turned back to their sin and to their idols and their old way of life.

And so in the last half of chapter one, we have the prophecy God gave Nahum concerning His decision to destroy Nineveh. And it's very clear from what we read in these verses that God is through with the Assyrians. Though in the past, He had used them

to accomplish His purpose, which by the way, was to chastise Israel, now He was through with them.

And now He would turn His attention to the Babylonians, who He would use to not only destroy the Assyrians, but eventually to chastise Judah.

And so that's the jest of chapter one. God is a jealous God, and he hates sin and He's angry at sin and eventually He will deal with unrepentant sinners.

And then in chapter 2, we learned that God is not only a Judge who demands justice, but He is also the administrator or the executor of that justice. And as a result, we're going to learn in this chapter **how** Nineveh will fall.

So God, in chapter one, made it very clear that He was going to destroy Assyria.

In verse 14 He said,

**14 The Lord has given a command concerning you:
“Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. Out of the
house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the
molded image. I will dig your grave, For you are vile.”**

That's a pretty clear statement as to what's about to happen.

And then in chapter 2 He tells us **how** all this to come about.

So if you haven't already, turn with me there and we'll look at the description Nahum gives us of Nineveh's fall.

Look at verse 1.

Nahum 2:1, He who scatters has come up before your face. Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks! Fortify your power mightily.

And who is He who scatters?

Well, it's God right? It's God who is behind all this, and here He's giving the Assyrians a warning. He's telling them that an enemy is about to come upon them.

And though it's God in essence who is going to scatter them, He's using the Babylonians to do the work. It's the Babylonian army who has come against the city of Nineveh and the Assyrians.

Now, the Assyrians, they thought they were invincible. They thought that their city was impregnable and that they could withstand an attack from anyone. But as they're going to see, nobody is invincible when God pronounces judgement upon them.

And then in the last part of verse one, we hear someone cry out!

Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks! Fortify your power mightily.

This is no doubt the Assyrian leaders shouting to their soldiers to get ready for the attack. But it's all to no avail.

Now, again the agent of God's judgment was the Babylonians. And though we're not told that here by Nahum, we know from history, that it was the Babylonians that fulfilled this prophecy in the year 612 B.C.

It was actually the Babylonians and the Medes and they partnered together to form this coalition to go in and to conquer the great city of Nineveh and to destroy the Assyrian Empire.

But now keep in mind, this prophecy that Nahum gives us here, occurred long before that invasion ever occurred. In fact it was probably some forty or fifty years prior that Nahum predicted that God would use this Babylonian coalition to execute judgment against these heartless Assyrians.

And if you'll remember in our past lessons we talked in detail about how heartless the Assyrians were. How they would not just kill people, but how they would literally torture those who they came up against. And so here in this chapter they're just reaping what they had sown.

And then verse 2 says

**2 For the Lord will restore the excellence of Jacob
Like the excellence of Israel,
For the emptiers have emptied them out
And ruined their vine branches.**

In other words, all this torture and pain that the Assyrians had caused God's people was for the purpose of restoring God's people. Everything they had done was to bring Israel back to God.

And not only to be restored—but to also be elevated and exalted—to a position of great honor and power. And of course that's the part of the prophecy that hasn't been fulfilled yet. That part is still to come and that won't happen fully until Jesus comes back.

And then verse 3 says,

**3 The shields of his mighty men are made red,
The valiant men are in scarlet. The chariots come with
flaming torches. In the day of his preparation, And the
spears are brandished.**

The prophecy says that when the Babylonian invaders attacked, their shields would become red with blood and their clothing would be so covered in blood that they would appear to be dressed in scarlet uniforms. And the chariots and the spears would flicker under the sun's reflection and strike terror in the hearts of the Ninevites.

And then verse 4 says, the chariots would then storm recklessly through the streets and squares, as swift as lightning, glowing like flaming torches.

4 The chariots rage in the streets, They jostle one another in the broad roads; They seem like torches, They run like lightning.

And then verse 5 says,

5 He remembers his nobles; They stumble in their walk; They make haste to her walls, And the defense is prepared.

Although the Assyrian king would summon his troops to withstand the onslaught of the enemy, the soldiers would stumble as they rushed about in utter terror. But still even in all the confusion, they would manage to set up their defensive weapons, as a protective shield against the enemy's stones, spears, and arrows.

But then a decisive turning point would take place when in verse 6

6 The gates of the rivers are opened, And the palace is dissolved.

The Babylonian Army would take control of the river gates that controlled the flow of water both outside and inside the city. The Tigris River flowed very close to the walls of the city and there were two large streams, that actually flowed through the city back into the Tigris River. On top of that, there were a number of canals that had been built to run all throughout the city. And in

total, fifteen huge gates had been constructed to control the flow of water from these rivers and canals.

Well, apparently, the Babylonian army dammed up these rivers to hold back the flow the water, and then after the water levels rose to great height, they opened the gates wide open and suddenly released all that water, and when it started flowing it undermined the walls of the city and the walls collapsed and even the king's palace within the city collapsed.

Now, again keep in mind that Nahum was prophesying that all this would happen. It hadn't happened when he was giving us all this detail. But it did happen and it happened exactly like he prophesied it would happen.

And so this judgement that Nahum is prophesying and this detailed description of Nineveh's future downfall was a certainty, and it was fully and completely guaranteed by God Himself.

And then Nahum prophesies how the survivors of the attack would be enslaved and exiled, and scattered throughout foreign nations.

That's in verse 7.

**7 It is decreed: She shall be led away captive,
She shall be brought up; And her maidservants shall lead
her as with the voice of doves, Beating their breasts.**

The enslaved women would moan like doves and beat their breasts in deep sorrow and anguish.

And then verse 8 tells how the soldiers, the defenders of the city would flee for their lives. Like water rushing through a broken dam, it says the defenders would desert their posts. They would refuse to heed the commands of their superiors to return and to defend the city. And panic and chaos would flood the capital and sweep through the Ninevite army. And ultimately, all the city and all the citizens would be at the mercy of the attackers.

And then verse 9 describes how the people's wealth and valuables would be plundered.

Verse 9 says, Take spoil of silver! Take spoil of gold! There is no end of treasure, Or wealth of every desirable prize.

For decades the Assyrians had brutally conquered and slaughtered whole nations of people to get hold of their wealth. And so in building their empire, Nineveh had become the richest city in history up until that time. But of course it was blood money that had purchased it. It was the slaughtering of thousand of people that they had obtained all this wealth. And it would be in the same manner that they would lose it.

Verse 10 says, the land and all its glory would be stripped bare.

**10 She is empty, desolate, and waste!
The heart melts, and the knees shake;
Much pain is in every side,
And all their faces are drained of color.**

The Ninevite population would suffer the same fate they had brought on so many others, that of utter terror. The people's hearts would melt and their knees would literally shake. Their bodies would tremble in pain and their faces would grow pale with sheer fright.

The people would lose their security—their homes, their communities, their cities, and their nation. And just like a lion losing her cubs' protective den, the Assyrians would lose the place where they had reared their young and walked without fear.

**Verse 11 says, 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?**

**12 The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs,
Killed for his lionesses,
Filled his caves with prey,
And his dens with flesh.**

Over time, the Assyrians had adopted the lion as a symbol for their nation, and they had these huge statues of lions sitting all

about. And the reason is because lions are strong, and powerful, skillful, cunning, and ferocious. And so the rulers of Assyria they compared themselves to lions and they also acted like lions as they stalked other nations and tore their prey apart, and massacred and enslaved as many people as they could.

And it was all this brutality that caused God's judgment to fall upon them. The Assyrians had gone too far in killing other people and plundering their wealth. And therefore God decreed that the Assyrians would experience the very same. In other words, they would reap what they had sown and lose everything that made them feel secure and everything they owned.

And then chapter 2 closes with this declaration from God.

13 “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.”

Nineveh and the Assyrian nation would be no more. Judgement had come and this wicked nation and this wicked people would be no more.

