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The Mission

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Nahum

Queen Victoria was celebrating sixty years on the British throne when a fellow by the name of Rudyard Kipling published a poem which became very popular at the time. The title of it was “Recessional.” But not everybody in Great Britain liked the poem because it punctured the pride this great nation had the time, which was at its peak as a world empire at the time.

And this poem, “Recessional”, was a warning as it told how other empires had vanished from the stage of history and how the nation of Great Britain, which as I said was doing very well and prospering like never before at the time, might just follow in their footsteps, because God was still the Judge of the nations.

And here just a few lines of this poem which Kipling wrote:

Far-called, our navies melt away;

On dune and headland sinks the fire:

Lo, all our pomp of yesterday

Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!

Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,

Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The truth is, the prophet Nahum would have probably applauded Kipling's poem, especially his reference to Nineveh, for it was Nahum who wrote this book which is by the way, a sequel to the book of Jonah, as it vividly describes the destruction of Nineveh, which also was the event that marked the beginning of the end for the Assyrian Empire.

And Nahum makes it very clear in this little book that God is indeed the Judge of the nations. And that just like **Proverbs 16:18** tells us, **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”**.

In the seventh century B.C., the very mention of Nineveh brought fear to people's hearts and we've looked at the reasons for that fear in great detail over the past weeks and months in our teachings on this former great empire.

And I say former, because today, the city of Nineveh has long been forgotten by the world. In fact, it is only mentioned by Bible students like ourselves or maybe archeologists or other people interested in ancient history.

And so in this brief book of only three chapters, Nahum makes three declarations about God and Nineveh.

First, that God is jealous and that Nineveh will fall. (Nahum 1:1–15)

Second, that God Is Judge and then he describes how Nineveh will fall. (Nahum 2:1-13)

And then thirdly, that God Is Just and he tells us why Nineveh will fall (Nahum 3:1–19)

But now before we dive in, let me give you just a little bit of back ground about the writer and the time in which he lived.

First off, the title of the book is the name of the prophet who wrote the book. And of course he wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, just like every other book in the Bible was written, but nonetheless, it was Nahum who penned down these words.

Now, his name means “comfort” and it’s a shortened version if you will of Nehemiah’s name which means “Yahweh comforts” or “God comforts”.

And by the way, his name, and the name of this book is no accident. Because, though this book for the most part, is about the judgment of God; the judgment of God, like we learned last week in our Bible study, 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 Israel and for Judah during this time in history. Because when this prophecy was first given, the Assyrians were still in power. They

had already exiled the Northern Kingdom, which was Israel, and they had their sights set on the southern kingdom of Judah.

And though it would be another forty or fifty years before this prophecy would actually come to fulfillment, it still had to bring them some level of comfort, to know that God hadn't forgotten about them. And that He would get His vengeance one day, just like He promised.

And that truth hopefully is a comfort to many of you. I know it is to me. To know that one day, God will right all the wrongs; and in His time, He will set straight the crooked ways of our enemies. But it will only come in His time, and in His way.

If you'll remember back to our study of Jonah, God's remedy wasn't what Jonah wanted to see. Jonah wanted God to destroy the people of Nineveh. But God chose salvation as the remedy. And God may choose salvation as the remedy in lieu of the vengeance we want to see against our enemies. But then again, He might choose another method. But whatever method He chooses, it will be the right method and it will be in His time, and not in our time or in our way.

And again, we know from history, that God's judgement would come upon the nation of Assyria, but it wouldn't come for some forty or fifty years.

Now, the **time** of Nahum's writing is going to be somewhere between 663 B.C. and 654 B.C. And since we know that Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., 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 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 so in verse 1 we read these words,

Nahum 1:1, The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

So the prophet Nahum says this message from God is both a "burden" and a "vision,". In other words, it's something he felt, but it was also something he saw.

Now, that word "burden" in the Hebrew, simply means "to lift up" and it was often used to describe prophetic messages that announced judgment. Isaiah in fact, used the word ten times in his prophecy as he wrote about "the burden of Babylon" and "the burden of Moab".

And so these burdens came as a result of the visions that God gave His prophets. Visions of the dreadful events that God had

determined for the nations. And so it wasn't easy to be a prophet and to see what lay in the future.

I mean just imagine if you could see into the future; and not only see all the good things that would come about, but also see all the heartache and tragedy that was in store for people you know and love. And so these prophets, no doubt felt the burden of their messages.

Now, even though Nineveh isn't mentioned by name until well into the second chapter of Nahum, its destruction is still the theme of this book.

Now, in verses 2-8, God speaks of Himself and He gives us three very important words to consider. And these are all words that relate to the character of God. So look at verse 2.

**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;**

**3 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.**

**4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry,
And dries up all the rivers.
Bashan and Carmel wither,
And the flower of Lebanon wilts.**

**5 The mountains quake before Him,
The hills melt,
And the earth heaves at His presence,
Yes, the world and all who dwell in it.**

**6 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.**

**7 The Lord is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble;
And He knows those who trust in Him.**

**8 But with an overflowing flood
He will make an utter end of its place,
And darkness will pursue His enemies.**

So what are the three words.

Well, the first word is jealous. God is a jealous God. Not in the way you and I get jealous most of the time. It's not in a sinful way that God is jealous. He's not envious of what others have, and He's not wanting to possess what anyone else has. He in fact, made

everything and everything already belongs to Him. And so this is not a jealousy that envies.

But it's rather a virtue in that it means to cherish what He has so graciously given to us. And He cherishes it so much, that He wants to protect it.

It's like what a faithful husband or wife would be toward one another. They're jealous in that they're willing to do everything they can to keep their relationship exclusive.

In fact, the words "jealous" and "zealous" come from the same root word. When you're jealous over someone, you're zealous to protect that relationship.

And since God made everything and owns everything, then He is not envious of anyone, but rather jealous over His glory, and His name, and for the worship and honor that are due Him and to Him alone.

In fact, in the second commandment of the ten commandments, God prohibits the worship of idols and then He backs up that commandment with the reason: "for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God". That's in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 5.

If you've ever studied the Book of Hosea, then you should have learned that the Lord was "married" to Israel in a covenant relationship, and any breach of that covenant aroused His jealousy because of His love for His people.

God's not willing to share His chosen people with false gods, any more than a good husband would share his wife with his neighbor.

Exodus 34:14, "For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God"

Deuteronomy 4:24, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God"

Deuteronomy 6:15, (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 32:16, They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger.

And there are other scriptures that say basically the same thing. That God is a jealous God not willing to share His people with anyone or anything!

And because Nineveh was a city that God had spared during the time of Jonah and a city in which an entire generation had been saved; God was jealous. Because now once again they had given over to iniquity, and especially to idolatry and they had resumed their cruelty of others, and so God's jealous love burned against their pride and the willful breaking of His law.

And then the second word is vengeance. And again, in Scripture, vengeance is usually presented as a sin. In fact, both Jesus and Paul warned about it.

**In Matthew 5:38, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’
39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors

do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

In Romans 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

But for a just and holy God, His character won't allow people to turn their noses up to His law and not do anything about it.

Deuteronomy 32:35, Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.'

41 If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, And repay those who hate Me.

Contrary to what some people think, God will take vengeance one day. Yes He is loving and kind and patient and long-suffering, and not willing that any should perish, but one day, His patience

will run its course and He WILL take vengeance on those who refuse to receive His offer of eternal life.

And then of course we have several examples of how God's people prayed to God to avenge them when other nations had attacked them.

One account is in Psalms 94.

Psalms 94:1, “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!”

And when God takes vengeance by judging people, it's because He is a holy God and because He is jealous or zealous for His holy law.

And then the third word is anger. And again, God's anger isn't like human anger. Our anger many times is because we're selfish or because we're out of control. But God is never out of control. He never loses His temper. God's anger is a holy anger. It's a righteous indignation against all that defies His authority and disobeys His law.

And the truth is, as God's people, we too ought to exercise a holy anger against sin.

In fact Paul tells us as much in Ephesians 4:26

Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Henry Ward Beecher once said, “A person that does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good.” And he was speaking, of course, about righteous anger. The type of anger that opposes evil, not the kind of anger that loses its temper.

If we can stand by and do nothing while innocent, helpless people are mistreated and exploited, then something is wrong with us. We ought to be righteously angry about such things. To be apathetic or indifferent to the abuse of the innocent or less fortunate is to be guilty of the same.

And so in verse 2 Nahum chapter 1, Nahum writes that God is “furious”. And then in verse 6, he described God’s anger as so fierce and powerful that it is “poured out like fire” and with power enough to “shatter” the rocks.

But then in verse 3 we’re assured that God’s wrath isn’t just a fit of rage, or a temper tantrum; because it says, for “the Lord is slow to anger”. And many times in the word, we see that same phrase. That God is slow to anger.

And because God is so powerful, it’s good thing that His anger is a holy anger, and it’s a good thing that He’s “slow to anger,” because if not, He would have probably already destroyed the entire world and us included.

So the God that Nahum introduces us to is a jealous God who is angry at sin, but He is also a good God who cares for His people.

And we're going to leave it there for the this week and take up there next Wednesday night after our business meeting.

Amen

(v. 7). Nahum invites us (as Paul put it) to “consider the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22, NKJV). “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), but He is also light (1:5), and His love is a holy love. He is a refuge for those who trust Him, but He is an “overwhelming flood” to those who are His enemies.

God speaks to Nineveh (Nahum 1:9–11, 14). He informs the leaders of Assyria that He knows their plots (vv. 9, 11) and will cause all of their plans to fail. When the proud nations plot against God, He laughs at them and turns their schemes into confusion (Ps. 2:1–4). The Assyrians had plotted against Judah in the days of King Hezekiah, and God thwarted their plans (Isa. 36–37), but the Lord wouldn't allow this to happen a second time. Instead of marching out triumphantly, the leaders would be like drunks entangled in thorn bushes, and stubble burned in a prairie fire (Nahum 1:10).

The plotter mentioned in verse 11 is the king of Assyria, and God addresses him in verse 14, making three declarations: (1) his dynasty will end, because he will have no descendants; (2) the help of his gods and goddesses will end, because they will be destroyed; and (3) his life will end, because God will prepare his

grave. What a solemn message for a man who was sure his plans would succeed! Why would God do all these things? The answer is plain: “You are vile!”

God speaks to Judah (Nahum 1:12–13, 15). Although the Assyrian army outnumbered the army of Judah, and Assyria had more allies to help them fight, that didn’t mean Assyria was bound to win, for God was fighting on behalf of Judah. Yes, the Lord had used Assyria to chasten Judah in the past, but that would not happen again. This time, God would break the yoke and remove the shackles that Assyria had put on Judah, and Assyria would attack them no more.

In ancient days, news was carried by couriers, and the watchmen on the walls scanned the horizon hoping that messengers would bring good news. In this case, it was good news indeed: the courier would announce that Nineveh was fallen and the Assyrian army defeated and in disarray (v. 15). Judah could now live in peace and enjoy her annual feasts and regular religious festivals.

You find this same statement in Isaiah 52:7, where the messenger announced the defeat of Babylon, and Paul quoted the verse in Romans 10:15 and applied it to the proclamation of the Gospel to lost sinners. We don’t usually think of feet as being beautiful, but they certainly are beautiful when they enable a

messenger to carry good news that God has defeated our enemies. To Judah, it meant that Assyria was completely destroyed and could never again invade her land. To us who trust Christ, it means that He has completely defeated sin, death, and Satan, and that we are now free to enjoy the blessings of salvation.

2. God Is Judge: How Nineveh Will Fall (Nahum 2:1–13)

In 612 B.C., the Medes and the Babylonians united to attack Nineveh, and the Lord used them to judge the evil city. This chapter is a vivid description of what happened as seen by Nahum in the vision God gave him.

The invaders appear (Nahum 2:1–4). The guards on the walls of the city see the army advancing and the officers issue orders and encourage their soldiers. You can almost hear the sharp commands: “Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourself, marshal all your strength!” (v. 1, NIV) Above all the noise, the voice of the Lord is heard as He speaks to Israel and Judah and assures them that they will be restored and reunited. (v. 2).

The invading army is formidable with its manpower, armor, weapons, and chariots (vv. 3–4). Already their shields are red with blood. The chariots look like flames of fire as they dash here and

there in the streets of the city, and the soldiers find it easy to slaughter the defenseless people.

The city is captured (Nahum 2:5–10). “He” in verse 5 refers to the king of Assyria who had plotted against the Lord and His people (1:9). He gathers his best officers and gives them orders to protect the wall, but they are too late. They stumble like drunks instead of marching like heroes. The leaders were sure their fortress was impregnable, but their defenses proved to be their undoing.

The Khoser River flowed through the city, so the invaders damned it up and then released the water so that it destroyed part of the wall and some of the buildings. It was a simple matter for the Medes and Babylonians to enter the city and take control. But they can’t take credit for the victory; it was decreed by God that the city be destroyed and the inhabitants be killed or taken captive (2:7). The invaders were but God’s instruments to execute His will.

First, the soldiers line up the prisoners to march them off to their own lands where they’ll become slaves. Nahum compares the exodus to water draining out of a pool. Then the soldiers begin looting this fabulously wealthy city, and the people watch with dismay. “Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face

grows pale” (v. 10, NIV). Nineveh is being treated the way she treated others; her sins had found her out.

The captive leaders are taunted (Nahum 2:11–13). Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet has the last word. As the Assyrian captives are marched away, leaders and common citizens, and the city’s treasures carried off by their captors, Nahum taunts the Ninevites by contrasting their present plight with their former glory.

The image of the lion was often used by the Assyrians in their art and architecture. Visit the Assyrian room in any large museum and you will see huge statues of lions. But even more, the Assyrians acted like lions as they stalked their prey and completely devoured their captives. “Where is the lions’ den now?” Nahum asks as the city is destroyed. “Where is all your prey, the treasures you ruthlessly took from others?” Lions will normally take to their lair enough food for themselves and their cubs, but the Assyrians amassed wealth beyond measure, far more than they needed, and they did it at the cost of human lives.

No wonder the Lord announced, “I am against you” (v. 13). Over a century before, the Lord had sent Jonah to warn Nineveh, and when the city repented, He withdrew His hand of judgment. But now their time was up and the end had come. Assyria would be left with no weapons, no leaders, and no victories to be

announced by their messengers. Instead, Assyria's enemies would hear the voice of couriers announcing peace because Assyria had been defeated (1:15).

3. God Is Just: Why Nineveh Will Fall (Nahum 3:1–19)

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25) God is long-suffering, but there comes a time when His hand of judgment falls. “You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name forever and ever” (Ps. 9:5, NKJV). Nahum gives three reasons why Nineveh deserved to be judged.

Their ruthless bloodshed (Nahum 3:1–3). The Assyrians were clever diplomats who lied to other nations and then broke their promises and destroyed them. They slaughtered people without regard for age or sex, and they stacked up corpses like lumber as warning to anybody who would oppose them. The shedding of innocent blood is a serious sin that God notes, remembers, and judges (Deut. 19:11–13; 2 Kings 21:16; 24:4; Ps. 106:38; Prov. 6:16–17; Isa. 59:7). Depraved dictators who authorize the heartless slaying of innocent victims will someday answer to God for their crimes against Him and humanity.

Their idolatry (Nahum 3:4–7). Often in Scripture, idolatry is associated with prostitution, and when you consider that the chief deity of Nineveh was Ishtar, goddess of sexual passion, fertility, and war, you can understand why Nahum used this metaphor. Because of their spiritual blindness, the Assyrians were ensnared by this evil goddess and were under the control of lust, greed, and violence. People become like the god that they worship (Ps. 115:8), for what we believe determines how we behave. Assyria spread this evil influence to other nations and enslaved them by their sorcery. (See the description of the corrupt end-times religious system given in Rev. 17.)

In ancient times, prostitutes were often shamed by being publicly exposed, and this is what God promised to do to Nineveh. God would expose Assyria's nakedness before all the nations, and this would be the end of their evil influence. The magnificent wealthy city would become a heap of ruins.

Their pride and self-confidence (Nahum 3:8–19). In this closing paragraph, Nahum uses a number of images to show the Assyrians their weaknesses and assure them of their ultimate defeat.

He begins with a fact of history: the defeat of the Egyptian city of Thebes, or No-Ammon, by the Assyrians, in 663 (vv. 8–11). If you visit Karnak and Luxor in Upper Egypt, you will be at the site

of ancient Thebes. This capital city of Upper Egypt was sure it was safe from any invader, yet it went down in defeat before Assyria. Like Nineveh, Thebes was situated by waters which were supposed to be their defense, but the city fell just the same. Thebes had many allies, but they couldn't protect her.

What Assyria did to the people of Thebes would in turn be done to them: their children would be dashed to pieces, the leaders would become slaves, and the people would become exiles. Now, argues Nahum, if this happened to Thebes, why couldn't it happen to Nineveh? Their pride and self-confidence would be totally destroyed as the Medes and Babylonians captured the city. Nineveh would drink the cup of God's wrath and become drunk (v. 11; see Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:14ff).

In fact, the conquest would be so easy, it would be like ripe figs dropping into a person's mouth (Nahum 3:12). Why? Because the ferocious Assyrian soldiers would be drained of their strength and be like women: weak, afraid, and unable to meet the enemy (vv. 13–14). They wouldn't be able to bar the gates or stop the enemy from setting fire to them, nor would they be able to repair the walls or carry water to put out the fires.

The next image is that of insects (vv. 15–17). The invading soldiers would sweep through the land and the city like a plague of grasshoppers or locusts and wipe everything out. The Babylonian

merchants were also like locusts as they collected all the treasures they could find. But the Assyrian leaders were like locusts that go to sleep on the wall on a cold day, but when the sun comes up, they feel the heat and fly away. The king and his council were overconfident, like locusts sleeping on the wall, but when the invasion occurred, they flew off to a safe place!

Assyria was like a scattered flock with sleeping shepherds (v. 18), or like a wounded body with no way to be healed (v. 19a). They had no allies to rescue them, for all the other nations would rejoice when they heard that the Assyrian Empire was no more (v. 19b).

Like the Book of Jonah, the Book of Nahum ends with a question: “for who has not felt your endless cruelty?” (v. 19, NIV) Nahum emphasizes the same truth that was declared by the Prophet Amos: God punishes cruel nations that follow inhumane policies and brutal practices (Amos 1–2). Whether it’s practicing genocide, exploiting the poor, supporting slavery, or failing to provide people with the necessities of life, the sins of national leaders are known by God and He eventually judges.

If you question that fact, go and search for Nineveh.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Amazed*, “Be” Commentary Series
(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 97–106.