

NAHUM

The Prophet of Consolation

The book of Nahum is a prophecy directed at Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. It is the sort of book that we can imagine Jonah to have penned. Indeed, the similarities between these two books are striking.

We know virtually nothing of Nahum. Because the name Capernaum means “village of Nahum,” some have supposed that he came from this Galilean village.

- Both Nahum and Jonah focus upon Assyria and their capital city of Nineveh.
- Both Nahum and Jonah contain prophecies of Nineveh's destruction.
- Both Nahum and Jonah close their books with a question. The question at the end of the book of Jonah points to God's compassion. The question at the end of the book of Nahum points to Nineveh's continued lack of compassion for others.

The name “Nahum” means “consolation” or “comfort.” One form of this word is used in Nahum 3:7 where we read: And it will come about that all who see you Will shrink from you and say, “Nineveh is devastated! Who will grieve for her?” Where will I seek **comforters** (מְנַחֲמִים) for you?

This gives us a clue as to the purpose of the book. It is a book of judgment against the city of Nineveh, but it is also a book of comfort of God’s people as they see the judgment of God fall upon their enemies of God’s people.

How do you handle it when bad people do bad things? And how do you handle it when bad people do bad things to you? It is one thing to ask this question from the comfort of an armchair or within the confines of a church pew. It is quite another thing to ask this question when you are suffering because someone is treating you badly.

Suffering is not fun at the best of times. But the worst sort of suffering is the suffering that is intentionally inflicted upon you by those who want to deliberately hurt you. It is easier to take a hurt that was accidentally given than it is to take a hurt that was intentionally delivered.

How do you handle such hurts? It is by recognizing God’s sovereignty. It is by recognizing that nothing comes into your life without first passing through a nail-scarred hand. And it is by understanding that the Lord will eventually balance the books. The Judge of the earth will do what is right.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The Book of Nahum is organized in a large parallel known as a chiasm. The centerpoint of this chiasm is the lament in which Nineveh is likened to a den of lions that had formerly gobbled up the nations and was now herself devoured.

The Lord takes vengeance against Nineveh (1:1-9)

- His anger poured out like fire (1:6)
- Mountains quake before Him (1:5)
- He pursues His enemies into darkness (1:8)

The Lord will destroy Nineveh (1:11-15)

- Assyrians are like drunks in their drink (1:10)
- They are consumed like stubble (1:10)
- The Lord will tear off the shackles (1:13)

Vivid description of attack on Nineveh (2:1-10)

- Warriors and shields in scarlet (2:3)
- Chariots rushing back and forth (2:3-4)
- Appear as lightning flashes (2:4)
- They stumble in their march (2:5)

Lament over fall of Nineveh, the Lion's Den (2:11-13)

Vivid description of attack on Nineveh (3:1-7)

- A mass of corpses and dead bodies (3:3)
- Bounding chariots (3:2-3)
- Swords flashing, spears gleaming (3:3)
- They stumble over the dead bodies (3:3)

Nineveh will be destroyed (3:8-13)

- Assyrians will become drunk (3:11)
- Fire consumes their gates (3:13)
- Her great men bound with fetters (3:10)

Nineveh consumed

- They are consumed with fire (3:15)
- They are scattered on the mountains (3:18)
- The sun rises and her armies flee (3:17)

The fall of Nineveh took place in 612 B.C. when a coalition of Chaldeans, Medes and Scythians attacked the city. Nahum's prophecy is vivid in its language and he utilizes a

number of word pictures to describe the destruction of the city.

THE ANGER OF GOD

*² A jealous and avenging God is the LORD;
The LORD is avenging and wrathful.
The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries,
And He reserves wrath for His enemies.
³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.
In whirlwind and storm is His way,
And clouds are the dust beneath His feet. (Nahum 1:2-3).*

There were a series of billboards that cropped up in the South Florida area in the late 1990's. They all had reference to the Lord and one of them boldly proclaimed, "Don't make Me come down there." -- God.

We have displayed in these verses a picture of the anger of God. It is an anger that is so terrible that it comes like a whirlwind and a storm and stirs up clouds and dust.

We don't normally think of anger as a good thing. When we get angry, it is often not a righteous anger, but rather an anger that is inappropriate.

God is described as being angry, but a part of this description is that He is "slow to anger." This is the opposite of being quick-tempered. It takes a lot to get God angry.

There are three possibilities when it comes to anger and only one of them is appropriate.

- It is possible to be quick to anger. There are some who try to justify being quick tempered by says, "I erupt with anger, but then it is over and done with." A nuclear bomb is like that. We are warned in the Bible against being quick to anger.
- It is also possible and equally bad to have no anger. There are times when the only appropriate response is to be angry. When we see people in rebellion against God and recognize these actions and attitudes carry eternal repercussions, the only appropriate reaction is to be angry against sin and against evil and against the works of Satan.

If it is bad to be quick to anger and it is also bad to have no anger, then what is the proper

response for the Christian? We are to be like God and we are to be slow to anger. It should take a lot for us to become angry.

HOPE IN THE BOOK OF NAHUM

*The LORD is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble,
And He knows those who take refuge in Him. (Nahum 1:7).*

In the midst of Nahum's pronouncement of anger upon the city of Nineveh, he pauses and gives these words of hope. These words are not in contradiction to what precedes or follows this verse. They are the flip side of the same true. The same God who is a Judge and an Avenger of unrighteousness is a stronghold and a refuge for those who trust in Him.

It is the anger of God that gives us hope. If God did not get angry, then sin would be allowed to continue. If God did not get angry, there would be no deliverance from the hands of evil men. If God did not get angry, there would be no salvation.

The cross was the place where God demonstrated His anger against sin. The anger of God was poured out upon Jesus as He hung suspended between heaven and earth. It was there that the anger of God was satisfied.

There is a theological word for this. It is called propitiation.

*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins. (1 John 4:10).*

This same word was used to describe something in the original temple in Jerusalem. The temple was a holy place and only the priests were permitted to enter within. Yet there was a part of the temple from which even the priests were excluded. It was the Holy of Holies. This was the innermost part of the temple. Within was only one article of furniture. It was the Ark of the Covenant -- a wooden box overlaid with gold. Sitting atop the Ark was a cover of solid gold. It had mounted on it the images of two cherubim with their wings spread over the Ark. They were there as guardians, for this lid served as the throne of God.

Only one person was permitted into the presence of the Ark and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The high priest could come here on that day and he would

sprinkle blood upon the lid of the Ark. When he did this, that seat of judgment would become a propitiation -- a place of satisfaction.

That is what Jesus is for us. He is our place of satisfaction. He is our stronghold and our refuge and our strength and our place of safety.

The presence of a stronghold points to the fact that there is danger in the world. The need of a refuge assumes that there are things in this world from which you need to take refuge.

Just as Israel was under the threat of attack from the hands of the Assyrians, so also we are under a threat of attack. Our war is not necessarily a physical war. It is primarily a spiritual war and it is fought with spiritual weapons.

The good news is that we have a stronghold. We have one in whom we can take refuge. We have a Savior who is able to save in the day of trouble.

LESSONS FROM NAHUM

There are several lessons that we can learn from the book of Nahum.

1. God is concerned with politics and political happenings.

One must be careful when applying the political statements that are addressed to Judah and to Israel to countries and nations today. We are not a theocracy. We are not a "Christian nation" in the same way that Israel was.

At the same time, we must also recognize that God is concerned with politics and with the movings of nations. We may try to separate church and state, but God will not remain separate from anything in His creation.

2. God takes it seriously when anyone hurts His people.

I'm not much of a woodsman and my idea of camping is a Holiday Inn with air conditioning and a hot tub. But I do know enough about the outdoors to know that one thing you do not disturb is a bear cub when his mother is anywhere in the neighborhood. In the same way, you do a dangerous thing when you hurt the people of God.

On two different occasions, the Lord says that He is against the people of Nineveh.

- Nahum 2:13. *"Behold, I am against you," declares the LORD of hosts. "I will burn up her chariots in smoke, a sword will devour your young lions, I will cut off your prey from the land, and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard."*
- Nahum 3:5. *"Behold, I am against you," declares the LORD of hosts; "And I will lift up your skirts over your face, And show to the nations your nakedness And to the kingdoms your disgrace."*

By way of contrast, Paul asks us in Romans 8, *"If God is for us, who is against us?"* If we are in Christ and seeking to follow Him, then God is not against us; He is for us. When God is for you, then He is against everything that is against you because nothing can separate you from His love.

3. When God shows compassion (as He did toward the city of Nineveh in the days of Jonah), He demands that compassion is shown to others. Jesus said the same thing. When He taught His disciples to pray, He told them to say, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Is there anyone of whom you can think against whom you are holding a grudge? Is there an instance where someone had done wrong against you and who you need to forgive? Is there someone who needs your compassion?

If you are having a hard time letting go of a grievance that has been committed against you, perhaps it is time for you to go to the cross and to look anew upon the One who died for your sins. He suffered because of you and, at that very time, He prayed for you: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

He calls you to do the same thing.

Here is the principle: Forgiven people forgive. Have you been forgiven of your sins? Then you need to forgive with the same forgiveness with which the Lord has forgiven you.

There is an "or else" to that statement. What happens if you refuse to forgive?

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:14-15).

I didn't say that. Jesus did. He pointed out that if you do not forgive, it is because you have not yourself completely entered into the forgiveness of God.

4. Grace is able to reign, even after judgment.

Though it is not mentioned in the book of Acts, we know from church history that one of the places where the early church took root and flourished was among the Assyrians. Though they had long ceased to be a political power, they did become a spiritual power as they came to Christ and began a Christian heritage that continues even to the present.