

God's Message to Us in Nahum

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Introduction

Today we are going to look at the book of Nahum.

- Nahum is the seventh of the twelve books that we call the minor prophets.
 - We call them that because they are shorter than the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, which were written at this time.
- For those who are new to this sermon series, I am preaching a sermon (or sometimes two sermons) on each book of the Bible...
 - and our goal is to look at how each book relates to us today.
 - The Bible is a unique book because it was written not only for the people who were alive at the time of writing, but also for all those who would live after.
 - It is God's message to us as God's people in each generation.
 - He so guided the prophets by His Spirit that what they wrote was just the message that He wanted to convey to us. That is why we call the Scriptures the Word of God, and that is why we can absolutely trust them to be true.
 - It is imperative for us to understand them as from God and not from man because we are called to base our faith and life on what is written.

One of the best things about doing a series like this is that it forces you to study books in the Bible that are often ignored.

- And Nahum is such a book because it makes us uncomfortable.
 - This is ironic because it is actually a book of comfort for us as God's people.
 - The name *Nahum* means comfort and it is written to be a book of comfort for us as God's people.

I. Let me begin by showing you how this is a book of comfort.

- Let's do this by looking at the first verse and then at the last two verses.
- A. In the first verse, Nahum tells us that the book is about the destruction of Nineveh—and that was indeed a very comforting thought.
 - **Nahum 1:1: The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.**
 - 1. When a prophet speaks of the “burden against” some place, it means that he is getting ready to reveal a prophecy about disaster coming to that place.
 - Nahum is a prophecy (probably written in 627 BC) about the disaster that is coming upon Nineveh in 612 BC, the capital of the Assyrian Empire.
 - This book shows how God is furious with them and how He is going to bring them to complete ruin and disgrace.
 - When He is done with them, their once proud leaders will rush away to find places to hide.
 - 2. You need to know that the Assyrian Empire was one of the first to make a concerted effort to conquer the world.

- There were certainly many great world empires, such as China and Egypt, in the ancient world,
 - But the Assyrians started this process of taking over one nation after another, not only by plundering them or making them pay tribute,
 - but also by uprooting their people and scattering them so as to break up their society and put in place their own rulers.
 - Once they got the ball rolling with this approach, it seemed as if they could never be stopped.
 - The more nations they subdued, the more power and wealth they obtained.
 - Humanly speaking, no one had a chance against them.
 - At the height of their power, they had even conquered Thebes also called No Amon, in Upper Egypt.
 - Nahum makes reference to this incredible feat in Nahum 3:8 when he asks Assyria if they are better than No Amon that had Egypt and Ethiopia to defend her.
 - **Nahum 3:8-10: Are you better than No Amon *that was situated by the River, that had the waters around her, whose rampart was the sea, whose wall was the sea?* ⁹ Ethiopia and Egypt *were* her strength, and *it was* boundless; Put and Lubim were your helpers. ¹⁰ Yet she *was* carried away, she went into captivity; her young children also were dashed to pieces at the head of every street; they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.**
 - Assyria had successfully conquered them in 663 BC, less than half a century before Nahum wrote this prophecy... he probably wrote in 627.
 - How could Assyria ever be stopped?
3. Moreover the methods of the Assyrians were dreadful, causing them to be feared by all.
- They would call for the complete surrender of the cities and kingdoms they went to conquer, giving up all their wealth and their ways to them.
 - And if any nation dared to stand in their way, they would, upon conquering them, brutally mutilate their kings and nobles before they killed them.
 - It was a way of saying, “This is what happens to anyone who opposes Assyria!”
 - You will remember that even in Jonah’s day, almost two centuries before, Jonah had at first refused to warn Assyria that God had purposed to overthrow them in forty days...
 - He did not want to warn them because he knew that they might repent... and he wanted to see this ruthless nation destroyed.
 - You will remember that he was angry when they repented.
 - Well now, two centuries later, they had become much more powerful and much more ruthless, wreaking havoc on both Israel and Judah.

TRANS> With this background, it comes as no surprise to see how those who hear reports of Assyria’s demise respond.

- B. Nahum shows us that all who hear of Assyria's destruction will rejoice.
1. Look at the last two verses of Nahum—chapter 3, verse 18-19:
 - **Nahum 3:18-19: Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles rest in the dust** [in other words, they are dead]. **Your people are scattered on the mountains, and no one gathers them.** ¹⁹ **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?**
 - They will applaud because they will be glad to know that this menace among the nations has finally been brought down.
 2. This is similar to the rejoicing a little kid has when her friend's big brother comes and beats up the bully that had been terrorising her and her friends.
 - All the kids who hear of the bully's demise rejoice as soon as they hear the news.
 - At last, there will be peace in the neighbourhood.
 - The applause is not from an evil impulse, but it is due to the great relief of being freed and from a sense that justice has been done.
 - There is a righteous satisfaction.
- C. Now I want you to think about how this applies not only to Nineveh, but also to us—on a big scale.
1. Nothing is more contrary to the way of God than for a person to use their superior strength to bring harm to the weak.
 - Yet, sadly, this is all too often the way of the world.
 - It is so unlike our Maker.
 - The LORD is supreme over all, and it is His way to use His strength to give us things that make us happy and blessed—to create a beautiful place for us to live and to fill it with all sort of good things.
 - He takes delight in being God and having the power and wisdom to know how to bless us and to bring happiness to us.
 - He created us, He gave the world, He gave us each other, He planted a garden and filled it with wonderful things and gave all but one tree to us.
 - As God, it was His proper place to govern us, and the forbidden tree was to test us and see if we would have Him govern us—this gracious God who gives good things to His children.
 - That is the kind of God He is.
 2. As soon as Satan came and led us into rebellion, justice was toppled.
 - The greatest injustice of all was that we rejected our Maker as God.
 - But having done that, we also brought injustice into all our relationships in the world.
 - Now, instead of using whatever power or strength we have to bless others and especially those who are weaker, we were such that we would use our strength selfishly—the way we are now.
 - What human being in the world today would you want to give absolute power to?

- I mean such power that he could melt down enemies with a stare... such power that nobody could topple him?
 - How long would it take before you would see him taking advantage of others in a selfish way?
 - We are all little vipers, whatever we may think of ourselves, who would soon become intolerable to all if given enough power.
 - Only the LORD is truly benevolent in Himself.
 - He needs nothing from us, yet He gives everything to us.
3. This helps us to understand why God is angry and judges.
- a. In Nahum, the demise of Nineveh exemplifies for us what will become of all the wicked at the second coming of Jesus Christ.
 - They will be stopped.
 - They will be brought down so that only Jesus will reign.
 - b. For only Jesus to reign is a wonderful thing.
 - Jesus is the only man who uses His strength to bless those under Him.
 - His is a kingdom where God the benevolent one is praised and imitated.
 - When His kingdom is established in that day, every member will truly love every other member.
 - In whatever way we possess superior power to others, we will use that power to bless them.
 - Some wonder what we will do if there is no evil... and that is it...
 - We will be busy blessing each other and making each other happy.
 - We will be busy worshipping our LORD and serving Him as the fountain of all good instead of ignoring Him and rebelling against Him.
 - c. The ruin of His enemies is a glorious thing.
 - They would go on using their power more and more to abuse...
 - So their power is taken away from them and they are cast into the abyss forever.
 - There will be great applause in that day!

TRANS> And now, with that understanding that Nineveh deserves to be judged, we are ready to move on see how God is presented to us in Nahum 1:2-8 as the righteous judge.

II. In Nahum 1:2-8, God is presented in His glorious character as the destroyer of the wicked.

- A. Look at the description of Him and verses 2-3 and consider how good it is that He is such as He is described here.
 1. First, it says that He is jealous!
 - a. Jealousy is the zealous opposition that is stirred up in you when someone has something that you think you ought to have.
 - They have taken honour that you think should have been yours.
 - They have a person's affection that you think should have been yours.
 - They have a possession that you think should have been yours.

- b. There is, of course, both a righteous and a wicked kind of jealousy.
 - Jealousy is righteous when it is about something that indeed ought to be yours that someone else has taken.
 - This can be illustrated with man and a woman.
 - If a man is married, it is right for him to be jealous if another man comes and tries to steal the affection of his wife.
 - However, if he is not married but has his eye on a woman, and someone else wins her affection, he may be jealous, but his jealousy is a wicked jealousy.
 - c. God's jealousy is an excellent jealousy.
 - The three persons in the Godhead delight in one another, the Son always honours the Father, and the Holy Spirit always honours the Father and the Son, and the Father always loves the Son, and the Father and the Son always love the Holy Spirit.
 - And if any creature does not honour our great God, all three persons burn with jealousy for the honour that is due to them as God.
 - There is a jealousy rooted in love and praise, in a true sense of justice, of what obviously ought to be—
 - that every creature has an obligation to bring worship and praise to the triune God and that any who do not, upset the order of all that is good—they grossly pervert justice.
- So God's justice is an excellent thing.
- But what does the most high God do with His jealousy?
2. We are told that the LORD avenges.
- a. That is, He actively opposes those who do not bring Him the honour that is due to Him.
 - He comes against them as enemies with a mighty force to punish them justly for their wickedness.
 - By rejecting the LORD, they pervert all justice and bring in a world where the strong oppress the weak, the way Nineveh did.
 - Once a creature, be it an angel or a human, departs from God, that creature will no longer use his strength for the good of others.
 - He is no longer under God, but now is a law unto himself.
 - b. And notice, that God does not avenge gently—not by any stretch!
 - Verse 2, after saying “God is jealous, and the LORD avenges;” says:
 - **The LORD avenges and is furious.**
 - He is furious when He deals with them because their wickedness calls for fury, not for light measures, but for severe punishment.
 - God is just, and He will give each according to their sin.
 - Then it says...
 - **The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves *wrath* for His enemies**

- These are not His friends, these are His enemies who have rejected Him as God and ruler over all.
 - They are treasonous and He reserves His wrath for them...
 - in other words, His wrath is pent up until the time appointed for it to be poured out.
 - Sometimes, there are small portions of it along the way, but for the most part, it is reserved for the day that God has appointed to judge the living and the dead.
 - Until then, He lets evil take its course—
 - He restrains it, or it would be much worse, but He does not stop it and sometimes He lets it grow to immense proportions as He did with Nineveh—to show us what is in us all.
3. And verse 3 shows us that He is very careful in His vengeance.
- It says: **“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked.**
 - Everything here points to carefulness and control.
 - a. When it says that He is slow to anger, it indicates that He does not express His anger without thought—the way one who flies off the handle does.
 - When we see vengeance in other people, it is often rash, and very often it overreacts.
 - But not so with the LORD.
 - b. When it says that He is great in power, it indicates that it is impossible to stop Him when He punishes.
 - No force can come against Him and weaken the force of His punishment... it is always perfectly appropriate.
 - c. When it says that He will not at all acquit the wicked, it assures us that no one will be able to escape His punishment—He will not just let things go.
 - He is a God of perfect justice and will allow no imbalance in the cosmos that He has created.
 - He is even a searcher of the heart and we are told that even the hidden things will be exposed in the day of His wrath and indignation.
- B. The rest of verse 3 through verse 6 show how nobody can escape from His wrath and indignation.
1. He is the one who controls the weather, directing it as He pleases to punish His adversaries:
 - It says (from the middle of verse 3): **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.**
 - He is the One who sent the great deluge in the day of Noah—when the fountains of the deep burst forth and great cedar trees fell like toothpicks.

2. With such power at His disposal, verse 6 asks...**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.**
 - Of course the answer is that nobody can stand if God's anger is directed against them.
 - The forces of nature overwhelm us to this day, reminding us that we have no power to resist the mighty hand of God.
 3. God often lets men rise very high in the world relative to other men...
 - He lets them become filled with pride and think themselves to be invincible.
 - Such was the case with Nineveh—as we saw already how they had destroyed Thebes—a great feat that put terror in all.
 - But then at the time appointed by Him, He brings them down from their lofty height.
- C. And now there is something super encouraging that is declared about the character of the LORD as judge.
1. First of all, we are told, at the start of verse 7, that **He is good.**
 - a. When we see His terrifying judgment, it is comforting to remember that all of this power is never used for malevolence.
 - We are uncomfortable when we see such invincible power because power in the hands of men is used with selfishness—but God is good.
 - He is not like us.
 - He is full of kindness and goodness, and only uses His power to crush what is opposed to these.
 - b. But if you are honest, that can be terrifying too—because you know that you are not good—that you deserve to be punished too.
 - You know that there is that rebellion against God that is too often seen in you.
 - You know that in you there is that which does not use power for others, but for your own selfish purposes.
 - Even Jesus' disciples debated about which of them would be the greatest among them as Jesus headed to the cross to die for them.
 - They were looking for power to elevate themselves instead of power to bless others.
 2. But verse 7 continues... that God is not only good but that **He is a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.**
 - a. This is God's promise to all who trust in Him!
 - A stronghold is a place of safety—a refuge—and that is what He is for those who trust in Him.
 - When it says that **He knows them**, it does simply mean that He knows who they are...
 - but it means that He knows them as His own special people—as the people He loves and protects.

- This is the same word that is used of a husband knowing his wife so as to bear children.
 - It is not just to know about, but to know as to dearly love.
- b. What a grand thing this is that God has a place for those who come to Him.
 - As we saw, we are all sinners—we have all rejected God as our God—we have all turned to our own way.
 - We deserve to receive what Nineveh is prophesied to receive according to Nahum—the wrath and vengeance of God without remedy.
- c. Do you know what the place is God has provided for us?
 - Our refuge is in His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - He has come and He has already been punished for the sins of all His people—His kingdom that He came to establish is a kingdom that already has complete atonement for sin.
 - He went to the cross and paid in full.
 - He had not yet come when Nahum wrote, but God had already begun gathering the people of Israel through whom He would come, and He had already accepted those who put their trust in Him.
 - For us, as soon as we repent of our sin and come to Christ to be reconciled to God, we receive a full pardon through faith in His sacrifice.
 - My message to you is repent and believe on the LORD Jesus Christ and you will be saved from the wrath to come.
 - You will find refuge in Him in the day of judgment.
 - The LORD has no pleasure in the destroying the wicked.
 - He is good and His is a kingdom of benevolence.
 - He destroys those who refuse His kingdom, not because He is cruel, but because He is good and they insist on continuing in their rebellion against Him.

III. So you see that the destruction of the wicked is not a bad thing but a good thing.

- A. Most of the rest of Nahum is the assurance from God that He will destroy the wicked.
1. This is basically the flow of thought from verse 8 to verse 15.
 - He tells them in verse 10 that they will be fully devoured like stubble fully dried...
 - And in verse 12 that even though they are safe and many in number, they will be cut down.
 - At the end of verse 14 He says, **“I will dig your grave for you are vile.”**
 2. But peppered through these statements of Nineveh’s destruction, God has words of encouragement for what their destruction means for His people.
 - In verse 12 He declares that even though He has afflicted us, he will do so no more... v 13: **For now I will break off his yoke from you, and burst your bonds apart.**

- That assured Israel at the time that God would no longer use Assyria to punish them for their correction—He was bringing an end to Assyria...
 - He will set Israel free so they can serve Him.
 - Verse 15 sums it up for them that the destruction of Assyria will be their release from bondage so they can serve God freely.
 - The destruction of the wicked is a part of the gospel of peace: **Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, perform your vows. For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off.**
 - For us, this is the assurance that Satan and all his will one day be cut off so that we will be able to freely serve God without opposition.
 - We will be released from their grip—their grip that God sometimes tightens when He needs to chasten us.
 - In chapter 2, verse 2, it declares the outcome for us with these words:
 - **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.**
- This all good news for us that one day we will be free of those oppose the reign of Christ.

B. Chapter 2 and 3 are essentially a vivid affirmation that Nineveh will indeed fall.

1. It was very hard to believe, given their great power and hubris and the terror that they had put into the hearts of all...
 - but they are no match for the LORD.
 - As with Pharaoh, God raised them up to make His power known in bringing them to ruin at His pleasure.
2. He shows their armies in a tizzy in 2:3-4... their nobles stumbling along and their maidens beating their breasts in 2:5-7... their riches plundered in 2:8-10... their lion-like boldness gone in 2:11-12... and the reason...
 - Because God is against them. In 2:13 He says: **“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.”**
 - Chapter 3 opens with a description of them tripping over all the corpses because of the multitude of their harlotries and sorceries...
 - And 3:5-7 speak of God exposing their shame and exposing them.
 - Verse 8-11 that they will be no better than No Amon which they destroyed—drunk with the wrath of God.
 - Verse 12-18 picture them as defenseless with gates wide open for their enemies (v. 13) and their defenses burned and their military leaders scampering like locusts when the sun gets too hot in search of cover.

C. And as we saw already—it all ends with applause.

1. When everything is exposed, nobody feels that injustice has been done.

- So it will be on the Day of Judgment.
 - God will be praised for His justice in rendering to each as he deserves, and Jesus will be honoured as our holy and righteous Judge.
 - Perhaps we will say: **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*.**
- 2. Moreover, there will be great relief among the godly to see that God has purged the world of the wicked...
 - That He has removed them so that His glorious kingdom under Christ might come in all its glorious fullness.
 - We will rejoice that we have been set free from all our enemies to serve God without hindrance—and we ourselves will finally be like Him...
 - so that we will use all of our powers and abilities to bless each other.
 - Heaven will be a world of love.

Conclusion: Now you can see that Nahum truly is a book of comfort for the godly.

- Indeed it is a book of terror for those who reject Christ,
 - but it is book of comfort for all who know themselves to be sinners but have come that they might have life through Christ in His kingdom.