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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Nahum 1:1-15

35. THE BOOK OF NAHUM

How many of you have ever heard a sermon from the book of Nahum ? Queen Victoria was celebrating sixty years on the British throne when Rudyard Kipling published his poem entitled “ *Recessional*.” Not everyone in Great Britain liked the poem because it punctured national pride at a time when the empire was at its peak. “ *Recessional*,” was a warning that other empires had vanished from the stage of history and their might follow in their train. God was still the Judge of the nations. 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 prophet Nahum would have loved the poem especially Kipling’s reference to Nineveh, for it was Nahum who wrote the Old Testament book that vividly describes the destruction of Nineveh, the event that marked the beginning of the end of the Assyrian Empire.

Now the book of Nahum is neglected and considered obscure, and it’s not a book that many Christians read. Yet every portion of Scripture is indispensable and has its own contribution to make to our spiritual growth and nourishment. Paul reminds us that “ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” (2 Tim 3:16-17) And this little prophecy of Nahum is no exception. Now how can we bring this book alive ? Well, let me try and set the scene by pointing out,

1. TWO PROPHETS:

Do you recall the other prophet that was associated with Nineveh ? (Jonah 1:2) He prophesied during the era of King Jeroboam the Second who reigned from 790-750 B.C. in the Northern Kingdom. Nahum appeared on the scene about 100 odd years later preaching during the reign of King Manasseh (695-642 B.C) in the Southern Kingdom. Now its interesting that two of the Minor Prophets deal wholly with Nineveh. Jonah had preached in the streets of Nineveh and the Ninevites had learned through him that “ *God is slow to anger.*” (Jonah 4:2) But revivals are only transitory and soon the Ninevites went to greater lengths of sin than ever before. They must learn now through Nahum that “ *Jehovah is a jealous God.*” (Ex 34:14) Jonah’s message had been, “ *Now is the accepted time.*” Nahum’s message was, “ *Now it is too late.*” Jonah had revealed God was the God of the Second Chance. Nahum revealed that God was the God of

the Final Word. Between them these two prophets underlined the truth of Paul's words to the Romans,

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God."

(11:22) Now as with prophecy of Jonah, that there is question that underlines the book of Nahum which has troubled Christians down through the generations. The prophecy of Jonah asks, ***"Does God control nature ?"***

The prophecy of Nahum asks, ***"Does God control history ?"*** The Bible says that it is God who draws the atlas of history. When Paul preached in Athens to the Greeks he said, *"God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation."*

(Acts 17:26)

God allots every nation its place in time and space. God can allow a nation to rise and become an empire and God can bring it to an end. Many scholars believe that God brought the British Empire to an end when she washed her hands of the Jewish people in 1947. Indeed within five years the empire had gone. Does God control history ? My history is His story.

2. TWO PERIODS:

Because Nahum does not mention a single king in this little book, we have to try and determine the time of his ministry from internal evidence. *Now there are two periods mentioned in the book.* The first one is found in (3:8-10) Now this was No Amon or Thebes the capital of Upper Egypt, and this city was destroyed by the Assyrians

in 663 B.C. The second period of course was the destruction of Nineveh, by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.

(3:7) So Nahum would fall in between the dates of 663 B.C. and 612 B.C.

3. TWO PLACES:

Are mentioned in the book. Nineveh was then the capital of Assyria and located in what we now know as Northern Iraq. It was rated the greatest city of the ancient Near East, surrounded by massive walls of 100 feet high, and wide enough to take three chariots abreast. In Jonah's day the population of the city was about one million (Jonah 4:11) In Nahum's day it would be more. The other place that is mentioned in the book is Judah. (1:15) You see, this was not a message of warning to Nineveh, they had heard God's warning from Jonah some 100 odd years before. No, there was no hope for Nineveh, God's patience had run out and His judgment was about to fall. *Rather, this was a message of hope for Judah, to encourage them to trust God at an hour of great danger.*

Now we know very little about Nahum. His name means *"Comfort,"* or *"Consolation,"* and some think it's a shortened form of Nehemiah which means *"Comfort of Jehovah."* He is identified as a native of Elkosh. (1:1) but it's difficult to determine where this is. Some suggest that it was on the Tigris River north of Nineveh, others that it was Northern Galilee. Others say it was Capernaum, Caper-Nahum meaning *"place of Nahum the prophet."* Still others that it was in Judah between Jerusalem and Gaza. Sidlow Baxter says, *"This much is*

certain. Nahum address Judah (1:13-15) and the impression left on the readers mind is that he also wrote from Judah.”

4. TWO PROPHECIES:

For we have discovered in reading the Prophets to distinguish between those parts which relate primarily to events which have long since been fulfilled, and those which have to do entirely with what is still future. Now keeping that in mind look at (1:11) The phrase “ *wicked counsellor,*” is literally “ *counsellor of Belial,*” which suggests Satanic influence on the leadership, identified as the King of Assyria. (3:18) I wonder, was Nahum harking back to Rab-shakeh who, a few years earlier had come from Assyria to terrify Jerusalem. (2 Kings 19:1 Is 36:1) He was certainly a “ *counselor of Belial,*” “ *a man of sin,*” and do you recall what he was known by ?

His mouth. Do you recall that it was this man who placed Jehovah on the same level as the “ *gods of the nations ?*” (Is 36:19-20) What a picture he is of the “ *man of sin,*” who is yet to appear on the stage of history ? Someone who will defy the living God, and will meet with the same end as the Assyrian host.

For Paul says, “ *then shall that Wicked be revealed whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.*”

(2 Thes 2:8) Yes, Nineveh is fallen, is fallen. God will not acquit. His government is righteous. He is the stronghold of the godly. Lo He comes and every eye shall see Him. Wrongs shall be righted and “ *the kingdoms of*

this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.” (Rev 11:15) Now the book of Nahum has only three chapters and it divided easily between them. Chapter One: announces the certainty of Nineveh’s overthrow. Chapter Two: depicts the siege and capture of the city. Chapter Three: tells of the wickedness that provoked such judgment. Notice then,

(1) NINEVEH’S JUDGMENT IS DECLARED Ch 1:

Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians. Judah had been threatened by the Assyrians but now their judgment is declared. Though Assyria had been blessed God in the days of Jonah (780 B.C. and used by God in the punishment of Israel. (2 Kings 17:6 722 B.C.) nonetheless her sins will not be overlooked. This people who have known God, and have been blessed by God, have now rejected God and will be punished by God. Look at (1:8) Nahum describes Nineveh’s judgment as an engulfing flood and darkness from which none can escape. You see, the message of Nahum can be viewed almost as a Court Scene. First of all we have a portrait of the One who judges in court, God. This is followed by a description of the judgment, and finally the reason for such a heavy sentence.

A school teacher for young children told everyone to draw a picture of what was important to them. In the back of the room Johnny began to labour over his drawing. Everybody else finished and handed in their picture but he didn’t. He was still drawing. The teacher graciously

walked back and put her arm around Johnny's shoulder and said, "*Johnny, what are you drawing ?*" He didn't look up, he just kept on working feverishly at his picture. The teacher said, "*What are you drawing ?*" He said, "**God.**" "*But Johnny,*" the teacher said gently, "*No one knows what God looks like.*" He answered, "*They will when I'm through.*" My what is your concept of God ? How do you view God ? How do you see God ? Have you a balanced view of God ? We like to think of God as God of forgiveness, mercy, grace and compassion and He is. But if that is the only side to God we see, we'll end up with a fuzzy image of God, perhaps even a false god who is indifferent to the sins of men. But that is not the God of the Bible. Nahum's prophecy may not make for entertaining reading but this prophecy does a marvelous service for us by setting the balance of who God is and what God is like. Notice Nahum sets before us,

(a) *THE GREATNESS OF GOD:*

On 7th January 1855 the minister of New Park Street Church, Southwark opened his morning sermon as follows. "*The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work the doings and the existence of the great God he calls his Father.*"

Would you agree with statement from C. H. Spurgeon ? I wonder have we lost sight of the holiness, the glory, the majesty and the might of our God ? And the result is that we have a low view of worship. Well, Nahum puts the

balance where it ought to be. *For this opening chapter declares who and what God is.* What a remarkable way to begin. "*God is,*" The Holy Spirit deems certain truths to be self-evident, the first and foremost that God is. My do you believe in the existence of God ? Do you believe in the reality of God ? Here is one of the things that separates the Christian from the humanist and the agnostic. The humanist insists that there is no God, the agnostic shrugs his shoulders and says, "*I just don't know.*" What a contrast to the believer who comes with an emphatic, "*Yes, the Lord is.*" You see, this opening chapter is a study on theology, a study of God. It's a far different picture than the average person in Ulster has of God today. Do you want to see the God of the Bible ? Well, look at these opening verses. For here we see,

1. His Jealousy: (1:2-3)

This word often baffles us. Yet the Lord says, "*For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.*" (Ex 20:5) Our God is a jealous God. Now remember there is a sinful jealousy and a rightful jealousy. Jealousy is a sin if it means being envious of what others have, but it's a virtue if it means cherishing what we have and wanting to protect it. *Envy is wanting what someone has, jealousy is wanting what's rightfully yours.* A faithful husband and wife are jealous over one another and do everything they can to keep their relationship exclusive. "*Jealous,*" and "*zealous,*" come from the same root for when you are jealous over someone you are zealous to protect the relationship. Do you recall that when we studied the book of Hosea we learned that the Lord was "*married,*" to Israel in a

covenant relationship and any breach of that covenant aroused His jealous love. He will not share His people with false gods any more than you will share your wife with your neighbor. Nineveh was a city given over to idolatry and God's jealous love burned against their willful breaking of His law. (Ex 20:5 34:14) So God is jealous over His glory, His name and the worship that is due to Him alone.

2. His Fury: (1:2)

For “ *the Lord revengeth and is furious.*” In (1:6) Nahum described God's “ *indignation,*” as so fierce and powerful that it is “ *poured out like fire,*” with the power to shatter the rocks. Indeed the word “ *indignation,*” comes from a Hebrew term literally translated as “ *foaming at the mouth.*” Have you ever considered the attribute of God's anger ? Do you recall that God was angry at Aaron for he led his people into idolatry ? (Deut 9:20) In the wilderness wanderings Israel sinned against God in such a way that they provoked Him to anger. (Ps 78:58-59) When Solomon turned his heart away from God we read “ *And the Lord was angry with Solomon.*” (1 Kings 11:9) Yet “ *The Lord is slow to anger.*” In fact He had given Nineveh over 100 years of mercy but they had gone too far in their idolatry, brutality and robbery and the Lord had to judge them.

A.W. Pink says “ *There are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God than there are to His love and tenderness.*” You see, some folk picture God as

more of a Santa Claus than the Creator, Father, King, Judge He truly is. They cannot bear the thought of God having to discipline or to punish someone. They want to reshape their image of God into something more genial, more warm and fuzzy more soft. My does God really get this angry with sinful men ? Well, the Psalmist says,

“ *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*” (2:12) He says “ *God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.*” (7:11) Sometimes I wonder if we really believe in God's wrath. Do we really believe that God will judge the world someday ? That He will send sinners to the Lake of Fire ? Your family and mine. I know we believe it in our heads, but I wonder do we believe it our hearts ? And the reason I ask that is because we often lack any real urgency in our evangelism.

On the 8th July 1741 Jonathan Edwards the 18th century American preacher and theologian preached a message in Enfield Connecticut entitled “ **Sinners in the Hands of Angry God.**” Here what he said,

God's wrath towards you burns like fire, He looks upon you as unworthy as nothing else but to be cast into the fire. It is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not go into hell last night, that you were ever suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes in sleep. And there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning but that God's hand has held you up.

No wonder as Jonathan Edwards preached that message the elders threw their arms around the pillars of the building and cried, “ *Lord save us for we are going down to the pit of hell.*” Now I wonder is Nahum correcting your view of God ?

3. His Majesty: (1:3-6)

Does God have the power to judge ? Of course He does. Look at His power in nature (1:3-6) In winds and storms, in rains and droughts, on land and sea. Who can stand before His indignation and power ? The answer of course is obvious. No-one. You know, nations today seem to forget the power of the Lord. They act as though there is no God. But you can be sure that the day of judgment will come and in that day no amount of atomic bombs or fighter planes will make any difference.

4. His Reliability: (1:7)

For Nahum says “ *The Lord is good a stronghold in the day of trouble.*” The same God who is jealous, angry at sin, majestic and powerful is a refuge for His people. Do you recall the words of the song ?

**Where can I go ? Oh, where can I go ?
Seeking a refuge for my soul
Needing a friend who'll love me to the end
Where can I go but to the Lord**

Do you see that word “ *stronghold* ?” It means “ *a fortified place or refuge.*” Are you facing trouble ? Have

you fled to this refuge Do you recall those glorious words in Deuteronomy ? “ *The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.*” (33:27) The Psalmist says, “ *I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in Him will I trust.*” (91:2) He says, “ *The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.*” (18:2) My have you learned through experience that God is your guaranteed refuge ? He is reliable.

5. His Equity: (1:8-14)

You see, the Assyrians tried to use their wisdom against God and His people. Nahum says “ *What do ye imagine against the Lord ? He will make an utter end, affliction shall not rise up the second time.*” (1:9) All Assyrian attempts to foil God’s judgment would end in futility. The affliction of God’s people would not be allowed to occur again. Assyria’s end was determined. Now are you getting a glimpse of the greatness of God ? Do you see His Jealousy, His Fury, His Majesty, His Reliability, His Equity will you notice,

6. His Mercy: (1:15)

For in the last verse of the chapter it’s the picture of the herald who announces that Nineveh is fallen and the Assyrian army is defeated. Now that is the (a)

(b) THE GOODNESS OF GOD:

For Nahum says, “ *the Lord is good,*” (1:7) that almost

seems to be out of place after Nahum's opening salvo against Nineveh but it's not. You see, we need to keep in mind that Nahum's prophecy was given for Judah's encouragement and here God's people were given the assurance that their deadly enemy was to be wiped out while they remained secure and free to worship him without Him without fear of invasion. My here is something about God that we need to know. God is good. The Psalmist says, "*Good and upright is the Lord,*" (25:8) "*O taste and see that the Lord is good,*" (34:8) Now it's interesting to notice that when Nahum said, "*the Lord is good,*" he was in the midst of prophesying judgment. So often when things go well for us we say, "*Isn't God good.*" Then when trouble crosses our pathway we doubt the goodness of God, but God is eternally, immutably and unchangeably good. I wonder has some dire circumstance caused you to doubt God's goodness toward you ?

One of God's faithful missionaries Allen Gardiner experienced many physical difficulties and hardships during his service for the Saviour. Despite his troubles he said, "*when God gives me strength failure will not daunt me.*" In 1851 at the age of 57 he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "*I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God.*" Are you ? Even in the storms of life, does your faith look up amid the trial and cry out, "*the Lord is*

good." Nahum is speaking here about (a) (b) and then he speaks of.

(c) THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD:

There is not much gospel in Nahum, but bless God there is a great deal of government. And John Phillips reminds us "*it is as much a truth in Scripture that God rules as it is that He redeems.*" I want you to see the rule of God here in relation to,

The Destruction of Nineveh:

For in these closing verse of (Ch 1) Nahum describes the fall of Nineveh with two pictures, a great flood of waters that sweeps everything away and a fire of dry thorns that burns like stubble. Did you notice what Nahum said in (1:8-9) Twice he said it, "*God will make an utter end.*" You see, His purposes in grace and mercy were now to be replaced by His purposes in judgment and wrath. History tells us that Nabopolassar, King of the Babylonian invasion forces besieged the city for three years, leading three massive attacks and failing each time. Because of this the Assyrians inside Nineveh rejoiced and began holding drunken parties.

But suddenly the Tigris River overflowed its banks and sent its wildly churning waters against the walls of the city. Soon it had washed a hole into which rushed the Babylonians and the proud city was destroyed. My do we need to grasp this truth that "*the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*" (Dan 4:17)

The Deliverance of Judah:

Can you imagine how happy the people of Judah and the surrounding nations were when they heard, “ *Nineveh has fallen. The Assyrian Empire has been broken.* ” 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 that Assyria had put on Judah and Assyria would attack them no more. Today, God’s long patience with Israel’s enemies aggravates the national sin of her foes. The Lord acts so slowly that people come to the conclusion that either there is no God, or if He is there He does not care. They think that they can get away with their sins forever. *But God waits and God warns.* Wicked nations misinterpret God’s patience. They can only see the silence of God and forget His sovereignty. But as Nahum said, “ *the Lord will not at all acquit the wicked.* ” (1)

(2) NINEVEH’S JUDGMENT IS DESCRIBED: Ch 2

Its almost as if Nahum was watching the events unfold on television, so graphic is the detail. For here he talks about,

(a) THE SIEGE OF NINEVEH:

The fascinating thing is the people who came up to destroy Nineveh wore scarlet uniforms just as Nahum had prophesied even though such uniforms were unheard of in Nahum’s day. He saw also how they entered in through the river gates (2:6) and described the city of blood. (2:3-8) Please do make (2:4) a prophecy of the modern car. It only pictures the chariots in the streets of the city.

Huzzab in (2:7) probably refers to the Queen being led away in humiliation. (a) And then,

(b) THE SACK OF THE CITY:

Do you notice the repeated reference to lions in (2:11-13) ? You see, the lion was the emblem of Assyria. Visit the Assyrian room in any large museum and you will see statues of lions. Nahum is asking, “ *Where are you lions now ? Where are your rulers ? Where are your champions ?* ” Nahum was calling Nineveh a toothless lion. Now in the Bible the Assyrians were not the only people who were actual enemies of Israel, but they were also a type of a people yet to come. A society that would threaten the peace of the earth and play an important part on the stage of world history in the last days. Who are these people ? Well, look at (2:13) where God says, “ *Behold I am against thee, saith the Lord of Hosts.* ” Now the Lord made an identical declaration against Russia, when He said, “ *Behold I am against thee O Gog.* ” (Ezek 38:3 39:1)

We don’t know what the future holds for Russia but we do know that God only sets His face against a people as a last resort and as a result of long defiance and deliberate provocation. Is Russia the Assyria of our day ? Is Russia equally *determined to rule the world ? Is Russia equally ruthless in war ? Is Russia equally boastful of its power and culture ? Is Russia equally antagonistic to God and the Jew ? Then Russia will equally be the eventual target of God’s wrath.* (1) (2)

(3) NINEVEH'S JUDGMENT IS DESERVED: Ch 3

You see, Nahum is now ready to explain the reasons for God's judgment on Assyria. I mean he talks here about,

(a) **THEIR MURDEROUS FORM:**

This was a city that was founded and maintained on murder, bloodshed and constant warfare. One of the kings of Assyria Sennacherib wrote of his enemies.

I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives as one cuts string. Like the many waters of a storm I make the contents of their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth. Their hands I cut off.

(b) **THEIR MORAL FAILURE:**

He compares Nineveh to a harlot. You see, the chief deity of Nineveh was Ishtar goddess of sexual passion, fertility and war. People become like the god they worship (Ps 115:8) for what we believe determines how we behave. The Assyrians were ensnared by this evil goddess and were under the influence of lust, greed and violence.

(c) **THEIR MAJOR FALLACY:**

They felt they were better than No-Ammon, or Thebes in Egypt and believed what happened there, could not happen to them. Well, what happened to Nineveh ? Well today it's a desert. Do you see in the closing verses,

(d) **THEIR MISERY FINALIZED:**

Nahum could see the city stripped and as desolate as landscape after a locust plague. (3:15) My the Lord judges the sins of nations and the sins of individuals. And “ *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* ” (Heb 10:31) But “ *He knoweth them that trust in him.* ” (1:7) My He doesn't need a computer to record your name. Actually, He has you written on His heart, He's written your name on the palms of His hands. He knows you. Aren't you glad that God knows who you are ? Isn't it unbelievable ? The God who made heaven and earth knows your **name**. He knows the very hairs on your head by **number**. (Matt 10:30) He knows you intimately. If God numbers the hairs on your head, don't you think He is up-to-date on the larger issues of your life ?

Don't you think He knows exactly how you feel, and cares deeply ? My God knows you. He perceives you. Have you ever heard the old saying “ *Out of sight, out of mind ?* ” My you are never out of His sight, and you are never off His mind. “ The Lord is good a strong hold in the day of trouble and he knoweth them that trust in him.” (1:7) A. W. Tozer says, “ *With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack ?* ” The answer is nothing. My “ *this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death.* ” (Ps 48:14)

