

Synopsis of Nahum

(With Spiritual Lessons)

Introductory Remarks: The name “Nahum” means “comfort” or “consolation.” This seems very appropriate, because the primary message of the book is the utter, complete, and permanent destruction of Nineveh, the capital city of the wicked Assyrian Empire. For several centuries this wicked nation-state had ravaged the surrounding world, including Israel and Judah. In fact, the Assyrian conquest brought an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Warfare in ancient times was very cruel, but the Assyrians had taken cruelty to unprecedented levels and gloried in doing so, as can be seen in some inscriptions left behind by their kings. To demonstrate this I will quote the following paragraph from Halley’s Bible Handbook:

Assyrian policy was to deport conquered peoples to other lands, to destroy their sense of nationalism and make them more easily subject. Assyrians were great warriors. Most nations then were robber nations. Assyrians seem to have been about the worst of them all. They builded their state on the loot of other peoples. They practiced cruelty. They skinned their prisoners alive, or cut off their hands, feet, noses, ears, or put out their eyes, or pulled out their tongues, and made mounds of human skulls, all to inspire terror.

However, the comfort of this prophecy lies in the fact that they were not going to get away with such injustice and cruelty. God was watching them. He allowed them to go just so far. When they had reached their limit of iniquity He brought them to utter destruction. Many writers think that this was the largest city ever so utterly destroyed known to recorded history. In fact her destruction was so complete that many unbelieving scholars thought that references to it in the Bible and in other historical records were mythical. Alexander the Great fought a battle near the site of what had been Nineveh in 331 B. C. and was not even aware that

there had been a city there! The ruins of Nineveh were not discovered and explored until the 1800s. Since then there has been the discovery of the ruins of magnificent palaces, and hundreds of thousands of inscriptions. These inscriptions confirm the Biblical account to a remarkable degree.

Further comfort is given by this book to the Lord's people. They had been ill-treated by the seemingly invincible Assyrians, but at the end of the day they still existed, while the Assyrians had been totally annihilated.

This prophecy is a comfort to the people of God at all times. It is a graphic example of the truth that God is Ruler among the nations. Sometimes it seems as if evil will ultimately triumph, but it will not. God is a righteous judge. Abraham knew this long ago when he asked in Genesis 18:25, "... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

There are some differences of opinion of when this book was written, but conservative scholars agree that it was probably written sometime between 660-650 B. C. Jonah's prophecy had been written about 150 years before this. Nineveh, at his preaching, had gone through a period of national repentance. But she had soon gone back to her old ways of cruelty and robbery. We can see in this that God is indeed long-suffering. However, His long-suffering eventually comes to an end when there is no lasting repentance. When Nahum wrote this prophecy Nineveh was at the height of her power. It is almost certain that very few took him seriously. But when the fall came, it came rapidly! This should be a warning for any nation, no matter how powerful. Nineveh was finally destroyed by the Babylonians and their allies in 612 B. C.

Outline of Nahum

(This very brief outline is adapted from Unger's Bible Handbook)

Chapter 1-God's Majestic Holiness

Superscription- v. 1

Character of God in Judgment-vs. 2-11

The Fall of Nineveh Announced-vs. 12-15

Chapter 2-Siege and Destruction of Nineveh

The Overthrow of Nineveh Predicted and Described-vs. 1-12

The Reason for Nineveh's Destruction-v. 13

Chapter 3-Nineveh an Example of God's Judgment

Her Sins Reap Their Harvest-vs. 1-17

Lament Over the King of Assyria-vs. 18, 19

Lessons and Observations

1: 2-6-This presents an awe-inspiring picture of the holiness, justice, and power of God. He is long-suffering, but His wrath against sin is inevitable. This is made plain in Ecclesiastes 8:11-13, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God."

Some of this language may be figurative, but we also know that God does have complete control over nature and uses it for His purposes. The Bible is full of such examples. Also, if anyone has any doubts about this they should talk to Napoleon, who lost an entire army in Russia to the winter, or to Hitler, who did the same thing many years later, or to Philip II, who sent the Spanish Armada to

England in 1588, or to George Washington, who was enabled by a dense fog to get his army off Long Island to fight the British another day.

1: 7- Especially in times of trouble, the Lord's people must remember what a wonderful strong hold He is. The wise man wrote in Proverbs 18:10, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

Concerning the security found in the Lord David waxed eloquent in Psalms 18:2, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

1: 8-10-Some of this language may be figurative, but it is likely that at least some of it is literal. The prophet mentions here an "overrunning flood." Nineveh was situated on the Tigris River. While the Babylonian armies were besieging her, there was a torrential rain and a sudden rise in the river washed away a long section in her walls, permitting the enemy to enter the city. Verse ten also mentions that they "shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." When Nineveh was excavated, there was much evidence that it had been almost totally consumed by fire. According to Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian, when the river rose a portion of the walls collapsed, and part of the city was flooded. The superstitious king, Sardanapalus, thought this was the fulfillment of a pagan oracle and that the river, itself, had turned against Nineveh. He accordingly built a huge funeral pyre and burned himself, his family and officials, and the palace to the ground.¹ Whatever else had not been destroyed in this conflagration was burned by the invading armies.

1: 11, 12-These are more predictions of the destruction of the Assyrians. Even though they thought evil of the Lord and of His people, and even though they were very numerous and confident ("quiet") they would be cut off so thoroughly that the Lord would afflict them no more because they would have been utterly destroyed.

1: 13-This verse brings great comfort to God's people. The yoke of the enemy was to be broken and God's people would go free. John Gill has the following comment about a spiritual application of this verse: "set thee entirely free from the bondage of the enemy, and all fear of it; a type of that freedom from the yoke of sin, Satan, and the law, which the people of God have by Jesus Christ."

1: 14-This verse speaks of the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire. God is going to put this empire in the grave. Their name and influence are to be blotted out.

1: 15-This is a beautiful and comforting verse. The literal destruction of Assyria would be good news to the Jewish nation. However, something even more wonderful than that is prefigured here. Nahum here is referring to the announcing of the fall of Nineveh. In almost identical language (See Is. 52: 7) Isaiah prophesies of the release of the people of God from their Babylonian captivity. Paul in, Rom. 10: 15, applies this language to the arrival and reign of the Messiah. Boice makes a very helpful comment here: "Just as Isaiah saw the prophesied release of the people of God from their Babylonian captivity to be a token of that final and perfect release from sin and its bondage through Christ, so does Nahum see the fall of Assyria's capital as a promise of the ultimate defeat of all wickedness by the triumph of Christ."2

Good tidings of peace is what the gospel is all about. It is wonderful to be delivered from cruel bondage by an earthly tyrant. However, there is a limitation on this bondage. It will last just so long and the effects, while terrible, are limited. Far greater is it to be delivered eternally from the bondage of sin and Satan, from eternal hell itself. In ancient times when battles raged the people who were left at home waited anxiously for news of victory or defeat. Defeat meant imprisonment, deportation, slavery, and worse. When a messenger appeared with news of victory in battle the joy was great. Indeed, how very beautiful were the feet of those who delivered such good news. In fact, the word translated "gospel"

originally referred to news of victory in battle. This word is euangellion. There is a beautiful description of this word in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words. The article is titled "Euangellion among the Greeks:

Euangellion is a technical term for "news of victory." The messenger appears, raises his right hand in greeting and calls out with a loud voice *chaire...nikomen* ("rejoice...we have conquered). By his appearance, it is known already that he brings good news. His face shines, his spear is decked with laurel, his head is crowned, he swings a branch of palms, joy fills the city, euangelia (sacrifices) are offered, the temples are garlanded, an agon (athletic games) is held, crowns are put on for the sacrifices and the one to whom the message is owed is honored with a wreath...Because of the of the message, the messenger exerts himself to be first. If another arrives before him, his reward is less: A slow messenger can be punished for his dilatoriness, for he deprives the recipients of their good fortune.³

How joyful the saints should be when we hear the wonderful news of our complete and everlasting salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ! Our worship services should be filled with joy.

Chapter 2-Siege and Destruction of Nineveh

2: 1-An ironic exhortation for Nineveh to prepare for a terrible attack.

2: 2- The term "turned away" can also mean "turned back," indicating that the Lord was giving back the things the Assyrians had emptied them of.

2: 3-5-A description of the Babylonians and their allies as they came to attack Nineveh.

2: 6-This may be figurative of the enemy coming in like a flood, but it is likely literal referring to the rising river that broke down a portion of the walls and flooded part of the city.

2: 7, 8-The queen would be led away captive. Her maids, mourning, are with her. The people, maybe even her soldiers, were fleeing away and not looking back.

2: 9, 10-Nineveh had been filled to an amazing extent with the wealth of the many nations she had conquered over the centuries. She had been a robber nation to an exceeding degree. Now all this wealth was being removed by her conquerors. When the ruins of Nineveh were discovered in the 1800s the archaeologists found no gold and silver there, a very unusual experience when compared with the excavations of other ancient cities.

2: 11-13-Here the prophet compares the cruel Assyrians to group of lions who had killed and filled their dens with the prey. They were seemingly invincible and self-confident and none could stand before them. Now, however, the Lord was against them. He would destroy them. Their messengers (ambassadors) who had made great demands on all their victims, would no longer be heard. The all-conquering Assyrians who had fielded mighty armies were no match for the Lord of hosts. In this particular instance, the Babylonians were a part of that host. He used them to punish the Assyrians. Later, when He was through with the Babylonians, the Lord destroyed them too. He truly is Ruler over all! David wrote in Psalms 103:19, "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all." Later, Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty ruler of Babylon, was humbled before the mighty Lord and said in Daniel 4:34-35, "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

Chapter 3-Nineveh an Example of God's Judgment

3: 1-4-The prophet now begins to set forth in detail the sins of Nineveh. One of her greatest crimes was her cruel and sadistic violence. In monuments and inscriptions found by archaeologists many of her rulers boasted of nauseating atrocities that they had committed against those they had subdued. According to almost all historians of this period no single city in the ancient world had matched the Assyrian capital for her cruelty. Things such as skinning her victims alive, mutilating them by cutting off limbs and putting out of eyes were standard practices. They often impaled defeated soldiers on long stakes.

In these verses the Nahum also tells of Nineveh's deceit. The city was "full of lies."

She was also guilty of plunder or robbery. We have already seen how she was full of the wealth that she had stolen from other nations. This reminds one of the way Hitler plundered the countries of Europe that he had overrun. He stole gold, great paintings and other treasures. He plundered entire museums and expropriated the property of Jews and other perceived enemies of the Nazis.

We find in verse four that Nineveh was also guilty of witchcraft. No doubt much of this was connected with Satanic and demonic influences.

3: 5-7-In these verses God begins to detail some of the ways He will punish and destroy the Assyrians. They had humiliated their victims; now they would be exposed to the contempt of the world. They will be mocked and ridiculed.

3: 8-10-Nahum now brings to the attention of the overconfident Ninevites an example of another seemingly impregnable city that had fallen. This was the city of No in Egypt, which most scholars identify with the city of Thebes. This city had been in a very strong location. It was located on the Nile and was surrounded by moats and canals. Yet in 663 B. C. it had fallen to the Assyrians. The people of Thebes also had many strong allies, such as Ethiopia, Put (Libya), and Lubim (another Libyan city). Yet, with all these advantages she fell.

3: 11-13- Now Nineveh would be drunk (with the cup of the Lord's wrath). Her strongholds would be easily taken, like a fig tree being shaken and her figs falling off. Her soldiers would be as weak as women for warfare. The gates would be undefended, likely by the soldiers fleeing and by the breaches made in the wall by the rising river. The city would be destroyed by fire.

3: 14, 15- This is the ironic language of the taunt. They are told, in a mocking and derisive fashion to prepare the city for a long siege. Then they are told that the most strenuous efforts would be to no avail. The city would be destroyed by fire and the sword.

3: 16-18-The merchants who had traded with Nineveh flee away in the face of trouble. They scatter like locusts. The rulers and military leaders flee in utter panic and confusion. This is a scene of absolute chaos and anarchy. The shepherds or rulers "slumber" and "dwell in the dust." These are probably euphemisms for death. In the chaos and absence of leadership the people are scattered.

3: 19-The fall of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire was complete and final. She would not rise again. She had been utterly and totally and irreparably destroyed. At this news the entire world surrounding her greatly rejoiced. Many of them had either been her victims or feared her as potential victims.

Final Thoughts

This prophecy should be a great consolation to God's people. Even today we are surrounded by evil, but this evil will not go unjudged. God is going to finally completely vindicate His people and pour out His awesome wrath on their enemies. The enemies of God's children are also His enemies. When God's people suffer great injustice they must follow the example of the Lord Jesus. We must follow the pattern set forth in 1 Peter 2:21-23, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should

follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously..."

We must also walk humbly before our God and to encourage others to do the same . We must not trust in the wealth and military might of our nation. If God forsakes us we will fall. Paul gave some very good advice in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

The twofold lesson then, from Nahum? Be greatly comforted, but also be warned!

1 [The Minor Prophets II](#), James Montgomery Boice, pp. 376, 377.

2 [Ibid](#), 376.

3 [Kittel, II, p. 722](#).