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C1120 – June 22, 2011 – Nahum 3:1-7

Description Of The Reason For The Destruction Of Ninevah

If you'd turn to Nahum 1. We've covered several aspects of the problem of evil and now we want to come back to Nahum, which is what stimulated our interest in this problem in the first place. Nahum is a full three chapters devoted entirely to the destruction of Nineveh in 612BC. And it has an important message for us today. It gives us a tangible foreview of the fact that God will take care of the evil problem. It's something you really need because it seems that evil is having its way but what Nahum does for you is say, no, evil is a temporary situation that God will resolve. In light of the fact that God will resolve it also comes the question what is the right response to God resolving it?

There are a number of possible responses. Should we be saddened and weep because they did not believe the gospel so as to be saved? Should we remain quiet and humbly respectful of the dead? Or should we celebrate, should we clap our hands because evil is destroyed? As we come to chapter 3 and near the close of the book we will find increasingly the proper response to the destruction of evil. We will be working more on this issue from here on out. As we gear up for that let's review.

In 1:1 we learn that the Book of Nahum is an oracle concerning Nineveh. Nineveh was an ancient city founded after the Flood in the 22nd century BC by Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. He was the great leader of apostasy in the post-Flood world, but he was still made in the image of God and he used the tools of reason and language to become a great architect and builder of cities; he designed and built nine cities in all, all around the Mesopotamian region. They were supposed to spread out from that region but they rebelled. And one of the cities he built was Nineveh. He situated it on the Eastern bank of the Tigris River, a post-Flood Tigris River, not the pre-

Flood version (this is a radically changed earth, the Flood was a global catastrophe). So he built his city here and it came to be in the Assyrian Empire, one of the seven great Gentile kingdoms. And by the 8th century BC it was chosen by the Assyrian Warlord Sennacherib to be the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Sennacherib wanted to renovate Nineveh and so he started a great building project. He built a great palace there, he built beautiful parks and gardens, he built a canal system that fed reservoirs throughout the city and watered the parks and gardens. Nineveh became one of the greatest cities of the ancient world; the whole city was transformed into a resort and it attracted people from all over the ancient world. Then came Sennacherib's sons Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal and they continued to build and develop the city with all the riches they received either by pillage or by tribute, from the surrounding nations and Nineveh rose to become the richest city of the ancient world.

The thing you want to remember is the Sennacherib dynasty. This dynasty was extremely arrogant, just like its founder, Nimrod. This connection of arrogance goes way back to the time just after the Flood. And we studied this arrogance. Remember how Sennacherib acted in the days of Hezekiah? Hezekiah had come to the throne and he was faithful to YHWH. His father Ahaziah had been an apostate idiot, he couldn't trust the Lord at all and so he paid tribute to Assyria to keep them off his back, but when Hezekiah came to the throne he was able to trust the LORD and so he rebelled against Assyria, he refused to pay tribute to a pagan king. And so Sennacherib decided he would come down to Judah and teach Hezekiah a lesson. And while he was besieging Lachish he sent his propaganda boys, Rabshakeh and company, over to Jerusalem to threaten Hezekiah. They talked a lot of smack about the God of Israel and how they had whipped everybody else and everybody else's gods and so who is going to stop us from whipping you and your god. And that was their big mistake. There was a whole lot of talk and that was one of the tactics they used to instill fear in people. Propaganda can go a long way, it still does today. But we saw in the end who got the last word because when a man of faith heard all this smack he utilized the faith-rest drill and got results. First he went to the prophet Isaiah because he knew that in a pressure situation he needed the word of God. Since the prophet was the voice of God he went straight to the prophet. Then he did another smart thing, he went to the Lord in prayer. Those are the two smartest things you can do in a pressure situation, go the word of God and start praying. And out

of those two things he got the word of God that Sennacherib had a big fat head, he had put YHWH alongside all the other gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations. And since God has a reputation to keep and His reputation is directly associated with the city of Jerusalem, then God told Hezekiah that Sennacherib would not take Jerusalem. And so during the night the angel of the Lord went through the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 of their soldiers and Sennacherib went home with his tail between his legs. It's one of the great moments of the OT that shows you how God gives the victory through faith. When we simply trust Him and turn to Him He does great things and solves our problem in a way we never could achieve.

A point we want to make out of this is that God is always doing more than one thing at the same time. God is complex in the way He works and so you may see what He's doing over here but there's usually more to it. He's usually accomplishing other things simultaneously. And as He was giving Hezekiah the victory he was also teaching Sennacherib a little humility lesson. Sennacherib was so arrogant he thought he could push YHWH around, and YHWH showed Him you can't push Me around and if you try to push Me around I'll smash your face. And so the Lord was teaching this family a little lesson in humility.

But they didn't learn the lesson because Sennacherib had a son named Esarhaddon and he and his brother teamed up and when their daddy was worshipping in the Temple of Ishtar they snuck up behind him and stabbed him in the back. That's another prophesy by Isaiah that came to pass. And when Esarhaddon came to the throne look what he says, tell me if this family learned humility back at Jerusalem, "I am powerful, I am all powerful, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal, I am honored, I am magnified, I am without equal among all kings, the chosen one of Asshur, Nabu, and Marduk"ⁱ Did he get the lesson? Did he change the family sin pattern? No, the kid was a braggart. Then his son Ashurbanipal comes to the throne and look at his inflated ego: "I [am] Ashurbanipal, the great [king], the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria... . The great gods ... magnified my name; they made my rule powerful" (ibid., 2:323-4). So this family had a sin problem just like every family has a sin problem. The issue isn't does your family have a sin problem, the issue is does your family recognize its sin pattern and bring it under the control of the word of God. That's the issue. This family got the sin pointed out to them very poignantly at Jerusalem but

they didn't do anything about it, they just let it go on and on and on expressing itself. And so every one of these guys in this family passed on his arrogance to his son and that son would pass it on to his son and the sin of arrogance got entrenched in this family and became habitual. And what does God say when a sin pattern becomes habitual in the Ten Commandments? I allow it to go on for three or four generations and then that's it, I wipe it off the stage of history. It's a malignant cancer and I cut it off and that's what Nahum is all about, this malignant cancer being cut out of history.

And here's where we want to capitalize. Right here we see this arrogant kingdom governed by this arrogant family and arrogance tends to use three basic tactics: not always, there's variety, but generally these things - tactic one is propaganda, arrogant people are a lot of talk, hot air and baloney talk, and it's nasty talk, threatening talk. Secondly, terrorism, terror tactics, terror is a form of warfare designed to scare people, it's unpredictable, it's sudden, and what it does is introduce instability into a society and the government responds by taking more and more security measures until freedom is destroyed. Third, brutality. Brutality against anyone who rebels, when you don't go along with their program they teach you a lesson you'll never forget. And these were the three tactics the arrogant Assyrians used. If you rebelled they'd rip your testicles off, they'd impale you and leave you to die, burn you alive, skin you with razor sharp knives, and chop the husbands head off and make his wife carry it hundreds of miles. They even blinded people and cut them loose around the territory of the next city on the hit list just to prepare the way. The Assyrians did insanely wicked things; things that took into account detailed study of anatomy and physiology just to make the death process more grueling, they were expert practitioners of these three tactics.

Now, when you have a sin pattern like arrogance develop into these complex tactics we call that complex depravity. Depravity can be simple or complex. Simple is you just have one thing going over here, say lying, and that can be bad enough, it has to be brought into check. But complex depravity is when it has gone unchecked and you sin and you don't get right with God and you sin some more and you don't get right with God and the sin becomes habitual; it becomes a sin pattern and then you start doing other sins and you develop other habitual sin patterns and all these habitual sin patterns start to interact. That's what we call complex depravity and that's what happened to

the Assyrians and it's what's happening right now with Islam. Islam is the modern counterpart of the ancient Assyrians. They are arrogant, they have a program of world domination and they use the three tactics of propaganda, terrorism and brutality to accomplish their mission - it's complex depravity.

And the only way to handle these people is get tough with them like the Babylonians got tough with the Assyrians. You can't bargain with these people, you can't scare them by putting a few sanctions on them and you certainly can't crouch in a corner and let them have their own way. If you cower, if you flinch for even a moment, they interpret that as a victory and then they get more arrogant and nastier. So the only way to deal with these people, the only thing that communicates is to militarily crush them, just obliterate them. You can't show any mercy and people don't like that; something about that doesn't sound right. But if you don't they'll do just like the Assyrians did - they'll keep pushing you around until they take over your country and eventually the whole world. They won't stop. That's the nature of complex depravity, it gets so embedded in a society, in a culture that nothing will stop it except to totally annihilate it. So, since God dealt with the Assyrians that way by obliterating them in 612BC with the Babylonian and Median armies, then I think we can say with respect to Islam, that somehow God is going to obliterate them. That's not to say that in the meantime they can't come to Christ, many of them are coming to Christ right now, Muslims in Iran right now are coming to Christ in droves but eventually that society has to be obliterated. I don't know if it will be in the battle of Gog and Magog in Ezek 38-39 which looks like an alliance between Iran and Russia or if it will be in some other battle not prophesied by Scripture. But that God will deal with the arrogant Empire of Islam is a foregone conclusion.

And so what Nahum does is it assures us that when some people group or some religion gets arrogant and nasty and they start to take over the world, they start to overwhelm everybody and it looks like they're going to prevail, Nahum says they will not prevail. Nahum says, yeah, the world is a bad place, yeah, these people are nasty, they do unspeakable things, but God has it all under control. God is working something out, but it will only go so far and then bang, He's going to destroy it. We don't know exactly why God lets it go so far, we don't know why He sets the limits where He sets them, but we do know that He is longsuffering. God has a very long fuse and we cry out for God to judge and we wonder how long, O Lord, but finally He will. Finally

He will blow the whistle and the end of grace will arrive and judgment will fall. But always there is grace before judgment. Never forget it. God gives grace to everyone, including the nasty people, and sometimes God goes and saves the really nasty people. Remember Jonah? What was that book all about? It was about God saying I have some really nasty people that I want to be gracious to, that's what I want. Jonah didn't want that, but God did want that and so what did God do? He reached down and saved the nasty Ninevites much to the dislike of Jonah. But that is God's prerogative. He can save who He wants to when He wants to and no one is beyond His reach. So we have grace and that goes on for awhile and if it is spurned and sin patterns develop and get embedded in societies and cultures then they can go past the point of no return and then God drops the hammer. And I think the proper response when He drops the hammer is to rejoice; we're going to have a celebration because justice has been served. Our God reigns and we should clap our hands because here we have a little foreview of the fact that God is going to solve the evil problem in the grand finale. Evil will not prevail, God will prevail. So God has given us historical precedent, we can look back at Nineveh and say, aha, God solved that little evil problem and all the hot air and baloney talk. And therefore we have precedence for saying He'll solve the bigger evil problem of Islam and He'll solve the evil problem of Satan. So don't be discouraged and overwhelmed by evil, there is hope. God will make all wrongs right, He'll correct the imbalance, justice will prevail. In the meantime we live in a day of grace and we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, to get back into the book we can outline Nahum into two parts. Chapter 1 is part 1 and chapter 2 and 3 are part 2. In part 1 He has simply declared judgment. Chapter 1 is a declaration of judgment; it's just stating that God judges because of His character. His character is the standard by which the judgment occurs. And there are various means by which God judges so that when some nation gets destroyed we recognize that He is the one doing that. He uses nature forces like earthquakes, volcanoes, floods; He uses men, armies of men, economies of men, ideas of men, all these things are at God's disposal, they're His creations. When we see economies collapse we know that God is orchestrating that collapse as a judgment upon man. When we see a flood destroy some place then we know that water is God's hand of judgment.

Then he goes on in chapter 1 to apply this to Nineveh and so when the Judeans see the flood of water entering Nineveh and they see the Babylonian army rushing into the city to destroy they know that is the hand of God, that it is God doing these things through the instruments of man and nature at His disposal. So we have the specific application of God's principles of judgment to Nineveh. That's part 1, declarations of God's character as the basis of judgment and declarations of judgment. But they're simply declarations, doctrinal formulations if you will.

Then in part 2, Chapters 2 and 3, we have descriptions of the judgment. The difference between declarations and descriptions is that the declarations in chapter 1 are more general while the descriptions of the actual judgment are very specific. Here we read vivid details of the actual judgment, prophesied, they are written in advance, about 50 years before they occurred in 612BC at the battle of Nineveh. And Nahum sees the infantry in formation outside of Nineveh dressed in red and holding shields of red so they appear as a sea of warriors. They are brandishing cypress spears and the cavalry are mounted in Scythian chariots of flashing swords, prepared for war. They enter the city, the chariots race madly in the streets, there is confusion and chaos; a group of operatives destroy the sluice gates allowing water to rush into the city, the people of Nineveh flee in terror. In the aftermath the city is plundered of its silver and gold. It reads real fast, real quick, its sudden destruction and Nineveh disappears from the stage of world history, never to be rebuilt.

Tonight we come to chapter 3 where we have further description of the battle and the reason for their disappearance which centers on verse 4, **All because of the many harlotries of the harlot, The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries.** The reason put forth is the **many harlotries of the harlot.** And the harlot is the bloody city of verse 1, which is the city of Nineveh. So Nineveh is the **harlot** and she has committed **many harlotries.**

We know about harlots because we studied Hosea and Hosea was told to go marry a harlot. Christians have tried to fix that because they're too pious to believe that God could tell Hosea to go marry a harlot. But that's what it says and if you don't believe me you can go back and listen to the CD's where I give the reasons. God had a reason for doing that and God was more interested in getting His message through loud and clear than meeting the

pious standards of modern theologians. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute because that depicted what He was married to. The nation Israel was a spiritual prostitute, she worshipped idols, and she was violating her marriage contract. So go marry a prostitute Hosea, I'm going to give a highly visual lesson here of what I'm having to put up with.

But here we have a different aspect of harlotry in view. Israel is not portrayed as the harlot here but Nineveh is. And Nineveh is not being portrayed as if she was married to God and committing harlotry by worshipping idols. Of course, they were idolatrous, they were polytheists and worshipped the goddess Ishtar, the goddess of sex and war, and they had plenty of both in Nineveh, so much that the city took on characteristics of sex and war, illicit sex and illicit war which we've seen.

But here it's not speaking of physical sex, though they had that too, it's speaking of foreign policy, it's talking about political sex. Politics can be carried out illicitly and so to point out the sinful aspects of politics Nahum plays on the figure of a harlot. The point at which he plays on is how the harlot has to use certain techniques to attract her customers; she has to put out something that draws attention. That's why harlots dress they way they dress, that's why they hang out in the red light district and stand on the corner, that's why they wear just enough clothing to show some skin yet enough to leave the rest to your imagination. It's all to lure you in and get you in the sack. Nahum is taking those principles of attraction and lust and applying them to the politics of the Ninevites. Nineveh had a certain way of dealing with other nations down in the foreign policy department and it runs parallel to how a harlot attracts and lures customers.

And if you turn to 2 Kgs 18:31 you can see these tactics being employed. These people weren't stupid, they were quite shrewd, but this is what God is upset about. He doesn't like their political tactics. Here in 2 Kgs 18 we have Sennacherib's propaganda boys and Rabshakeh at the head of it all. This guy was a real piece of work and he's working them over real good. This guy had a degree in propaganda and this is one of his finest pieces, in vv 27-30 he uses the negative side of propaganda. Propaganda, to be effective has both a negative and a positive side. The negative side is the bleak picture, if you don't do what we want we're going to hurt you real bad; the positive side is the nice pretty picture they paint, if you do what we want we're going to give

you some candy. So he's giving them the negative in vv 27-30 and then in v 31 he gives them the positive, this is the eye candy, this is the tactic of the harlot: "thus says the king of Assyria, "Make your peace with me and come out to me, and eat each of his vine and each of his fig tree and drink each of the waters of his own cistern," see, you'll have peace, you can stay at your home for awhile until verse 32, "until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey," we've got a nice place set aside for you, it's just like your land, it's got a lot of food, it even has wine, how about it? Then he turns back to the negative, "that you may live and not die." So, there's no reason to die today, you can have a great life if you just submit to our yoke. That's the political policy the Assyrians used and if you turn back to Nah 3:4 you see they used it over and over and over.

This was standard operating procedure when they approached a city and we know it was because Nahum says she commits **many harlotries**, not just a few acts of harlotry, but many harlotries, meaning she had many customers. Every city they went to they used this line and the people would buy it hook, line and sinker just like the men that go into the red light district, it looks good, it sounds good, it's easy, they get started and they can't stop. It's become habitual and once it gets habitual it's impossible to stop; they've gone beyond the point of no return. And they're being condemned for using the tactics of harlotry in the foreign policy department. It's illicit politics or what I call the politics of whoring.

But that's not all, in verse 4 we also see the politics of sorcery, Nineveh, **the charming one, the mistress of sorceries**. Now sorcery is using a secret art to bring something to light but the thing doesn't come to light until it's all said and done. In other words, you can't tell what they're doing until it's done and then it's too late. And that's what happened to many nations who entered foreign relations with the Assyrians. They thought they were getting one thing and they ended up with another, that's the politics of sorcery. It's deceitful.

And the after-effects are spelled out at the end of the verse, **Who sells nations by her harlotries And families by her sorceries**. See the thing about sleeping with a prostitute and the thing about putting yourself under sorcery is that the end result is slavery. In both cases you think you're the

one that's going to benefit. You think you're going to score, but in both cases they're the one's that win and you're the victim. You lose. That's why prostitution and sorcery are so seductive; they have to be in order to lure you in because there's a catch and the ones in the business know very well that you are the victim. So they have to use these techniques to draw you in. And that's what he's saying Assyria did. They used techniques of deceit but it was all eye candy. They baited nations, they lured families, and the nations and families that took the bait and engaged in harlotry with Assyria. They were sold off, they were sent into slavery, they were sent into captivity. And we've studied how Assyria did this. They'd take your people and send you somewhere else and they take another people and send them to your land and they were moving people all around because that way it was easier to destroy national loyalties, it made it smooth sailing so far as running the empire was concerned.

And that's the reason God is so upset, these sinful politics of Assyria were deceitful. Now we're going to go back to verse 1, how they benefited from the deceit. **Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; Her prey never departs.** We already know why Nineveh is referred to as **the bloody city**, literally "city of drops of blood," that is bloodshed and murder. They were wicked killers, murderers of innocent life, they were constantly on the search for prey, they went too far, as in the prior verse, verse 12, like lions that tore enough for their cubs, killed enough and yet filled their lairs with prey, with torn flesh. They over-did it, they killed and conquered for the sake of killing and conquering. They got a taste of blood and they became man eaters. **completely full of lies and pillage**, two things, **full of lies** or "deceit." Just like modern Islam, full of lies, these people lie, lie, lie, they lie right to your face and that's defined as moral. They tell you one thing to your face and the opposite to the Arabic world. There's nothing new under the sun, the Assyrians started that. And second, **pillage**, this of course is the plunder, the plunder that came out of broken covenants that Assyria made with other nations. Assyria became the wealthiest kingdom of the ancient world at the expense of the other nations. And it's been demonstrated that the descriptions of the plunder are so extravagant they border on fabrication. This is how they benefited; always the harlot benefits and you lose.

Verse 2, we return to the vivid description of the destruction of Nineveh when the Babylonians and Medes attack, **The noise of the whip, The noise of**

the rattling of the wheel, Galloping horses and bounding chariots!

Nahum hears the noise, the cracking of the whips of the charioteers, and the rattling of the chariot-wheels across the cobblestone streets. He sees horses galloping and chariots bouncing through the streets as they speed across rugged roads, he sees **Horsemen charging**, from a word that means to drive the spurs into the side of the horse to make it accelerate its speed. He sees **swords flashing** as the warriors fight and **spears gleaming** as they fly across the chaotic expanse.

As these words depict the battle the words which follow depict the consequences of the battle. **Many slain, a mass of corpses, And countless dead bodies—They stumble over the dead bodies!** There are so many dead bodies, mountains of bodies in the streets to the point soldiers cannot get down the street without tripping over them.

Verse 4 we've covered, their politics of whoring and sorcery that deceived the nations, enslaving them and building up hot anger in God who is now obliterating them. Verse 5, **Behold, "I am against you," declares the LORD of armies**, hosts is armies and the point is that God has at his disposal man and nature, these are His weapons of mass destruction and when God is against you that is a very terrifying thing. **And I will lift up your skirts over your face.** Nakedness was the most extreme form of embarrassment in the ancient world and so He's saying I'm going to embarrass you **And show to the nations your nakedness And to the kingdoms your disgrace.** He's going to disgrace them because of all that they have done.

Verse 6, **And I will throw filth you on And make you vile, And set you up as a spectacle**, the Hebrew is really nasty here, I don't know if we can say in church what He's saying here, but maybe you can imagine what **filth** really means here. Let's just say it's a waste product and leave it at that. Nineveh will become a waste and will be set up as a spectacle before all the nations. That way everyone sees what God does to arrogant kingdoms.

Verse 7, **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 for you?"** See, the ancient practice is that even vile people had people go grieve for them at the funerals because they would have

paid mourners, that was a common practice. Herod the Great, paid off Jews before he died to mourn for him when he died. But when he died they didn't go, that's because he was rotten, absolutely rotten and that's what is being said here, not even paid mourners would show up to grieve for Nineveh! And so already you see the kind of response that is proper to the destruction of evil. And I don't see anyone grieving at all, I don't see anyone upset that these dirty, rotten people got obliterated.

Alright, next week we'll try to finish up the book and see if we can conclude the questions regarding how to respond to the destruction of evil.

¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1494). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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