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An Introduction to Nahum, Part 2

As a child I used to lay in my bed frightened by my imagination. I remember those days of lying in bed knowing that there was some creature under the bed or in the closet because i heard the creaking sound of the house cooling at night. A few times I sought my loving father to be reassured that everything was going to be alright. The prophecy of Nahum is little more than that conviction!

Nahum was written around 650 B.C. and concerns itself with the perennial threat of God's people: The Assyrians. The only reason God raised up this nation and made it great, was so that it could serve His purpose of disciplining His people, Israel and Judah on account of their

apostasy and rebellion. One hundred years prior to Nahum, speaking of Assyria, God said this:

Isaiah 10:6, "I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury to capture booty and to seize plunder..."

The point was to discipline God's people NOT to torture or condemn them! Yet Assyria in their godlessness never gave consideration to the Lord that raised them up. Instead, they took credit for their success as a nation and wielded it to serve their fleshly lusts and pleasures! However this was an abuse of the civil authority that God had given them for Paul plainly declares that civil authorities are to be "a minister of God to you for good" (Romans 13:4).

Yet as has been the case throughout world history, strong nations have abused their power and so their calling, and have used their position to serve a sinful agenda. And this is what Assyria did to the utmost! They derived pleasure both from

- (1) Humiliating God's people (torturing, raping, murdering) and
- (2) Defying God most high- thinking that they were more powerful than the Lord who raised them up!

Recall the words of Sennacherib when he laid Jerusalem in siege:

2 Chronicles 32:15, "Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you like this, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less shall your God deliver you from my hand?"

Now God will not be mocked! The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility! Because of their arrogance and rebellion, Assyria would be destroyed.

Isaiah 10:12, "So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.'"

Now fast forward the clock about one hundred years; the prophecy that Isaiah gave in Isaiah 10 was soon to be fulfilled! And the one whom God raised up to announce this was Nahum!

Nahum. 1:1: "The oracle of Nineveh...."

The term "oracle" in the context of the prophets typically references a "burden of judgment"! And that is exactly what it was here.

Nahum. 1:14: speaking of Assyria, "The Lord has issued a command concerning you [Nineveh]: 'Your name will no longer be perpetuated. I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible.'"

Nahum. 3:7: “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?”

Now to understand fully the significance of this declaration, you must remember that for 200 years God’s people were the whipping posts of this cruel nation! The mere mentioning of their name would have evoked horrible memories which would have overpowered!

Think of the three Cleveland women held captive by Ariel Castro for ten years; *what a burden!* Do you realize that for the rest of their lives it will only take the smell of an odor or perhaps the sound of a lawn mower and each of these women will be transported back to their dungeon and all its cruelty? This is the horrible effects of trauma on an individual. In fact, they called it “shell shocked” in World War II. This no doubt was the effect that the 200 year reign of Assyrian terror had on God’s people!

But then God came into the room! Again, that essentially is the point of Nahum! In 650 BC God raise up a man whose name means “comfort” (“Nahum” is an onomatopoeic word which conveys the sound made when relief comes to someone in pain- נַחֲמָ [nă·hûm]) to proclaim the powerful message of the sovereignty of God over this nation! And so from Nahum we learn that all that Assyria ever was, was a pawn in the hand of God! Do you understand this important message?

Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

The same could be said about:

- Any and every foe.
- Evil and wicked men.
- Disease.
- Whatever holds you captive!

God sovereignly rules over all things, not just the good things of life and what a comfort this is! Remember what enabled Joseph NOT to be bitter toward his brothers who sought his ruin years before.

Genesis 50:20, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

God was behind the very difficult times in Joseph’s life and this truth comforted him! The apostles recognized this when they were persecuted by the Jewish leaders of their day and they too were comforted! Speaking of Jerusalem they said:

Acts 4:27-28, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur."

Accordingly, Nahum is a glorious treatment of the Sovereign Rule of God over Life! It was intended to be a reminder that God is always on watch, in the room! In the words of David:

Psalm 4:8, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety."

Last time we saw the first four truths with which Nahum reminded his generation when it came to God's Sovereign Rule.

God's Sovereign Rule is Righteous

All that God does is pure and noble! Does evil exist in this world? Yes! Do good people get hurt by it? Yes! But you must see that (1) Even the evil and wicked designs of man are in the sovereign control of God, and (2) The rule He exercises is righteous!

God's Sovereign Rule is Patient

Nahum 1:3, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power..."

Recall that there is a beautiful weaving together of two important truths here. First, God's timing is not our timing. Assyria ruled over God's people 200 years before the Lord destroyed the evil nation. That means that good men and women lived their lives only to suffer under wicked men! Secondly, but this is not weakness of the on the part of God.

Nahum 1:3, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power..."

For man, suffering seems to be the ultimate crises. Yet to the genuine child of God who is God-centered (recall what we saw in Zephaniah 3:18), the ultimate crises is NOT the failure to enjoy pleasure, BUT when (1) God is dishonored, (2) His worship is compromised, and/or (3) His people fail to take refuge in Him! Pastor Jared Wilson put it this way in a recent blog:

One of the problems I have with all the 'chase your dreams!' cheerleading from Christian leaders is not because I begrudge anyone wanting to achieve their dreams, but because I don't think we readily see how easy it is to conflate our dream-chasing with God's will in Christ.

You know, it's possible that God's plan for us is littleness. His plan for us may be personal failure. It's possible that when another door closes, it's not because he plans to open a window but because he plans to have the building fall down on you. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Will Christ be enough? (Wilson, 2014)

God's sovereign rule over this creation is patient, which means we may live in light of the shadow of death for a lifetime as our good God works His purpose and will in and through all things!

God's Sovereign Rule is Just

Nahum 1:3, "...and the Lord will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished..."

Yes we may suffer a lifetime, but in the end we enter into Christ's rest (Hebrews 4:9-10)! But the wicked, they will suffer eternity in hell on account of every sin they have committed! At one point in his life Asaph struggled on account of the relative ease of the wicked and yet the seemingly difficult life of the godly. Yet it was resolved when he realized that God's sovereign rule is just.

Psalm 73:16-17, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end."

God's Sovereign Rule is Unpredictable and Foreboding

Nahum 1:3c, "...In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet."

Again I remind you of C. S. Lewis' statement that "*while God is good, He isn't safe!*" Temporally we don't know what God is going to do and how He is going to do it. Again, His will for us may be our "littleness"! Yet if that brings about His good purpose how can we complain? Isn't it enough to know that He has deigned to use us?!

Accordingly, we must be very careful when it comes to the expectations we have when it comes to God and what He will do with, by, and through us! I can't tell you how many times I've watched Christians flounder in their faith because they hold God to something He has never committed Himself! Learn from Nahum. 1:3 that God's sovereign rule is unpredictable; and for the non-Christian it is foreboding!

God's Sovereign Rule is Unthwartable

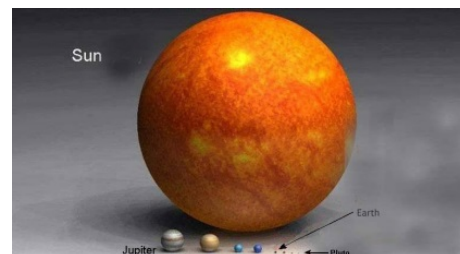
Nahum. 1:4-6, "He rebukes the sea and makes it dry [an allusion to the Exodus]; He dries up all the rivers [Nineveh's primary protection as a city was its river, the Tigris (cf. Zephaniah 2:6); this bespeaks the hopeless condition of the city and so the nation]. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossoms of Lebanon wither [all three of these locals are in Samaria and represent the most fertile, forest clad, and well-watered areas of Palestine; heretofore they were impervious to ruin and destruction, but what God was going to do to these areas in His judgment would make them wither!].⁵ Mountains quake because of Him, and the hills dissolve [literally, "melt"- an interesting statement in light of 2 Peter 3!]; indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, the world and all the inhabitants in it. [Family of God, it is by the word of His power that this world is upheld (Hebrews 1:3). Accordingly, He need only speak a word and there will destruction!]⁶ Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? [The answer is, "No One!"- not Israel, not Judah, not a foreign

nation, and certainly not Assyria!] His wrath is poured out like fire [note in this world fire devours anything and everything... except rocks/mountains- which brings us to the last statement], and the rocks are broken up by Him.”

What an incredible description of the unthwartable work and will of Almighty God! In comparison to God and this description, we are so puny! David pondered this very question:

Psalm 8:3-4, “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?”

Let me put into perspective how great God is and how small we really are. In your notes I have placed two pictures. The first is a picture of the planets of our solar system in comparison to the sun. Now notice: the sun is a million times the size of earth. If the earth was the size of a golf-ball the sun would be 15 feet in diameter! Another way of putting it: 960,000 earths could fit inside the sun! The second picture has three of the largest stars that we know of in the universe. Notice the first one:



- Betelgeuse. This star is twice the size of the earth’s orbit around the sun! In fact, 262 trillion earths would fit inside Betelgeuse. Accordingly, on the picture you will note that the sun isn’t even a dot in comparison to it! If that is the case, what must be the earth? And yet God made all of this by the breath of His power (Psalm 33:6)!
- Then there is Mu Cephei. This star is massive. Two point seven quadrillion earths would fit inside it. Let me put this into perspective: a billion is a thousand million, a trillion is a thousand billion, and quadrillion is a thousand trillion. A million seconds is twelve days. A billion seconds is thirty-two years. A trillion seconds is 31,709 years. But a quadrillion seconds is 30,800,000 years! With that in mind, again consider: 2.7 quadrillion earths would fit inside Mu Cephei! It is massive! *And again, God made this by speaking a word!*
- Finally, the largest known star is Canus Majoris. Seven quadrillion earth’s would fit inside! And yet to God, Canus Majoris isn’t even a speck of dust!



Do you see how big God is and how small we really are? Next to Canus Majoris, the earth isn’t even visible! And next to the earth, we aren’t visible! Now God has said that on the Last Day He is going to destroy the entire earth by fire (2 Peter 3:11)! Do you think He can? To God, the earth is less than a speck of dust! But this is where it gets incredible! Listen again to David’s words in Psalms:

Psalms 8:1, 3-4, 5, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens! When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take

thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? // ⁵ Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty!”

Think of how puny we really are in this universe! And yet God says here that in the entire universe, you are the most important thing to Him! Ultimately, that was Nahum’s exhortation to his generation! Whatever Assyria has or will do is ever and always subject to the unthwartable rule of God who in His providence has made us the most important thing in the universe! This naturally leads to God’s sovereign rule is good.

God’s Sovereign Rule is Good

Nahum. 1:7, “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.”

This passage speaks marvels! First, how do we define “good”? It is very difficult since our definition is relative to our context and situation. When we speak of a man being “good” we typically are saying that a large part of his life results in benefit. He helps those around him whether animals, objects, or persons. And this facet can be ascribed to God when the Bible says that He is good. Truly, that God is good means that all that He does results in benefit, where “benefit” is defined in the context of His Kingdom!

However, we must also realize that God is holy in His goodness. That means that God’s goodness is unlike anything we’ve ever seen or known on this earth. So again, what does it mean to say that God is good? This we can say:

- (1) When the Bible says that God is good that means every act, thought, and action of the Lord is good!
- (2) All that He does is for the benefit of His Kingdom and therefore His children! In fact, notice how the text qualifies the statement that “The Lord is good.”

Nahum 1:7b, “The Lord is good, a stronghold [a place of protection] in the day of trouble [this is similar to the Greek thlipsis. The Hebrew is סָרָא (sārâ) and references any tight or suffocating place], and He knows [loves and so cherishes] those who take refuge in Him.”

Because God is good, He is a refuge for His people whom He loves! Do you see Nahum’s point as it relates to the genuine servant of Christ? If God in His providence deigned to uphold Assyria for 200 years while His people suffered, we must conclude that a good purpose was in mind- though we may not understand it on this side of the grave. Yet in the meantime, the Lord was all the protection, comfort, and support that God’s people could ever want or need! All they needed to do was rely upon Him! And this we too must say about *any valley* into which God may lead us, whether it be the valley of the shadow of death, the valley of suffering, the valley of insecurity, etc. Christ is our sufficiency; He is all we need! And so, God’s sovereign rule is good, both in its essence and results! All that God is and is doing will be to the glory of Christ and the benefit of His

people!

God's Sovereign Rule Can Seem Brutal

Nahum. 1:8, "But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, and will pursue His enemies into darkness."

This passage involves the extremes! We are NOT talking here about a small flood, but "an overflowing flood" one that is unstoppable and overwhelms all things! We are NOT talking merely about the end of a nation, but its "complete end."

Jerusalem, Damascus, and Hebron all have been occupied continuously from patriarchal times until today. Yet a mere three hundred years after the fall of the city of Nineveh (again, at its peak it held 175,000 people in the city walls), travelers hardly suspected that the area ever had been inhabited! We are NOT talking about a casual pursuit on the part of God of the wicked and evil, but "an unrelenting pursuit" all the way "into darkness." Think of it, no warrior would ever pursue an enemy into darkness; when night fell the battle typically ended. Yet not so with God! He will pursue both His and our enemies until they are gone!

The nuance is that of utter "brutality" (my word). We've seen how EVERY sin will be judged on the Day of Judgment. Yet what does this look like? It involves a seemingly unyielding and thorough "brutality" in which even the redeemed will be tempted to say, "*There's more?! Unbelievable!*"

Nahum brings this out in the second and third chapters of this prophecy. He utilizes what is known as the prophetic present where he describes a future event as if it were happening before the listener's eyes! Now brothers and sisters, we must realize that we are a culture which has been greatly influenced by television and movies. Today we don't read about something, we watch a video on it! And of those who mostly read today, the visual area of their brain is much more developed than a person living in Nahum's day.

In Nahum's day, however, THE media was the spoken word — oral. That means that the part of the brain that controls listening and the imagination were much more developed than ours. Accordingly, today reading Nahum. 2-3 will seem boring and archaic to most if not all of us. Yet you must see that to Nahum's original audience, it would have been a brutal, "R-rated" description of what was going to happen to Assyria.

Nahum. 2:3-7: "The shields of his mighty men are *colored* red, the warriors are dressed in scarlet, the chariots are *enveloped* in flashing [shiny] steel when he is prepared *to march*, and the cypress *spears* are brandished. The chariots race madly in the streets, they rush wildly in the squares, their appearance is like torches, they dash to and fro like lightning flashes. He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their march, they hurry to her wall, and the mantelet is set up [a "mantelet" was a protective shield used in warfare by people assaulting a city]. The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved. And it is fixed: she is stripped,

she is carried away, and her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves, beating on their breasts.”

Another major theme of this prophecy is the vivid wrath of God! The people of Assyria would live through the harrowing throes of judgment!

Nahum. 3:2-3, “The noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of the wheel, galloping horses, and bounding chariots! Horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming, many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies- they stumble over the dead bodies!”

Both of these passages graphically describe the fall of Nineveh, which occurred in August of 612 B.C., at the hands of the Babylonians. Truly, God’s sovereign rule can seem brutal! Yet this is nothing new to you. Look around and behold the “brutality” of God’s providence as the Kingdom of God comes to this earth! In fact, when we recognize the sovereignty of God, we are faced with the moral dilemma of evil.

Isaiah 45:6b-7, “I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity [רע] (ra’); I am the Lord who does all these.”

Amos 3:6, “If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?”

You say, “How do these passages fit with the goodness of God?” To fully address this question adequately would take several sermons. However, I will say that it is important to recognize the context from which the question most often is raised: from the perspective of this world and its bitterness. Yet let me ask you: when in WWII we attacked German forces resulting in brutal and untold suffering and death — not only to soldiers, but sometimes to civilians — were the Allies being cruel? Would you call what they did evil? NO! You would say, “That’s warfare!” Christian, do you understand that Satan still is the prince of the power of the air and though Christ in His First Advent re-established His Kingdom on this earth, nevertheless Christ’s Kingdom has yet to come in its fullness? Today, God still is in the process of reclaiming this earth from Satan! We are the church militant, and this age is going to climax in a brutal clash between the followers of Satan and the followers of God! Accordingly, there are going to be lives lived in oppression and hardship. Yet to the child of God, it will all be to the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom. Now, would you call this evil? No! We call it warfare!

In fact, if you pray the way Christ taught us to pray you will be praying for the continuation of the “Brutal” Rule of God, “...Thy Kingdom come...” What do you think you are praying for when you pray this prayer? For an easy and successful life? The coming of God’s Kingdom on this earth means the conquest of Satan’s Kingdom which currently rules over this world (cf. Luke 4:5-7)!

When you pray, “Deliver us from evil,” are you so naïve that you don’t understand that this involves the violent incursion of God’s Kingdom into this world by which Satan’s wicked reign is

diminished? Brothers and sisters truly, God's sovereign rule can seem brutal. But, once and again we must see, it is always good! And because of that, we are able to follow God as He leads us through the valley of the Shadow of death! The genuine servant of Christ did in Nahum's day! And so it will be in our own!

Are you weary and heavy laden? Are you frightened by many a fear? The message of Nahum to you this day is, "Open your eyes; your Daddy has entered the room!"

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

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