



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### Introduction to Nahum, Part 3

Mary and Martha sent Christ a message, their brother, Lazarus, is sick. Now in what may seem to be a most curious passage, we read this:

John 11:5-6, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He heard that he was sick, He stayed then two days *longer* in the place where He was."

You'd think that if Christ "loved" Lazarus, He would have dropped everything to go to his bedside; but Christ didn't! Why? Because something bigger was going on here that went way

beyond Lazarus.

After the two day delay, Christ travelled to where Lazarus lived along with his sisters, Mary and Martha. You know the story, He was greeted by the Martha who said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). After Christ consoled her, Mary then arrived on the scene and her response was the same as her sisters, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32)!

Isn't it interesting that both Mary and Martha presumed the same thing: When Lazarus lay dying, Christ was not there!

I think that is how we view most of what occurs in our lives. When things are hard and things happen that are outside of our control and which seem bad, we presume Christ/God wasn't there! After all, if God were there and He is good, then such and such wouldn't have happened! And so we have this quasi doctrine of God's Sovereignty which presumes that if Christ is involved, we will always live happily ever after. That clearly was the understanding of Mary and Martha! But here is the problem; Christ was involved in Lazarus' death!

John 11:3-4: "The sisters therefore sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.' But when Jesus heard it, He said, 'This sickness is not [ultimately] unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it.'"

Then we read:

John 11:6, "...the Lord stayed then two days longer..."

Christ was involved in Lazarus' death at every point and that ought to have been his sister's comfort! It was this which gave comfort to Jeremiah, God told him:

Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you [IOW, *Jeremiah, all that you are and have been is according to my appointment! Now get this...*]; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

When Job finally woke up and saw reality, this is what he affirmed:

Job 42:2: "I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."

That was Job's comfort! And we see this with David,

Psalms 139:1-5, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known *me*. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up [IOW, God is intimately involved in our lives!!!]; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid

Thy hand upon me.”

This truth of God’s intimate and yet Sovereign involvement in our lives was so amazing to David he essentially closes the section saying, *“God sovereignty and intimacy in this life blows my mind!”* (Psalm 139: 6). Loraine Boettner put it this way:

The sense of security which this doctrine gives to the struggling saint results from the assurance that he is not committed to his own power, or rather weakness, but into the sure hands of the Almighty Father, - that over him is the banner of love and underneath are the everlasting arms. He realizes that even the Devil and wicked men, regardless of whatever tumults they may cause, are not only restrained of God but are compelled to do His pleasure. (Boettner, 1991, p. 329)

This is essentially the message of Nahum! Nahum was written around 650 B.C. and concerns itself with the perennial threat of God’s people: The Assyrians. Recall, 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! 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!

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.’”

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 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?”

To understand fully the significance of this declaration, you must remember that for two hundred 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! But then God raised up a prophet to preach a most comforting and reassuring sermon! In fact, his name translates in the Hebrew as “comfort” which is no mistake. God’s sovereignty over life is one of our greatest comforts as Christians!

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

And so with every humiliation perpetrated against God’s people, every wrong, every hurt and pain, God was intimately involved! Asaph wrote this:

Psalms 73:28a, “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge...”

That essentially was and is the message of Nahum! Christian, Christ is always there in your life! He rules over all things! And while we may not understand what God is doing and why, we know He is good! And that is enough! We have seen this:

- God’s Sovereign Rule is Righteous, Nahum 1:2.
- God’s Sovereign Rule is Patient, Nahum 1:3a.
- God’s Sovereign Rule is Just, Nahum 1:3b.
- God’s Sovereign Rule is Unpredictable and Foreboding, Nahum 1:3c.
- God’s Sovereign Rule is Unthwartable, Nahum 1:4-6.
- God’s Sovereign Rule is Good, Nahum 1:7.
- God’s Sovereign Rule Can Seem Brutal, Nahum 1:8; 3:1-7.

There are four more truths about God’s sovereign rule. God’s sovereign rule confounds the plans of man.

### God’s Sovereign Rule Confounds the Plans of Man

Nahum 1:9, “Whatever you [second person plural and therefore addressed to Nineveh] devise against the Lord, He will make a complete end of it.”

This is reminiscent of David’s writings:

Psalms 2:1-4, “Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [saying]: ‘Let us tear their fetters apart [speaking of the Lord and His Anointed], and cast away their cords from us!’ [IOW, this is a declaration of a secular king’s independence from God! And God’s response?] He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them.”

Truly that was the case when it came to Nineveh! Again, we are talking about one of the greatest cities in the ancient world (175,000 people living behind the city walls!). And yet God would “make a complete end of it.” The word for “end” is *כָּלָה* (*kālâ*) which in the context of war, as it is here, references a violent destruction (Deuteronomy 7:22; 1 Samuel 15:18; Jeremiah 16:4)! Now while this expression is actually a repeat of what Nahum said in Nahum 1:8, the focus here is different; there it was on the city; here is it on the plans of the arrogant leaders. “Whatever you devise against the Lord” *חֲשָׁב* (*hāšab*); gives the basic idea of “the employment of the mind in creating new ideas.” Obviously the reference relates to the nation’s scheming against Judah and the various and sundry ways that Assyria was going to humiliate them. And yet, because God was behind the nation of Judah, Assyria ultimately was devising these schemes against the Lord!

What a comfort it must have been for the people of God to know

- (1) That all the scheming that Assyria did in their attack against God’s people ultimately was an attack against God, and
- (2) Their status as the largest and most invincible city in the ancient world notwithstanding, God would frustrate their schemes in a violent day of judgment when the city would be pulverized into nothing!

Nahum 1:9b, “...[the] distress [which Assyria inflicted upon the people of God would] will not rise up twice.”

From this we must see that while, “The mind of man plans his way... the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9)! Everything that the wicked and righteous plan is subject to the sovereign will of God. That means there are no free-radicals in this world. There is not one independent atom! From the raising up and deposing of earthly kings to the flight and fall of the tiny sparrow, God is in control of all things, (Daniel 4:31-32; Matthew. 10:29). From the determination of the times and boundaries of the earth’s nations to the number of hairs on your head, God knows and thus determines ALL things (Acts 17:26; Matthew 10:30).

Now if you presume that God is harsh, evil, and unjust this will be bad news. But if you understand that God is in fact good, kind, and gracious, then this doctrine is the source of incredible comfort in life! While what is taking place in our lives may not result in benefit in this world, against the Kingdom of God it is always good! Accordingly behold the testimony/experience of our fathers and mothers in the faith. Joseph was comforted in knowing

that the wicked treatment which he had received at the hands of his brothers had been an essential part of the divine plan to save the family of Jacob (Genesis 45:7-8; 50:20). During the events leading up to the exodus from Egypt, God represented Himself as the one who makes man “dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind” (Exodus 4:11). He also informed Moses prior to Moses’ return to Egypt that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart in order that He might have ample opportunity to display His power to deliver Israel in the boldest possible relief (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; cf. also Psalms 105:25).

On the eve of Canaan’s conquest, Moses informed Israel that God had chosen them to be a people for His own possession by an election (cf. Hosea 13:5; Amos 3:2) based not upon Israel’s merit but upon God’s condescending love and grace (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-8; 8:18; 9:4-6; 10:15). During Absalom’s rebellion against David, although Ahithophel’s counsel to Absalom was militarily superior to Hushai’s, Absalom nonetheless decided to follow Hushai’s advice, “For the Lord had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, in order that the Lord might bring calamity on Absalom” (2 Samuel 17:14) and so save the Kingdom!

Perhaps no declaration sums up the attitude of the Old Testament witness to God’s awesome sovereignty over men and nations more majestically than Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:15, 17, 22, 23, “Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Before Him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by Him as worthless and less than nothing. He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers... He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.”

Peter declared unequivocally that the treatment and death of Christ godless men were in accordance with the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,” (Acts 2:23). (Cf. also Matthew 18:7; 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 17:1; 22:22.)

The entire church in Jerusalem took comfort in knowing that all that Herod, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and the Jewish religious leaders had done to Jesus was in accordance with “...whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur,” (Acts 4:24-28). In the extended passage in Romans 8:28-29 Paul traces all redemptive blessing ultimately to God’s sovereign foreknowledge (i.e. His covenant love) and predestination. It is because of this that we are “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)!

What an incredible truth which we must hold on to! There are no accidents and no mistakes in the outworking of God’s Sovereign will! As such:

- Let the world threaten us!
- Let old age limit our abilities!
- Let disease threaten our being!
- Let a close friend betray us!

In all of these situations and circumstances that which ultimately determines what occurs is the Divine command, “Thus far you shall come, but no farther...” (Job 38:11)! That was the glorious word of comfort Nahum gave to His generation as it related to Assyria!

## God’s Sovereign Rule Will Bring About the Destruction of Wicked Men and Nations

God’s sovereign rule will bring about the destruction of wicked men and nations.

Nahum 1:10, “Like tangled thorns [which when you find them, you burn them lest they spread], and like those who are drunken with their drink [think of the horrible effects of alcohol on the alcoholic], they are consumed as stubble completely withered.”

Nahum 1:14, “The Lord has issued a command concerning you [Nineveh/or any enemy of God]: ‘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.’”

Speaking of the fall of Nineveh and its utter destruction D. J. Wiseman wrote this:

The fall of the great city of Nineveh, as predicted by the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah, occurred in August 612 BC. The Bab. Chronicle tells how a combined force of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians laid siege to the city, which fell as a result of the breaches made in the defenses by the flooding rivers (Na. 2:6–8). The city was plundered by the Medes, and the king Sin-shar-ishkun perished in the flames, though his family escaped. The city was left to fall into the heap of desolate ruin which it is today (Na. 2:10; 3:7), a pasturing-place for the flocks (Zp. 2:13–15), which gives the citadel mound its modern name of Tell Kuyunjik (‘mound of many sheep’). When Xenophon and the retreating Gk. army passed in 401 BC it was already an unrecognizable mass of debris. (I. Howard Marshall, 1996)

Truly as Nahum prophesied, the name of Nineveh, “no longer was perpetuated!” Herein lies the glorious declaration of the invincibility of God’s will over this world which eventually will end in a Final Judgment in which Satan, his demons, and followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire (cf. Revelation 20)! At this time, we/God’s people will be brought into the final state where we shall enjoy the glorious New World for which God created us!

This is a most amazing and glorious reality which we need to stake our lives upon: we have been created for another world! What we call life in this age is lived in the wilderness of sin with scorpions, heat, drought, and marauding bands of wicked and cruel men who entice us into their camp only to destroy us! What we view as “good” must be interpreted against God’s Kingdom! Herein is how we understand the attribute of God’s goodness. All that He does is beneficial in His Kingdom (not Satan’s kingdom which is this world)! Let us therefore be done with the shallow comforts and the vain promises of this life! Truly, if we keep in mind where the activity of the wicked ultimately lead, we would not be so fast to envy their way or their sin! There was a time when Asaph envied the way of the wicked, their pleasures, wealth, and seemingly easy life!

Psalms 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."

That is the point of Nahum. God in His sovereignty will finally and fully deal with the atrocities of the persecutor. Again, He did that with Nineveh in August of 612 B.C. He will do it on the last day!

### God's Sovereign Rule is Unthwartable

Again we see that God's sovereign rule is unthwartable.

Nahum 1:11, "From you has gone forth one who plotted evil against the Lord, a wicked counselor [literally "counselor of belial"- and so a "worthless" counselor or a "Satanic" counselor]."

Evidently there was an evil man who had the ear of the King of Assyria at the time- who, much like Haman perhaps, hated God and His people and actively counseled the king to maximize the pain and suffering of God's people (some commentators think this is in reference to the king himself). Ultimately, his hatred was the Lord though he aimed at God's people. Recall the words of Christ to Paul when the future apostle was attacking the church.

Acts 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

When you are attacked on account of Christ, you are NOT the object of the sinner's ire; it is Christ! Such was the case in Paul's day, and so it was in Nahum's. This wicked counselor of the King of Assyria (most likely filled and led by Satan himself) had it out for God's people, because he hated the Lord of Glory!

Nahum 1:12a, "Thus says the Lord, 'Though they are at full *strength* and likewise many, even so, they will be cut off and pass away.'"

This repeats what has already been proclaimed. However, the focus is on the counsel and will of the wicked against Christ. All that the wicked scheme against the Lord and His people (all that Satan might scheme against God's church) will surely come to naught! For the Lord God Almighty reigns!

Brothers and sisters, that is why I'm NOT a "conspiracy theory" advocate. First, I doubt whether sinful man could be so organized and efficient! We really are that dumb! But secondly if they could be, God will confound their "wisdom" such that in the end they will be "cut off and pass away!"

And so, as scary a thought as it might have been to think that Satan had the ear of the King of Assyria and was counseling wickedness against God's people, Judah need not fear! God was on the throne and He was going to snuff out the mighty nation to nothing! Truly Nahum's



generation could "...in peace lay down their heads and sleep" (Psalms 4:8)! Their God was on the throne! And family of God, so can you!

### God's Sovereign Rule Always Will Bring about Good for His People

And this brings us to Nahum's final point, God's sovereign rule will always bring about good for God's people.

Nahum 1:12-13, "...Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer. So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you, and I will tear off your shackles."

This passage expresses three very important truths regarding not just Judah's struggle with Assyria, BUT all God's providences: All the hardship and struggle that Judah experienced over the course of two hundred years from the Assyrians ultimately was of the Lord! God wasn't impotent to stop the bitter providences; He was behind them!

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 [רָעָה] (ra'ah); 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?"

The bitter providences that God ordained for His people was for their tempering and so their growth in grace. Recall, speaking ultimately of Israel, God told Hosea:

Hosea 2:5-6, "For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths."

It wasn't that God is a kill-joy or at times wakes up on the wrong side of the bed. In all that He does, God is molding and shaping His people for life in eternity! Again, the standard against which we interpret all of this life MUST be God's Kingdom and NOT the earthly kingdom of man. That is the point of Jeremiah speaking of the purpose of the exile and so the destruction of God's peoples' security and earthly comfort.

Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

Do you see? All that God is doing ultimately is for the next age, not this one! God's ultimate plan involves "breaking the yoke bar" of sin and so "tearing off our shackles." Though we are redeemed, nevertheless it is possible to be enslaved to various and sundry inclinations or

practices which typically result from sin. That was Paul's point when he exhorted the Galatians:

Galatians 4:9, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"

Though they had been delivered by Christ, nevertheless many of the Galatian Christians returned to their slavery. Amazingly! This they did willingly because of the passing pleasures of sin! Well get this, brothers and sisters, the ultimate working of God in this life is the once for all deliverance of us from sin and its slavery!

And so speaking of Judah in Nahum's day, though the Lord had established His people as a free, independent nation under God, nevertheless in their lust for earthly security, the pleasures of foreign trade, and earthly support, Israel willingly submitted themselves to the Assyrians! The result was that as a nation they became slaves to the policies, practices, and religion of the Assyrians. This became a "yoke bar" on their necks and "shackles" on their feet such that where Assyria walked, they were forced to follow! God's ultimate plan for His people was the breaking of this self-imposed bondage such that His people might walk once again as free men and women!!

This truly is the "good" that God is working in and through all things (cf. Romans 8:28)! This is the "welfare" Jeremiah ultimately had in mind as he considered the bitterness of exile (cf. Jeremiah 29)! And it is this that is behind and before everything God is doing in this life with us! The plan is the breaking off of our bonds and so our ultimate deliverance to live as free men and women in Christ!

So is God safe? NO! Might He ordain the roof to collapse upon our heads? He might! But this we know: it will all enable us more and more to glorify and enjoy our Lord in eternity! I want to close by reading to you the words of David when he was being attacked by evil men and his life was in constant danger:

Psalms 11:1-2, 4a, "In the Lord I take refuge; how can you [his advisors] say to my soul, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain [IOW, Run! Hide! Flee! Get out of here before it is too late!]; for, behold, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.' [Yet David had no plans to run and hide like a rabbit! So what could he do? What would he do? We see David's answer in v. 4...] The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven..." - David's answer to the Well-Intentioned Dragons who counseled him was essentially to say, "First and foremost, my refuge is ever and always the Lord; it is to Him I will flee!"

1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

I can think of no greater summary of Nahum's message to His generation as they faced the bitter

providences which soon would be upon them. Seek your God; He alone is Almighty and Good!

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## VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 23, 2014. Greg is the minister of Bethel Presbyterian Church.