

MERCY SPURNED

The Other Side of God's Mercy

Consolation from Nahum: Gracious Mercy – Severe Justice

Texts: Romans 11:11-23; Isaiah 30:18-33; 33:1-24; Nahum 1:1-8

Romans 11:17–22: *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,¹⁸ **do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.***¹⁹ Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. **So do not become proud, but fear.**²¹ *For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.*²² **Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness.** Otherwise you too will be cut off.

Isaiah 30:18–21, 27–33: **Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.**¹⁹ *For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you.*²⁰ **And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.**²¹ **And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.**²⁷ **Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire;**²⁸ **his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.**²⁹ *You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.*³⁰ **And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.**³¹ **The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod.**³² *And every stroke of the appointed staff that the LORD lays on them will be to the sound of tambourines and lyres. Battling with brandished arm, he will fight with them.*³³ *For a burning place has long been prepared; indeed, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.*

Nahum 1:1–8: *An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.*² *The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.*³ **The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.** His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.⁴ *He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers.*⁵ *The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.*⁶ **Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?** His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.⁷ **The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.**⁸ *But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.*

Introduction:

For many weeks we have worked our way through the marvelous book of Jonah with none other than Jonah as our guide. And what a guide he has been – leading us to places we never thought we would visit and exposing in us things we never would have believed were in our hearts. And the reason Jonah has been such a powerful voice to us is that he is speaking to us about things he himself experienced in the 48 verses he wrote as a ***spiritual travel log of his own journey from the barrenness of his own hard-hearted, theological arrogance to the wonderful, scandalous mercy of God – that reached the most wicked nation under the sun and touched the hardest heart in the book – his own.***

Jonah has invited us to join him under his booth on the hillside and to sit in on the difficult conversation he had with God (or more accurately, God had with him) ***about the hardness of his heart toward people God desired to redeem from their sin by granting them repentance, giving them faith, and showing them mercy*** – the very same mercy He had shown to Israel through Jonah during the reign of one of the most wicked kings in her history, Jeroboam II who refused to repent at the preaching of the prophets God sent to preach to him and to the nation (2 Kings 14:23-27).

Eventually, because of the ***rampant wickedness, hard-hearted rebellion, and unrepentant idolatry***, God sent Assyria to punish His people for their sins. First came a powerful king name Shalmaneser who subjugated Israel and forced her king to pay an enormous, crushing annual tribute for the privilege of being a vassal kingdom of Assyria. However, when the king of Israel decided to join Egypt (the other world power of the day) in a rebellion to defeat Assyria and throw off the heavy burden of Assyrian domination, then Shalmaneser sent his armies into Israel and waged war for three long years – and finally, after thoroughly defeating Israel’s armies in 722 B.C., the Bible states, “*He carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, an settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes*” (modern day Persian and Iran – 2 Kings 17:6).

Why on earth would the God of Heaven allow a pagan nation known for violent cruelty and led by a wicked, idolatrous king, carry His people into captivity from which they have still not returned? The Bible is very clear as to the reason and it is worth reading together this morning:

2 Kings 17:7-23 ⁷ ***And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods*** ⁸ ***and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced.*** ⁹ ***And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city.*** ¹⁰ ***They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree,*** ¹¹ ***and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger,*** ¹² ***and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this."*** ¹³ ***Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets."*** ¹⁴ ***But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God.*** ¹⁵ ***They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.*** ¹⁶ ***And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal.*** ¹⁷ ***And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*** ¹⁸ ***Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.*** ¹⁹ ***Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced.*** ²⁰ ***And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.*** ²¹ ***When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin.*** ²² ***The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them,*** ²³ ***until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.***

In short, the reason God allowed Assyria to carry away the ten northern tribes of the Kingdom of Israel into captivity was ***on account of their willful, idolatrous rebellion against His Covenant, their wicked rejection of His prophets, and their arrogant resistance to His Word in spite of all the mercy He had shown them.*** BUT . . . what about the two tribes that made up the Southern Kingdom of Judah?

Twenty-one years later (701 B.C.), another Assyrian King, Sennacherib, sent his armies back to the land of Israel to punish Judah and King Hezekiah. On his way to Jerusalem, Sennacherib's armies plundered and destroyed 46 major cities and an untold number of smaller villages until at last the might of the Assyrian army surrounded the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-19).

During that horrific siege, one of Sennacherib's wicked advisors (the "worthless counselor" mentioned in Nahum 1:11), a military general named Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18:18-37), taunted the Israelites and mocked God before them by counseling them not to listen to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:31-32) or to trust in God's promises or in His power to deliver them from the army of Assyria (2 Kings 19:10-13). Listen to his words: *"Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'* ¹¹ Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? ¹² Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?"

"Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" (2 Kings 17:35)

So here is the question I want us to consider this morning: After experiencing one of the most unexpected, unmerited, and spectacular displays of God's relentless grace and scandalous mercy in the entire Old Testament (Jonah 3); how is it that in less than 100 years, Assyria and Nineveh have become the specific target of God's righteous anger and unmitigated wrath?

Put differently, why does God bring the kind of devastating, irreversible wrath on people who formerly were the recipients of His unlimited grace and boundless mercy?

The answer to that important question is found in the prophetic vision God gave to the prophet Nahum and instructed him to preserve in an inspired book ***so that future generations might know and understand what happens when a nation, a people, or an individual despise the grace God has so graciously given them and the mercy He has shown them.***

Israel needed to learn this lesson. The early Christian Church needed to be reminded of this lesson. And frankly, so do many of us this morning who have been granted so great a mercy and given such an amazing grace as what we have received from the hand of the same God that granted both to Nineveh in Jonah's day.

So, with all of this in mind, what can we learn from Nahum about the danger of spurning the mercy and despising the grace we have received from the heart of God? And, even more importantly, how are we supposed to go about learning these important spiritual truths?

Paul gives us valuable help in Romans 11:22 where he instructs us with these unusual words: “*Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*”

Paul tells us that we are to make sure not to miss two important aspects of God’s character – His kindness and His severity! Both have important spiritual truths that are indispensable to God’s people.

We learned about the kindness of God from prophet Jonah – the relentless grace and scandalous mercy that God extended to Nineveh.

Nahum focuses our attention on the importance of understanding that though God is abundantly merciful toward humble and repentant sinners, His wrath is relentless, and His judgment is severe on those who arrogantly rebel against His Word and stubbornly resist His warning.

This morning we are going to make sure to listen carefully to Nahum as he uses the severity of God to comfort, encourage, strengthen, and warn us to make sure we remain in the kindness of God!

- Nahum – God comforts or has compassion
- Elkosh – God is hard or severe

- His prophecy is described in two ways:
 - a. An **oracle** concerning Nineveh – a statement or pronouncement of woe against this city (city stands for the Assyrian Empire). This oracle is intended to warn Nineveh of what God is about to do to them.
 - b. A **vision** – similar to the book of Revelation – intended to be a written record of some great act of God that is being announced ahead of time. This vision is intended to comfort God’s people who have been ruthless persecuted by Assyria.

So . . . what are the things we are to learn as we take a careful look at the “severity of God” toward Assyria recorded in Nahum’s vision?

I. God will Comfort His Afflicted People (Nahum 1:1-8)

- By the time Nahum arrives on the scene, God has sent the Assyrian armies to discipline His children with severe judgement and cruel captivity ***on account of their willful, idolatrous rebellion against His Covenant, their wicked rejection of His prophets, and their arrogant resistance to His Word in spite of all the mercy He had shown them.***
- And the judgement had come. And it was relentless, ruthless, and severe as His people were removed from the Land God had given them and deported to lands as far away as Persia (modern day Iran and Iraq).
- However, God always chastises His people because He loves them; as evidence of that love; and in order to produce a harvest of righteousness in them if they will endure and not harden their heart toward God or despise His gracious chastening (Heb. 12:3-17).
- And that is precisely what Nahum points out in the first segment of His prophecy to Israel – while they were yet experiencing God’s chastening at the hands of this cruel and ruthless nation.

A. ***Because of His Character (1:2-3)***

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

- Nahum reminds God’s afflicted people of the great moment when He revealed His character and His posture (ways) toward His people when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 34:5-9 and said, ***Exodus 34:6–9: The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression***

and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.⁹ And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

- By quoting this foundational text, Nahum is reminding God's people that the God they serve is marked by:

1. Untainted Goodness – He is merciful and gracious in view of their frailty; slow to anger when they sin; always faithful in loving kindness toward them; and abounding in forgiveness when they sin against Him by trespassing against His Word.

2. Unimpeachable Righteousness – but He will also not clear the guilty who refuse to repent of their sin by simply overlooking their wickedness or showing preference to some of them.

- And even from the middle of their misery, Nahum reminds God's people that the very God who disciplined them according to His faithfulness, will also execute righteous judgment on those who have afflicted them!

B. By means of His Power (1:3b-6)

*The LORD is slow to anger and **great in power**, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers.⁵ The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.⁶ Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.*

- Nahum makes one adjustment to the text Moses gave to Israel. Instead of pointing out the abundant mercy and longsuffering of God, Nahum points to His great strength and mighty power.
- A power and strength God had used to deliver Israel from the hand of their oppressors in the past when He rescued them from Pharaoh's army by drying up the sea; or, when he opened up the way to Canaan and the

defeat of Jericho by drying up the Jordan river so they could cross on dry land.

- Now God is announcing that He would once again use His great power to deliver His people and defeat their strong and mighty enemy, wicked Assyria.
- And the question Nahum puts before us this morning is found in 1:6, *“Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?”* And the answer is clear – no one! No matter how large their armies, how strong their might, or how bottomless their wealth – not even the mighty Assyrian’s can stand against God when He comes in wrath.

C. In accordance with His Past Faithfulness (1:7-8)

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

- The reason Nahum can offer this comfort with such confidence is that God has always been faithful to His people and to the promises He made to them.
- No matter what their failures or how deep their descent into sin, when they repented and sought refuge in Him, He became a stronghold for them in the day of trouble – even when that trouble came as discipline from His hand for their sin.

D. In view of His future Plan (1:12-15)

Thus says the LORD, “Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. ¹³ And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart.” ¹⁴ The LORD has given commandment about you: “No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.” ¹⁵ Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.

God makes two important promises to comfort His people in the midst of their affliction:

1. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more.

- God chastens us to make an end of our sin; not to make an end of us!

- The end of our chastening often coincides with our willingness to finally humble ourselves and repent.

2. *There is good news about a coming Peace (Shalom).*

- You will once again find yourselves in the place of “shalom” where you can celebrate your feasts and fulfill your vows.
- You will remember that Jonah found himself far away from the land of Israel, down at the bottom of the sea, in the belly of the great fish – and from that place he repented and told the Lord that he would return to the temple, pay his vows, offer praise, and go to Nineveh in obedience to God’s Word.
- This may be what Nahum is referring to – if you will do what Jonah did in his affliction, God will once again bring you into the good land He promised where you can celebrate your feasts and pay your vows in glad thankfulness to Him.

II. God will Vanquish His Arrogant Enemies (Nahum 1:14)

The LORD has given commandment about you: “No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.”

- Two times God states in no uncertain terms that He is “against” the nation of Assyria (2:13; 3:5).
- The term “against” is not just talking about a theoretical difference in position on some matter. It is not just talking about a moral or even a theological gap that exists between God and Assyria. It is referencing a militant posture God has assumed against Assyria.
- Assyria has dominated the world by means of her invincible army – her legendary soldiers, her mighty chariots, her unstoppable generals – and now God has come to the battle field with His armies and arrayed Himself against the might of Assyria and her king.
- And as He arrays Himself against Assyria, God pronounces her defeat and doom: *“I will burn your chariots in smoke! The sword will devour your young lions! I will cut off your prey from the earth and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard!”*
 - In spite of their mighty strength,
 - In the face of of their spiritual arrogance,

- Because of their vile wickedness,
Nineveh will be no more!

Nahum 1:12 *Thus says the LORD, "Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more.*

Nahum 1:14 *The LORD has given commandment about you: "No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile."*

Nahum 1:15b *... for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.*

III. God will Vindicate His Honor (Nahum 1:7-9)

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

⁹ What do you plot against the LORD? He will make a complete end; trouble will not rise up a second time.

- Throughout the opening chapter, Nahum reminds God's oppressed people that God will vindicate His honor before the nations by exalting His name.
- God's name refers to His character – and Nahum makes a point to remind us of that character in verses 1-2. God is jealous for His name. God will take vengeance on those who oppress His people unjustly. God will tear down those who exalt their name above His great name.
- Assyria needed to heed this warning in Nahum's day and we need to heed this warning in our own day and in our own lives.
- God will vindicate his name in three ways:

A. By Exposing His Rivals for what they are – worthless counselors and vile plotters/schemers (1:9-11)

- Nahum mentions that a worthless counselor who plots evil against the Lord has come out of Assyria (1:11).
- Remember the worthless counselor Sennacharib sent to "advise" Hezekiah when the Assyrian armies laid siege to Jerusalem?
- His name was Rabshakeh and he gave vile, wicked counsel to God's people by suggesting that God was deceiving His people. Listen to his worthless counsel – ***"Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."*** (2 Kings 19:10).

B. By Executing His Judgment upon them in spite of who they are, where they are, or how strong they think they are.

Never again shall the "worthless" pass through you, he is utterly cut off (1:15b).

- Hezekiah took this threat before the Lord and prayed for God to deliver His people. That very night, God sent His Angel to attack the Assyrians and 185,000 of their finest, strongest soldiers were slain before the sun arose the next day! Furthermore, shortly after returning home, Sennacharib was murdered by his own sons while in the very act of worshipping his powerless god, Nisroch. (2 Kings 19:35-37).
- Neither the might of Assyria's army, nor the thick walls of Nineveh, or even the god he worshipped could spare Sennacharib from the fate God decreed upon him (2 Kings 19:32-37).

C. By Restoring His People no matter how far they have wandered or how deep they have fallen (2:2)

For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel!

- This was not the first time God has used a pagan nation to chasten His sinning people (think Egypt, think the nations Israel did not drive out of Canaan like God told them to do).
- Nor would it be the last – the Babylonians were coming!
- In spite of past and future judgments, Nahum points to the present deliverance of God that is always available to His penitent, contrite people who come to Him for refuge!
- *"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in Him." (1:7).*
- The question is whether we will humble ourselves, set aside our pride, repent of our sins, and seek refuge in Him in the midst of our own day of trouble!

IV. God will Gladden the Nations (Nahum 3:19b)

All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom as not come your unceasing evil?

- When God finally brought about the defeat and annihilation of Assyria, the entire pantheon of nations rejoiced at the news.

- They were used to looking for “swift-footed runners” coming to announce that the Assyrian army was on the move and would soon arrive to destroy them.
- Almost every nation in that part of the world had experienced this terrifying news and suffered horrific cruelty after being defeated by the Assyrians.
- The Northern Kingdom of Israel had experienced this devastation. 46 strong cities in Judah had been decimated and destroyed by the Assyrian army. Even Thebes, the mightiest and best protected city in Egypt had fallen to the Assyrian army (3:8-10).
- But this time the news was different – it was the Assyrians who had been defeated. And when the news came over the mountains – all the nations responded with exuberant joy!
- But how does this ancient defeat translate into modern joy for the nations today?
- The King of Assyria was the servant of his god. He represented the power and glory of that god to his own people and to the nations. As the champion of that god, the King of Assyria functioned like a shepherd feeding, providing, and protecting His people on behalf of the god he served.
- And in the case of Assyria, the gods of Assyria were cruel. They fed people the bread of sorrow and gave them the wine of affliction as drink. Their cruelty knew no boundaries – and neither did the cruelty and vileness of their human representative, the King of Assyria.
- And when God defeated and deposed the king of Assyria, He was also announcing the defeat and destruction of the false idol-god that Assyria worshipped and honored before the world!
- A different God has come on the world scene – the true and living God!
- And through an appointed champion – “the good Shepherd” – *He has destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is the devil and has delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery!* (Hebrews 11:14-15)

Which brings us to the final truth that Nahum uses to comfort God’s afflicted people:

V. God will Rescue Penitent Sinners who Seek Refuge in Him (1:7)

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

- Nahum began his prophecy by reminding God's afflicted people that if they repented and sought refuge with God, He would be their stronghold (1:7).
- But what about the nations? Or more specifically, what about sinners in Nineveh during the time when God brought this awful, devastating judgment on their nation, their city, and their king?
- There is an interesting clue in the second to last verse in the book where God taunts the King of Assyria by stating, *"Your shepherds are asleep, O King of Assyria; your nobles slumber! Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them!"* (1:18)
- What about these Assyrian sheep that are scattered?
- Does God care about the ordinary, everyday sinners who lived in Nineveh and who were scattered when Nineveh was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians and the Persians in 622 B.C.?
- We know that Jesus, the Good shepherd, cared about His own sheep who were scattered and helpless like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He gave His life for them!
- We also know Jesus reminded his disciples that he had sheep that belonged to Him who were not part of Israel's fold (John 10:14-16).
- Finally, Isaiah states Messiah will establish a highway from Assyria for His people to return to dwell securely with Him in His land (Isaiah 11:16). AND on that Highway joining Israel will be two other nations who were ancient enemies of God and of His people – Egypt and Assyria (Isaiah 19:23-24).
- And God will receive glad worship from these three great nations and will bless them saying, *"Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance!"*(Isaiah 19:35)
- How will God bring this about? By means of a great shepherd who is also the good shepherd – who gave His life a ransom for many! So that through Him, God may show mercy upon whom He will show mercy (as Jonah taught us) and execute wrath on those who refuse His mercy and spurn His grace (as Nahum teaches us).

Conclusion: *So, what are we to do with Jonah, Nahum, and Paul?*

1. We must behold the mercy of God we have received and remain in it!
 - By receiving it humbly.
 - By rejoicing in it thankfully.
 - By extending it to others gladly and sharing it with the lost freely.

2. We must behold the severity of God and avoid it!
 - By repenting of our sins when God exposes them.
 - By humbling ourselves before God with a contrite heart.
 - By maintaining an appropriate respect and healthy fear of His anger!