

## GOD IS Nahum 1:1-8

On May 2, 1935, Winston Churchill in an address to the British House of Commons stated: *“When the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure. There is nothing new in the story. It is as old as the sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong—these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.”*

A simpler, more concise quote that has the same message was made by George Santayana (in *The Life of Reason*, 1905).

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

We read the latest happening in the Middle East and we see the rise of a group of people who are, from all logical standards, incompatible with the Twenty-first Century. The words of Churchill from 1935 were uttered about three years before the serious outbreak of hostilities that lead up to what we call World War II. That conflict was ended seven years later in 1945.

Here we are some seventy years after the ending of those hostilities and we find the world on the brink of events that could easily become World War III. Just seven years prior to this time (2008) we entered into a time of “lack of insight, unwillingness to act, unclear thinking and confusion of counsel” which has brought us to an “emergency situation” with concerns about “self-preservation.”

A present moment example of an emergency situation is happening in the city of Mosul in Iraq. A growing cruel and brutal group of extreme radicals have taken around one hundred Christian hostages and are threatening to torture and kill them in a horrible way that would strike terror in the minds and hearts of anyone with any sense of decency. There have already been numerous atrocities that give evidence of what might happen. Mosul is located very near to the site of the ancient city of Nineveh (which fell to the Babylonians in 621 BC). Nineveh was the major city of the Assyria Empire that was dominant in that area of the world around 700 BC.

One of the Assyrian kings (Ashurbanipal) boasted about the horrifically cruel treatment of those who has spoken derogatory things against their god Ashur and had plotted against him (the king who was his god’s prince). Does this sound similar to the present-day reaction of another group who takes much “offense” and commits atrocities when their prophet is criticized?

Some writings refer to Assyria as the Ashurian Empire (named for their god Ashur). This would be evidence that what they did had strongly religious motivations. These people were well-known for their terrorism and being the most cruel and ruthless nation of the ancient world. It is from such roots that Islam developed and we see the same cruelty and ruthlessness unfolding on the world in which we live today.

According to D. A. Carson (*New Bible Commentary*): “The Assyrians were the ones who had destroyed Samaria and with it the northern kingdom. In 2 Kings 17:5 it says, ‘The king of Assyria ...laid siege to it [Samaria] for three years.’ We can imagine the people getting hungrier, more desperate and more hopeless, as they looked out on the Assyrian army, an invincible multitude. They also knew that these soldiers were completely ruthless.” [The specifics of the despicable and cruel things that were done to those they conquered have been deliberately omitted.]

We can see why people were (and still are) concerned about the idea that God would allow Assyrians to carry out judgment on his behalf. Nevertheless, the Bible says in several places that the Assyrians were his instruments of judgment. We might legitimately wonder if the ISIS phenomenon is a type of Assyria that God will use to wake up a world that has abandoned Him and has gone the way of Israel and Judah. If we fail to act on what we can learn from the past, then can we predict the outcome?

Ironically, when dealing with world powers such as Russia and China, the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) provided us a questionable degree of “comfort” regarding our security. With such groups as ISIS, Mutually Assured Destruction is no longer a deterrent to attacks – in fact, MAD may be somewhat of a motivation to some of them. It turns out that even a seemingly irrational military doctrine that evolved from the Cold War has turned out to be less than a safe solution and has become a threat.

Nahum came along about ninety years after the fall of Samaria. The city of Nineveh fell in 612 B.C., and Nahum’s prophecy was written shortly before this. Ninety years is a long time to wait for the judgment of an evil nation. Can we stand ninety years of the growing and increasing craziness of what has been developing over the past year?

The main message from Nahum was that the LORD would bring punishment upon Assyria because of their gross sin. Nahum expressed his message in such a blunt way that it may cause us to be uncomfortable with the fierceness of God’s anger and the passionate vengeance with which it was to be carried out on His enemies. Our discomfort likely stems from the fact that God is patient and merciful and we forget that it is only by His grace that we have not already perished. If we fail to properly respond to His patience and mercy, then we will experience the eventual consequences of that failure. Whatever is wrong in the world has to be made right and God will make sure that happens.

The first part of Nahum is a song or psalm that describes the character of God (jealous, sovereign, good and just) and sets the basis for what Nahum prophesied would happen to the Assyrians.

### Jealous – 1:1-3a

<sup>1</sup>The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. <sup>2</sup>A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. <sup>3</sup>The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished. Nahum 1:1-3a (NASB95)

The literal meaning of the word “oracle” is said to be “a burden.” The closest thing that we have in our vernacular is something like, “an idea or message that is heavy on my heart.” Sometimes we actually use the word “burden” when describing some grave or serious idea that keeps coming to us. Apparently, Nahum could not ignore this message that God was going to deal severely with Assyria. He may have lived in an area controlled by Assyria and perhaps was a person who was displaced when the Assyrians scattered the people of Israel several decades before this time. Some commentators have speculated that he was from Judah but both ideas are speculations.

It may just be coincidental that Nahum’s name in Hebrew literally means “consolation or comfort” which comes from a root word that implied that the “relief comes by taking vengeance.” The message from Nahum was to give comfort to God’s people by assuring them that God would take vengeance on their enemies. In a sense, his name was the essence of his message. That might cause us to think that perhaps “Nahum” was what we might call a “pen name” that was chosen to protect his actual identity. After all, the Assyrian Empire had not

fallen when this was written. The message would have been considered to be critical toward the Assyrians and their god Ashur.

Ashur was thought to be a god of war and those who followed him were careful to exact retribution on anyone who defied, criticized or ridiculed him. Nahum's message in describing Jehovah in verse two as being jealous, avenging, and wrathful could have been a warning message for the Assyrians that because that was the way they acted toward their enemies, they would be treated the same way by the God of Israel. In fact, He had been saving up (reserving) His wrath for them.

There is a definite difference in Jehovah and Ashur and that is seen in verse three. There we find that Jehovah is patient or slow to anger which was a contrast with the behavior of those who followed Ashur. Even though He had been patient with them, He was more powerful than their god Ashur and would use His saved-up wrath to punish them because of their cruelty and evil. This may have been Nahum's way of taunting them by saying something to the effect, "you think you are really 'bad' but you haven't seen anything, yet."

The New Bible Commentary points out that "This sort of idea does not go down well with the average educated person today, and the book of Nahum provides a powerful reminder to us that God cares about his world, and will judge sin. Of course, we need to remind ourselves that God's passion is not like our passion, his anger is not like our anger. It is righteous and pure; 1:3 provides the corrective we need, 'The LORD is slow to anger and great in power'. The prophet then returns, however, to his original emphasis: 'The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished'."

Immorality and corruption and lack of mercy can and will arouse the wrath of God. We tend to forget that unrepentant sinners, who reject the love and mercy that God has shown to us in sending His precious Son to die for us, such will spend all of eternity in a place called Hell, where the fire is never quenched. This is tragedy of the highest magnitude and IF we really grasped the significance of "lostness" then we would not be able to sleep at night if we knew about anybody who was not saved and had not had a chance to hear the good news of the Gospel.

This description of God's wrath and anger showed the intensity of His feeling toward the Ninevites whom He had spared for almost 150 years after He had pronounced judgment on them through the prophecy of Jonah. We should learn from the mistake of the Ninevites, in that, we should not be presumptuous about God's mercy. He is merciful so that we can repent.

### Sovereign – 1:3b-6

<sup>3b</sup> In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet. <sup>4</sup> He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither. <sup>5</sup> Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. <sup>6</sup> Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him. Nahum 1:3b-6 (NASB95)

The Ninevites drifted back into their old ways after the destruction that Jonah had predicted did not happen. So they finally dismissed and forgot about what had happen (or not happened) so many years ago. They assumed that the slowness of God to act was a sign that there was no power there. They perhaps thought that God had gone out of the judgment business. Nahum's message sounds a warning that all of us should heed: "God is slow to anger, and great in power!" His slowness in showing His wrath is not due to lack of power, but is due to the level of His love. We should never forget that God is a God of justice in addition to being a God of love and mercy. We can enjoy His forgiveness and justification ONLY because Jesus paid the price for our sinfulness and our sin.

We quickly find that words are inadequate to communicate how powerful the Creator God of the Universe really is. Nahum used examples from what happens on a grandiose scale in the natural realm of the earth to project images of God's awesome power. He touches all the bases ranging from tornadoes, hurricanes, storm clouds, the sea, rivers, vast meadows that can dry up during droughts, earthquakes, and volcanoes that no one is able to stop.

Nahum depicted the power of God as greater than a tornado or a strong thunderstorm. Just as no one would dare stand in the path of an approaching tornado, we should have better sense than to challenge the power of God and endure His indignation. When God says that something is an abomination to Him, then we would be like a fool that holds up a lightning rod in the middle of a thunderstorm to advocate that it is OK to do the abominable thing. Sacrifice of children to pagan gods was an example of a practice that was an abomination to God.

Homosexuality was also an abomination. In our nation, the law of the land is that abortion is OK anytime during a pregnancy and homosexuality is an "acceptable alternate lifestyle." Do we in the USA think that we can stand before His indignation and that we can abide in the fierceness of His anger? We have examples such as Nineveh and Sodom that dispute such foolish thinking.

Nahum had barely scratched the surface of the wonders of the universe that were beyond his knowing at that time. Things ranging from galaxies with millions of stars down to the mysteries of the simplest life forms and the existence of life itself are exponentially greatly evidences of how powerful our God is.

The other aspect that is seen in these verses is that Jehovah acts out of Who He Is and in agreement with His will for His purposes. The only limitation to His sovereignty is a Self-imposed one that He will not do anything that is contrary to His character.

While these attributes of God would be "bad news" for the enemies of God who had been oppressing His people, they would be "good news" for God's people.

#### Good – 1:7

<sup>7</sup>The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him. Nahum 1:7 (NASB95)

Are we comforted or concerned with regard to someone with excessive power? It depends on the character or nature of the person who has the power and our relationship with that person. If the one with power is evil or has evil intent, then that should produce a lot of concern if not outright fear. This is one of the reasons, the founders of our nation set up checks and balances to prevent too much power being concentrated in one group or person. The idea of a society that provides cradle-to-grave care for people would be a utopia IF we knew that those who were in control were perfectly loving and compassionate, wanting only what was best for everyone. If those who are in control lack those good attributes, then instead of Utopia we wind up with a corrupt and fallen world that looks more like Hell than Heaven.

The alternative to the wrath of God that is reserved for the enemies of God is the goodness of God that is reserved for those that trust in Him. When Judah had put their trust in God, God dealt with their enemies and gave His people protection. Even when the people of Nineveh had believed God, they were spared. God is good and we can find no fault in Him. His goodness is seen in the protection that He gives to us when trouble does come.

#### Just – 1:8

<sup>8</sup>But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness. Nahum 1:8 (NASB95)

The judgment that God was going to send on Nineveh was to be total destruction. They would be blotted out and never again be a threat to His people. It did not make any difference that the Assyrians were powerful and strong and lived in relative peace and quiet at this time. They thought that they had it made, that they were so powerful that nobody could touch them. The Assyrians were the rulers of that part of the world and controlled the surrounding nations. That was going to come to an end. Part of the reason that the Assyrians had been allowed to rise to power was to bring judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel and to bring chastisement to Judah. They had abused their power and because of their wickedness and their lack of mercy they would be held accountable.

We in our nation need to keep on trusting God and being faithful to Him in whatever we do regardless of what is happening with terrorists groups that arise. We can take comfort in knowing that God is in control. At the same time we must oppose the situations in our nation that are taking us away from God's protection regardless of the stand of our government or the news media. We need to call sin what it is and not back away from the battle for what is right. We need to stand on the truth of the word of God and be prepared for the trouble that will come our way. We do this by putting on the full armor of God and engaging in spiritual warfare by using the sword of the Spirit (the word of God) and by praying in the Spirit.