

“A Sobering and Humbling Hope”

Nahum 2

Last week we introduced you to the book of Nahum. The prophet ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Israel somewhere between the years 660-620 BC. At the time the world was dominated and oppressed by the nation of Assyria, modern day Iran/Turkey and parts of Syria and Iraq. While ancient Egypt had a lot of world control, Assyria is often described as the first real world empire. From about 900 BC to 612 BC Assyria dominated the world. It's last and one of its greatest kings was Ashurbanipal who was ruling during Nahum's prophecies. He ruled from 668-630 BC.

Ashurbanipal was a ruthless leader who thought very highly of himself. Found in the ruins of Nineveh were many clay tablets with lots of their own historical information. There were many places where there was a description of Ashurbanipal, dictated by himself no doubt. Here's one they found where it says,

Ashurbanipal, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four regions of the world, king of kings, unrivaled prince, who, from the Upper to the Lower Sea, holds sway and has brought in submission at his feet all rulers; son of Esarhaddon, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad; grandson of Sennacherib, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, am I.

The British Museum has many of these artifacts from ancient Assyria and they ran a display on Ashurbanipal in 2018 titled,

“Ashurbanipal: Warrior. Scholar. Empire-builder. King-slayer. Lion-hunter. Librarian.”

Librarian because he valued knowledge and education and had the world's largest and first systemized library at the time. The Assyrians were known for their ability to make weapons and tools of iron with skill and speed and used this to their advantage to defeat their enemies. They were also viciously cruel, barbaric and merciless in how they treated their enemies. Comparing them to Nazis and Isis combined would probably not be far off.

So along comes this never heard of Jewish prophet with the not-so-scary name of 'Comfort' [Nahum] who declares to the 2 tribes of Israel still standing (because the other 10 tribes were taken captive by Ashurbanipal's great-grandfather Sargon in 722 BC) that the mighty empire of Assyria will soon be no more.

In Ch. 1 Nahum records God's very words who describes Himself as jealous – jealous for His people Israel with whom He is in covenant with – and a God of vengeance who will deal with Israel's enemies. And yet, 1:3 quickly adds that even though God is slow to anger, giving world powers time to repent, He will not leave the guilty unpunished. The Assyrians were evangelized by Jonah approximately 100 years earlier and there was a huge spiritual awakening. But it didn't last and the message of Israel's God as being the only God fell on deaf ears.

Nahum points out that only God is worth trusting and taking refuge in because He is good and will make an over-whelming flood of Nineveh one day soon. Ch. 1 ends with v.15 with

¹⁵ Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.

So we need to start here because Chapter divisions are man-made and are not always intended to show breaks in thought. If we don't stop reading we read

... No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed. 2:1 An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength! ² The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.

God is going to destroy Nineveh. He's going to use someone other than Israel to attack them. So this is good news for Israel and as such Nahum encourages his readers to

Look Forward to Unhindered Worship of God in Unending Peace **(1:15; 2:2)**

How do we know? Because Nahum just spoke God's Word and the Word of God is good news. So, in spite of what you see around you – whether its local bad news, international bad news or coming bad news, God is still in control and His Word is all-powerful. Remember,

God's good news makes this possible (1:15; Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15)

The word for "good news" as it is used in the Bible means news from a king coming through a messenger that his people will find comfort in. The Nahums and Isaiahs were the messengers from the King of heaven and here Nahum tells Israel that they should worship God and celebrate their festivals without fear because God is watching out for them. This is a real test of faith because the festivals (probably referring to the Big 3, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) were Feasts you were required to travel to Jerusalem for. People knew what you were doing and where you were going and why. That means you boldly identify yourself as a worshipper of Yahweh to those who you pass by who aren't going anywhere (because they don't believe in God) or you pass people who are going to their temples to worship their gods. Nahum's good news is that God is going to remove those who might ridicule you for your faith.

But notice Nahum says worship freely now knowing that one day

When all bad news is removed (2:13)

I find it fascinating that Ch. 1 and Ch. 2 both end on a note about messengers. Ch. 1 is a message from God saying I've got good news that the people who harass you will be no more so worship freely and in peace. And Ch.2 ends saying,

¹³ *"I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard."*

He repeats the same message of destruction in 2:13 as he did in 1:15 only now he adds that they will never have any messengers send out their version of 'good news', only God's good news will be the news. And even though the world's good news seems to drown out God's good news, a day is

coming when God will reverse the fortunes of His people (v.2) and send His Messiah physically to this earth again and reign from Jerusalem. Isaiah 52:7 is almost the same as Nahum 1:15, verses about God's messenger bringing good news. Isaiah's version adds that the feet of that messenger are beautiful and Isaiah 52 is about the message that Messiah is coming. The apostle Paul takes the Isaiah 52:7 quote and applies it to you and me to faithfully share God's good news to our lost family members, friends and neighbours.

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Rom. 10:15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ

We have the good news while the world continues to shout bad news. One day the bad news will be no more. So don't let the world hinder you from worshipping God and sharing your faith because we win. And that's our hope of course, the return of Jesus Christ. But as the sermon title shows, our hope has a sobering and humbling element to it. While we should look forward to the future day when our worship of God will never be interrupted anymore,

Yet, Be Humbled that God Will Completely Remove His/Our Enemies **(2:1, 3-12)**

God sends the Assyrians a message that their capital city, Nineveh, will be completely destroyed.

An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength!

God warns them (in His grace) to get ready for an attack. This is already something new. Assyria was always the aggressor, the hunter. Now God says you will be the hunted. In v.3 God even tells them the colour of their armour; red. And we know from Ezek. 23:14 that the Babylonians had red armour. And that they will come with speedy chariots, a well-prepared and organized threat. They will be quick like lightning and mount the great walls of Nineveh. God describes their defeat with imagery of a flood from a river. This is not merely poetry, this is actually what happened. The Assyrians had built a large dam north of Nineveh on the Tigris river so they could control fresh water flowing into the city. The Babylonians captured the dam around 614 and first they shut it off, cutting off Nineveh's water supply. And then at a strategic moment they open wide the sluice gates and so much water came at the city walls that it undermined the foundation, making it possible for Babylon to break through and enter the city. Thus causing many Ninevites to flee the city but without getting away. So these things actually happened the way God prophesied through Nahum. And so

God's past deliverances encourage present hope (vv.3-8)

This was written 2600+ years ago and it happened exactly as God said. Just as God said the flood would happen, and the exodus from Egypt would happen, and the conquest of the land of Canaan would happen and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus would happen. Every promise from God that has come true encourages our hope in God's future promises. If God says one day all His enemies will be removed and we will worship Him forever in a beautiful sin-free world then we will. And every past promise of God reminds us that God is faithful to His word. Make God your refuge in times of trouble because eventually God will remove us from the trouble and the trouble from us.

In vv.9-12, God warns the Assyrians that this coming enemy will plunder all her treasure and leave Nineveh empty and desolate. Again this is exactly what would happen. God even says with sarcasm in vv.11-12,

¹¹ *Where now is the lions' den, the place where they fed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs, with nothing to fear?*

¹² *The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey.*

Remember that title of Ashurbanipal we read earlier? Lion-slayer? Archaeologists have recovered many wall carvings that the kings of Assyria had carved that depicted their exploits. From gruesome carvings of decapitations and other atrocities they did to their enemies to the killing of lions. They were infatuated with killing lions and saw themselves as 'lions' hunting men down. So God sarcastically says, 'Well Mr. Lion hunter, who's being hunted now?' The Babylonians treated the Assyrians probably better than the Assyrians treated them, but God uses their own exploits and atrocities against them.

The greater the sin the greater the ruin (vv.9-12; Is. 10)

The Assyrians plundered their enemies at will. They were immensely wealthy. Some of the recovered treasures are in the British Museum today. But the plunderer was plundered. And the lion hunter was hunted down. In v.10 God said to Nineveh you will be desolate. So great was the destruction of Nineveh that over time people doubted Nineveh existed. Rumours of her grandeur were thought to be a legend much like Atlantis. It wasn't until 1846 that ancient Nineveh was discovered and archaeologists dug up and found massive walls and halls, statues, mosaics and all kinds of evidence of her size.

God has a way of making all wrongs eventually right. That's why He tells us don't take vengeance in our own hands, leave it with the Lord. He will do a far better job than we will. It's not our responsibility to punish sin. Which when you think about here, God never did use Israel in the defeat of Assyria. He used someone else, the Babylonians. Here's another thing to remember when we're struggling with being oppressed or bullied for our faith,

Remain Faithful as We Let God Fight our Battles **(2:13)**

Nineveh was God's problem. They heard the gospel years before. Many even repented for awhile. But over time they rejected God and mistreated His people and others very badly. They were inhumane in how they treated their captives. So if God could defeat Nineveh without His people's help, He can do the same for us.

He alone is our refuge (1:7; Ps. 73:24-26)

If ...

⁷ The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. [and] He cares for those who trust in him,

... then He will make an end of His enemies with an overwhelming flood and he will pursue his foes into darkness.

Remember they are **His** foes. V.13 "I am against you declares the Lord Almighty'. Or literally

'the Lord of hosts'. What hosts? The entire angelic host is at His command. So if we have made God our refuge then let's

Stand in the strength of His resources (v.13; Eph. 6:10-18)

Israel watched from a distance as God dealt with Assyria. But then Babylon would become a problem for them. What did they do then? Trusted God to defeat the Babylonians with the Persians. And what did they do when the Persians became a problem? Watch God deal with the Persians with the Greeks. And on and on it goes.

Fighting God's battles in our own strength will not accomplish much. God is the Lord of hosts, so all battles are ultimately spiritual. And so when Paul tells us how to fight spiritual battles, not surprisingly he tells us to stand in God's strength and trust his resources:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Stand in God's resources, making Him our refuge. Take the truth to heart knowing God will deal with all His enemies one day. Declare the good news to any who will listen because one day God will remove all bad news. Trust His Spirit do what we can't do where we can't see, praying at all times for each of His people to be alert but to stand firm in His strength.

The remnants of the Ashurbanipals, Nebuchadnezzars, Pharaohs and Hitlers are only found in museums now. Testaments to God's sovereign removal of empires that oppose Him. If God is for us, who can be against us.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us
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