

“God is Good, To Those Who Make Him Their Refuge”

Nahum 3

There are two key ideas that will help the unfamiliar book of Nahum become for you not just a familiar book but a helpful answer to the message of judgment in the Bible. The first thing to know is that we need to understand Nahum is a sequel to Jonah. Both Jonah and Nahum were prophets given a message from God to the Assyrians. Jonah, was sent to go to Nineveh himself, and initially refused. When you understand how cruel the Assyrians were you get a little more sympathy for Jonah. However, in God’s grace Jonah goes and in God’s grace there is a spiritual awakening. The king repents of his sinfulness and orders the nation to do likewise. That happened anywhere from 780-760 BC.

Did the Assyrians become a God-fearing nation? Not for long because in 722 BC the Assyrians captured the Northern kingdom of Israel and took them away captive. This happened in the 7th year of good King Hezekiah in the Southern Kingdom. Seven years later (715 BC), the Assyrians are back knocking on Hezekiah’s door in Jerusalem. They threaten, they lie saying we have a nice place for you in a land much like yours. Come along peacefully and you can live. Hezekiah goes to the temple, lays prostrate before God asking for help. Isaiah gets a message from the Lord, telling Hezekiah, don’t worry, He’ll look after that. In the night the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib the king withdrew his troops and returned to Nineveh where a few months later he is killed by his own sons.

God sends a Jewish prophet to tell Assyria to repent and trust the one true God. For awhile they do but then they revert back to their cruel ways. God miraculously kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers when they threaten a godly king and God’s covenant people. Do they get God’s message? No, they continue their cruel ways.

About 40 years later God sends the prophet Nahum to tell the Southern Kingdom God has had enough of Assyria, and Jonah’s prophecy about being destroyed if they don’t repent will now come true. God gave Assyria the opportunity to repent, which was short lived, and now Nahum comes along and says time is done for Assyria.

The second thing to keep in mind with Nahum is 1:7,

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

This verse is the key to the book. You have to understand that God is good, but only those who take refuge in Him see that. If you don’t, then you don’t understand why God sends a message of judgment. Without understanding Jonah and God’s gracious prior warning and Assyria’s brief experience with God, we will fail to understand God’s messages of judgment. So we’re going to use 1:7 as our outline in this last chapter, more doom and gloom. But we need to look at it from the perspective of Nahum. Because we are the messengers whose feet brings the good news today. God’s people are the ones who suffer the most at the hands of cruel nations and unrepentant leaders. Only we understand that God is good because we have taken refuge in Him. So as Nahum gets more specific in God’s message of judgment here in Ch. 3 this is how we can be built up in our faith – since Nahum is for the people of God about God’s enemies.

God is (Always) Good [even to His enemies] in His Grace He Sends Messengers to Warn the Unsaved (3:1-7)

The term 'good', depending on the context, can mean practical or material good; beautiful or pleasant; high quality; morally right or intellectually correct. When it applies to God it can mean all these things but it especially means His morality that benefits us. Here Nahum actually defines good as it relates to God's ultimate protective purpose for us when we make Him our refuge. Protection not from all trouble – because if sin still exists the consequences of it continue – but comfort and security in the midst of difficulties, resulting in one day enjoying the security of God's eternal presence and removal of all troubles. Only those who believe in God understand that.

God doesn't have to warn people about their sin and its consequences, but He does. Because as the apostle Peter says, 'He is not willing that people perish but that they come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9). God warned the Ninevites once before – and they responded by repenting – but over time they rejected Him. So it is by His grace that He sends another messenger to say destruction is still coming if you don't change. And these first few verses point out a general principle that we all understand:

We reap what we sow (vv.1-4)

Nahum says "Woe". Whenever God uses the word 'Woe' it means a funeral is coming. Assyria sowed death [blood], deceit [lies] and destruction [plunder]. Guess what you'll reap? The same. In a very poetic way in vv.2-3 God says listen for whips, wheels, horses, chariots, a charging cavalry with swords and spears. Why are they coming? To incur death and destruction on the Assyrians.

all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.

Like many godless people, the Assyrians used witchcraft and the occult to try to figure out whether the 'gods' were with them in their battles. God offered His direction and they eventually rejected it. The harlot imagery is often used to show spiritual adultery. They abandoned God for other gods. God alone is good, seek refuge in Him, not so-called gods. God doesn't lead you to kill, deceive and plunder. Since God is the one everyone is accountable to then you will have to answer for your sins. In vv.5-7 he gives an example:

History is a testimony to misplaced refuge (vv.5-7)

God would expose Nineveh as an adulteress was publicly shamed and exposed. This would happen of course as it has happened to all proud nations who thought they could get away with all their destructive ways. Yes, they trusted in gods with different names or used the same occultist practices that Assyria used (Babylon would prove no different), and where are they now? Buried in rock and sand and a few mementos of their existence sit in museums. Why don't people learn from history instead of repeating it?

What do people continually look to for refuge, for hope, for comfort in this world? Money, power, alcohol, sex, accomplishments, fame, etc. Do any of those things satisfy you, give you eternal security let alone present purpose and meaning? No. History is a testimony to people making this world its refuge and not God.

And yet, it's the people of God that often are the recipients of the oppressive sinful lifestyles and decisions of those who refuse to make God their refuge, even though we're trying to give them a message that says make God your refuge. How do we stay hopeful?

Be Strengthened Since God's Current Message is Affirmed by Fulfilled Prophecy (3:8-13)

History is fulfilled prophecy. All those nations God said would go down, went down. So when we're trying to warn people about the consequences of sin and imploring them to make God their refuge, we have so much proof of what we're saying is true, that we shouldn't be afraid to share God's gracious warnings.

In vv.8-11 God asks the Ninevites through Nahum if they are better than the city of Thebes? Some of our translations might say Amon-No which is the actual Hebrew. Thebes was the capital of Egypt at that time and the Assyrians had defeated and destroyed most of Thebes only a few years earlier. The city was named after Egypt's main God, Amun who supposedly created the universe. So, God is essentially saying, I am the true King of the universe. You think by destroying the 'king of the universe's city' that you won't experience the same fate? Think again!! Egypt sought refuge in their gods, they were defeated. You trust in your gods, you will be defeated.

God says 'remember what you did to them' in v.10? And here we get a glimpse of Assyria's cruelty. God says in v.11 "You too" will try to drink away your pain and seek 'refuge' from your enemy. But they won't seek refuge in God. Your fortresses will come down like harvest time for fig trees. All you got to is give the tree branch a healthy whack and watch the figs fall to the ground.

Again, what do we see today? Ruins of Egyptian pyramids. Ruins of the ancient Mayan civilization. Ruins of Nineveh, Babylon, Greece, Rome, etc. But as God's messengers we also see the continuing existence of the nation of Israel, a testimony to God's power. The continuing existence of the body of Christ and the gospel spreading around the world. Why? Because history affirms Scripture that Jesus really came and lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. How many world powers have toppled while the body of Christ remains and grows?

God is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him

He cares for [present ongoing tense] those who trust in Him and always has been and always will. We don't need to apologize or defend the gospel. It's true historically and it's true personally as we attest the existence and power and love of God in our own lives. When you are momentarily discouraged by world events and earthly powers causing suffering, remind yourself of Psalm 2:

- 1 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?
- 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.
- 3 "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."
- 4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.
- 5 Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
- 6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."
- 7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.
- 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.
- 9 You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

- ¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.
¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.
¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Even though Jesus has yet to return and establish his rule, God speaks of it as if it has already happened. Meaning; it will happen. And notice how the psalm ended? With an invitation “*Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.*”

This is our comfort and hope even when we don’t see prophecy fulfilled yet. And when Nahum gave this warning and prophecy to the Israelites about the cruel Ninevites, this is what they had to take away from his words:

Take Refuge in God During Current Trouble **Because Future Hope is Coming** **(3:13-19)**

Nahum finishes up with a last warning for the Ninevites but its also a word of comfort to God’s people. He tells Nineveh to get ready for the siege that is coming – which again is exactly what Babylon did – because their army will be like locusts. They will be so many and they will come so fast you are helpless to stop it.

Nahum describes the Babylonian army as locusts but he also shares how the Assyrians will counter that with their own increased numbers. Like merchants. What’s the point of increasing your merchants? Merchants trade goods. Assyria had many connections all over the world and if they thought these would come to their aid, God says it won’t make a difference.

I think this is an encouraging principle for us when we’re trying to share the gospel.

Don’t worry if we’re outnumbered (3:13-17)

Nahum was saying to Nineveh, you may have all kinds of resources and troops and connections that on paper should give you success. But if God is behind this you can’t stop it. And that’s the same for us as we share the gospel. Are we outnumbered? Sure we are. If 6% of Canadians are born again believers in Jesus, then 94% are not.

‘Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world’ (1 John 4:4).

‘Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. ⁸They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. (Psalm 20:7-8)

‘If God is for us, who can be against us.’ (Rom. 11:31)

God speaks directly to the Assyrian king who will be the last king of Assyria in vv.18-19, probably Ashurbanipal, and says,

- ¹⁸ *O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them.*
¹⁹ *Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?*

When God's people are in the midst of suffering at the hands of godless people, it's difficult yet we need to remind ourselves,

God sees everything (vv.18-19)

God saw the cruelty of Ashurbanipal just as He saw the cruelty of Hitler and every other person who mistreats people made in the image of God. The strange thing about the Ashurbanipal's and the Hitlers of the world is that they were so arrogantly evil they actually recorded their atrocities. Drawings on clay tablets and walls or films and photographs, the wicked think they can do what they want. But we have a God who says, 'Enough'. The world cheers at the demise of godless, cruel people; even though God in his grace warned them.

And the book of Nahum ends with a question, 'Who has not felt your endless cruelty?' reminding all readers that God sees all and will deal with all. And the only other book that ends on a question is Jonah, the prequel to Nahum. There God finished the book asking Jonah,

But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

And here we see how amazingly good God is when we see how Jonah and Nahum come together. God takes no pleasure in judgment. He desires everyone to come to repentance. He even expects us to share the gospel like Jonah to the cruelest people we know. And yet from Nahum, we also see that He will not leave the guilty unpunished. Nahum quoted God's words to Moses that God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished (Ex. 34:6-7).

We don't know when God will bring His retribution on rebellion and sin. In the meantime we are the Jonah's and Nahum's today, offering out the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ to those who need hope and forgiveness while at the same time graciously warning that if they don't they will perish as John 3:16 says.

We don't need to fear the threats of the rebellious even if we are outnumbered. God is all we need. He is our refuge and hope. May we be emboldened to share the gospel with someone this week knowing that God is with us in our task and Jesus has given us the authority to do so. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble; He cares for those who trust in Him.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net