

The Character of God, and a Prediction of the Fall of Nineveh

Nahum 1

Nahum 1:1-8 - *“The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*

² *God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies.*

³ *The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. ⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. ⁵ The mountains quake before Him; the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence. Yes, the world and all who dwell in it.*

⁶ *Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him.*

⁷ *The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, and darkness will pursue His enemies.”*

Background Notes

The theme of Nahum is “the doom of Nineveh.” Nineveh was one of the great cities of the ancient Assyrian Empire, and served as its capital for many years. More than 100 years before Nahum’s time, the prophet Jonah went to Nineveh and pronounced God’s judgment on this large city. At that time, the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah’s preaching. They repented, and God withheld His judgment. Unfortunately, like so many other revivals and re-awakenings in history, the response in Jonah’s day was short-lived. All too soon the Assyrians returned to their sinful ways.

About 150 years after Jonah’s time God again pronounced judgment on Nineveh through the prophet Nahum. This time there was no opportunity for Nineveh to repent, as there was in Jonah’s day.

Nahum’s description of the fall of Nineveh by an overwhelming flood (v8) literally came true. In 612 BC the Tigris River overflowed its banks and undermined Nineveh’s huge city walls. Both the river and the armies of the Babylonians and Medes swept into the city like a flood.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is great in His attributes.

In Nahum 1 there is a wonderful description of the character of God. Many of God’s inherent qualities are brought out in this chapter. Five of God’s moral qualities are found in the first eight verses.

a. God is jealous (v2).

“God is jealous...”

Wait a minute! God is jealous? I thought jealousy was a sin! If God is perfect and sinless, how can He be *jealous*? God's jealousy is good jealousy. God will allow no rivals. He is determined and zealous to protect His people, because they belong to Him! Aren't you glad that God jealously protects you from the enemy? God is jealous.

b. God is avenging (v2).

“...the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies...”

God will deal with all of His enemies, including Assyria. Assyria was about to be conquered by the Babylonians. The Lord avenges.

Although God takes vengeance on His adversaries, **we** are **not** to take revenge when we are wronged. Romans 12:19 says, *“...do not take revenge, but rather leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, 'It is Mine to avenge. I will repay,' says the Lord.”* We are to leave vengeance to God. When people wrong us, we don't have to take revenge. We can leave the situation in God's hands, because He will do something about it!

c. God is slow to anger (v3).

“The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” Anger is not a sin when it is *righteous* anger. Ephesians 4:26 says, *“Be angry, and do not sin.”* Because God is holy, He is angry about sin. Psalm 7:11 says that God is angry with the wicked every day. But God is patient – He is “slow to anger.”

God is long-suffering and patient. In ancient times, it may have looked like Assyria was getting away with evil - but in actuality it was only a matter of time before Nineveh would meet its doom.

This is still true today. It may look like people are getting away with sin, and it seems God doesn't know or care. But remember - God is slow to anger. One reason He's slow to anger is because He is merciful. But in the end, no one will get away with any sin!

d. God is great in power (v3).

“The Lord is... great in power...”

Don't get the idea that because God is slow to anger, He's too weak to do anything about evil. No! God is omnipotent – He's all-powerful! Verses 3-6 describe how God can even use the forces of nature to accomplish His moral purposes. In fact, God was about to use the Tigris River to undermine the walls of Nineveh and defeat the Assyrian empire. The book of Revelation says that in the End Times, God will use the forces of nature to accomplish His purposes - to judge the nations and deliver the “godly remnant” of Israel.

e. God is good (v7).

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who trust in Him.”

When we're on the Lord's side, His great power protects us and cares for us. He's a good God, and He is a strong refuge in the day of trouble. He knows those who trust in Him! Maybe you're facing "a day of trouble" right now - financial trouble, family trouble, church trouble. Remember - the Lord is good, and He is a stronghold in the day of trouble. God is great in His attributes.

2. God is great in His anger.

Nahum 1:9-14 - *“What do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time. ¹⁰ For while tangled like thorns, and while drunken like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dried. ¹¹ From you comes forth one who plots evil against the Lord – a wicked counselor. ¹² Thus says the Lord: “Though they are safe, and likewise many, yet in this manner they will be cut down when he passes through. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. ¹³ For now I will break off his yoke from you, and burst your bonds apart.” ¹⁴ The Lord has given a command concerning you: “Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. Out of the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the molded image. I will dig your grave, for you are vile.”*

The anger of God was mentioned back in verse 3. In verses 9-14 the anger of God was further expressed in the denunciation of Assyria.

Verse 9 says, *“Affliction will not rise up a second time.”* What's that all about? Assyria had tried to attack Jerusalem once before, but God said that they would not be able to attack it a second time, as they planned. Instead they would be attacked and would be unable to defend themselves. They would be confused like drunkards, and consumed like dry stubble in a fire (v10).

The “wicked counselor” who was plotting evil against the Lord (v11) was either Sennacherib, who attacked Jerusalem in 701 BC, or one of the later kings of Assyria - but they would all meet their end.

What an application for today! Anyone who plots evil against the Lord and His people will ultimately be cut down. Think of the people who plot against God by pushing the godless manmade philosophies of evolution and humanism. It's only a matter of time before their downfall, and they will be gone forever. Praise the Lord!

Verse 12 says that God had used Assyria to afflict or discipline Judah, but that yoke would be broken off Judah's neck (v13). In His anger, God was about to cut Assyria off, and destroy her temples and her gods (v14). God is great in His anger!

Practical Application

Look for common ground between interpretation and application.

What's the "good news" that's mentioned in Nahum 1:15? The good news was the coming fall of Nineveh. When Nineveh fell in 612 BC, it was never rebuilt. This was certainly good news for Judah!

This verse brings up a question about *hermeneutics*. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of principles for proper biblical interpretation. In Romans 10:15, the apostle Paul quoted verse 15 applied it to the good news of the gospel. Romans 10:15, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things.*"

It may be that in writing Romans 10:15, the apostle Paul was quoting Isaiah 52:7, which says just about the same thing. In the context of Isaiah 52:7, the good news was that the Jews would come back from their captivity in Babylon. In the context of Nahum 1:15 the good news was the fall of the Assyrian Empire.

When he wrote Romans 10:15, was the apostle Paul using good hermeneutics to quote Isaiah 52 or Nahum 1 and apply the "good news" to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Was the apostle using *good hermeneutics* – or *bad hermeneutics*? Well, we know that he was using good hermeneutics, because the apostle Paul was an *inspired* writer! The Holy Spirit inspired Paul's writings.

The principle of hermeneutics for this situation is this: **There is one proper interpretation, but there can be many applications.** The one proper *interpretation* of the "good news" in Nahum 1:15 was the good news of Nineveh's fall. The one proper *interpretation* of the "good news" in Isaiah 52:7 was the good news of Judah's return from captivity. But an excellent *application* in Romans 10:15 is the good news of salvation in Christ.

We're not inspired writers of Scripture - so how do we draw proper applications for today from the Bible? When we read the Bible and apply it today, how can we make sure that we don't come up with applications that are too far out of the context of the passage?

The answer is: **Look for common ground between the proper interpretation and the application.** First, determine the proper interpretation of the verse or passage. Then when making an application for today, look for common ground with the interpretation.

The apostle Paul found the common ground in the three verses— freedom from captivity and defeat of the enemy. When we receive and believe the good news of salvation in Christ, our enemy is defeated and we are set free from captivity to sin.

So **look for common ground** between interpretation and application!