

Nahum

The vengeance of God

November 5, 2009

“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is a sermon written by American theologian Jonathan Edwards, preached on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut. Like Edwards’ other sermons and writings, it combines vivid imagery of the Christian concept of hell with observations of the secular world. It remains Edwards’ most famous written work, and is widely studied both among American Christians and historians, due to the unique glimpse it provides into the theology of the Great Awakening of 1730-1755.

People in general do not have fear of the Lord at all or the idea that the loving God would not allow anyone to go to hell. If the human race realizes who God is; what He loves; what He hates; how patient He is; how loving He is; yet how holy and righteous He is and how much He hates our sins, we wouldn’t do what we often do – sin. I am not only talking about those famous criminals, murderous dictators and corrupted politicians, but we ourselves who know the Word of God, should know better, still continue in sin.

God hates sin, God hates pride. When those two get combined, it is like pushing God to the limit. A really, really bad idea.

Tonight we are going to study the Book of Nahum which, in my opinion, is the only Book solely dedicated for a foreign kingdom. Though Judah is mentioned a few times in the Book, it is pretty much for the inhabitants of Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

Little is known about Nahum except that he came from the town of Elkosh, the location of which we can’t identify with certainty. The name Nahum is an abbreviated form of the name ‘Nehemiah’, which means “Comfort of Yahweh.” It may be that Elkosh was in the region of Galilee, because the city of Capernaum was named after Nahum – Kephars-Nahum, “City of Nahum”. We all know that Jesus used Capernaum as His base during His earthly ministry.

We don’t know exactly when Nahum gave this prophecy. It is likely that Nahum was written during the height of Nineveh’s power. For any ungodly people to hear this prophecy during that time would cause them to laugh at Nahum, because Nineveh was doing just fine in their eyes.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of this Book is God’s wrath on His enemies. It is His vengeance against the Assyrian Empire that committed so many cruelties against everyone around them. In addition to their pride that came out with cruelties, they were total idol worshipers.

Some might have wondered why God was after them yet not other nations. Nineveh had the responsibility to follow the Lord, because the Lord had already spared them about 100 years ago. You can say that the Book of Nahum is a sequel of the Book of Jonah.

To Jonah's displeasure, he was chosen to deliver the prophecy from God to these people. The problem with Jonah was that he knew God all too well that if the people of Nineveh repented God would forgive them and relent His punishment against them. The people of Nineveh gladly received a stern doomsday warning from God through a very reluctant Hebrew nationalist prophet Jonah who wouldn't be more happy if every single person in Nineveh died. More than a half million people repented and turned their hearts to God in his three day crusade.

Jonah would be the only evangelist who wanted his listeners not to follow the Lord and get fried, because he was a selfish Hebrew nationalist rather than a true godly prophet. Jonah would have loved to prophesy what Nahum was doing to the people of Nineveh.

Obviously, the revival of the Assyrian Empire was short lived. By the end of the second generation, they were worse than before. While Nahum's message was directed especially to the Assyrians, he was careful to encourage the people of Judah as well.

I find the theme verses of this Book in the first portion in chapter 1.

Nahum 1:1-3 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.

Since the rest of the Book is describing how cruel these Assyrian people were and how God was going to destroy as you have read, we are going to go in depth in the first portion of chapter 1 to learn more about the Lord's character.

C. THE CHARACTERS OF GOD

1) God is jealous

Does it mean God has a tantrum with a typical human jealousy? Jealousy is a sin if it means being envious of what others have and wanting to possess it, but it's a virtue if it means cherishing what we have and wanting to protect it. A faithful husband and wife are jealous over one another and do everything they can to keep their relationship exclusive.

God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very moral life. God is not jealous of us, He is jealous for us.

Since God made everything and owns everything, He is envious of no one. But since He is the only true God, He is jealous over His glory, His name and the worship and honor that are due to Him alone. That is the reason why the Lord tells us in His Ten Commandments:

*Exodus 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,
Deuteronomy 4:24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

2) God avenges

We commonly think of vengeance as a sin, and it usually is. In fact, both Jesus and Paul warned about it in Matt. 5:38-48 and Romans 12:17-21. But a just and holy God cannot see evil people ignoring and disobeying His law and do nothing about it.

Man needs to understand that he can't fight against God and hope to prevail. Everyone who sets themselves against God will end up receiving His vengeance.

Let's make one thing very, very clear. God does not dish out His vengeance to someone who does not deserve it. His vengeance is the end result of His righteous and holy wrath. When God takes vengeance by judging people, it's because He is a holy God and is jealous for His holy law.

3) God is slow to anger

God's patience cannot be compared with human's. He is far more patient than us. But it does have a limit. It does not come quickly as we hope sometimes and we are glad it didn't come so quickly sometimes.

His anger is never a fit of rage or a temper tantrum, nor selfish and out of control. His righteous indignation goes against all that defied His authority and disobeys His law.

4) God is so powerful

One of the Pima County Regional SWAT team members is TJ Price. He is about 260 lbs, 6'4". I call him "a half teddy bear, a half grizzly bear". He has strength which can bend a steel rod, but he is gentle and kind. One day, a punk in his twenties was arrested with his partners in crime during one of the SWAT team search warrant operations. For some reason, this punk chose to call TJ every name in the book. He went on and on, until TJ grabbed him by his shirt front and lifted him straight up in the air. The punk's feet were about 2 feet off the ground and dangling. For the first time, the punk shut his mouth. Of course, the other SWAT team members rushed to TJ and told him that this punk ain't worth going to jail. I don't think that TJ was going to throw him over his head, but he sure scared the snot out of that idiot.

If the Lord's anger is not a holy anger, and if He were not slow to anger, I don't believe that there would be any human being left on the face of earth. He could easily wipe out everything. God is so powerful, yet He has His anger under His complete control. That is the true definition of meekness. Meekness is not weakness, rather it is strength under control.

In our human ignorance, people throw their puny fists at God as if they can punch Him out who is in heaven. I wonder how often He chuckles at our pathetic ignorance.

5) God will not at all acquit the wicked

God's justice is thorough and complete. There is no one who can get off through technicalities in God's court. There is no loop hole, no excuse, no bribe and no jury. He is the supreme judge who knows all things and hates sins.

God is not like an unjust judge who can be bought and let the guilty go out. He will not let the wicked go off. Sin must be accounted for – either in hell or at the cross where Jesus has blotted out our sins once and for all.

6) God is our Stronghold in the day of trouble

Nahum 1:7 The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.

Those who love Him and trust Him see the goodness of God, and find protection in His stronghold – which is the Lord Himself.

D. THE DELIVERANCE OF JUDAH

Nahum 1:12, 13, 15 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." 15 Behold, on the mountains The feet of him who brings good tidings, Who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, Perform your vows. For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; He is utterly cut off.

In the peak of the Assyrian military's power, God promised the deliverance of Judah to His people. It seems impossible, it seems so far away. In a way, we feel that way now, don't we? In the peak of all these liberal political backgrounds, the Lord promises to us that He is faithful to rescue us from the hands of wicked.

In ancient days, news had to be carried by couriers, and the watchmen on the walls scanned the horizon hoping that messengers would bring good news. In this case, it was good news indeed: the courier would announce that Nineveh was fallen and the Assyrian army defeated. Judah could now live in peace and enjoy her annual feasts and regular religious festivals to the Lord.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

In Isaiah, the good news is the coming of the Messiah. In Nahum, the good news is the defeat of the enemies of God's people.

Revelation 17 and 18 describe the fall of Babylon, representing the world system and all of its support structure. Revelation 18:9-19 shows how the kings and merchants of the earth mourned the fall of Babylon, but Revelation 18:20 through 19:6 shows how heaven rejoiced over the fall of the world system. What was mourned on earth was applauded in heaven, and the same principle applies in Nahum's prophecy of Nineveh's fall.

Rejoicing is not in this context gleeful gloating at the misfortune of others. Rather it is pleasure at the vindication of God and His promises. Oh, how we need to remember this! It is so easy to fall into the thinking of gloating over disasters or losses of some ungodly people who stood against God's Word and our lives. To our amazement, the Lord loves them as much as He does us.

E. THE FALL OF NINEVEH

In 612 B.C., the Medes and the Babylonians united to attack Nineveh, and the Lord used them to judge the evil city. Chapter two is a vivid description of what happened as seen by Nahum in the vision God gave him.

F. GOD'S JUSTICE

The pride, cruelty and idolatry of Nineveh and Assyria asked for the end of God's patience in chapter 3. Nahum emphasizes the same truth that was declared by the

Prophet Amos: God punishes cruel nations that follow inhumane policies and brutal practices.

G. A REMINDER

Psalm 73:2-7 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.

Psalm 73:17-19 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

It seems that the wicked constantly prospered and live at ease as Asaph felt and expressed in Psalm 73. If we are not careful, we, too, would be bitter by seeing the wicked doing well physically on earth. But we can take comfort in knowing that the judgments of the Lord are faithful and true. We don't need to envy the unrighteous or seek vengeance against them ourselves. Nahum and Asaph each show us that God is more than able to take care of them and us, each according to His promise.