

Good morning! I invite you to turn with me to Nahum. Nahum chapter 1. If you open your bibles to the middle, you will be in the Psalms. You need to flip past the major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Then you need to weed through some of the minor prophets. Jonah, Micah, Nahum. If you hit Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Haggai, you've gone too far.

Last time we were together we introduced the book of Nahum. We said that the word Nahum means comfort. This book was written to comfort God's people by telling them of the downfall of their enemies, the Ninevites. You might say that the book of Jonah was written to provoke God's people. They were supposed to be provoked to repentance. This book is intended to have the opposite effect. It is to comfort and console.

But, I don't want to give you the wrong impression. What we read in chapter 1 is rather intense. It is not a passage that is going to give you some warm fuzzy feelings. As a matter of fact, it can be somewhat disturbing.

This morning we are once again going to be reading and meditating on all of chapter 1. Nahum 1.

Have you ever had a moment in life where you were struck with a genuine feeling of awe? Something happened and you recognized the sheer awesomeness of that thing. You felt at the same time the weird mixture of terror, trepidation, and wonder?

We have just celebrated the anniversary of 9/11. Maybe you felt that when you saw the buildings collapse. You had a numbing sense of alarm--this was horrifying! and yet at the same time you gawked at the wonder of it all?

For me, it was when my class in elementary school took a trip to COSI in Columbus. The one thing that I remember from the trip was that we had an opportunity to sit in on a presentation about tornadoes.

In this demonstration they took a block of wood (something like a 2x4) and placed it inside a thick, fiberglass casing at the end of a large metal tube. At the other end of metal tube they placed a piece of hay or straw. It was just a single strip of dried up straw that you would find on a farm.

Moments later, the block of wood exploded. What they did was simulate the strength of tornado wind. They projected that piece of straw right down the tube and into the wood. And wouldn't you know that flimsy piece

of straw had been weaponized. It turned that 2x4 into toothpicks.

I was shocked. I was amazed. And, to tell you the God honest truth, I was terrified. I'm not ashamed to say that my understanding of tornadoes had been mostly shaped by episodes of Tom & Jerry or the Wizard of Oz. I did not physically move, but there was a sense in which I bowed before it.

That room full of 8-9 kids had a new reverence for the wind. That presentation displayed for us the sheer awesomeness of God's creation.

As we come to the book of Nahum this morning, this is the feelings that it should evoke in us. This book starts off with a blast of God that is simply awesome. What is set down here is a presentation of God that is supposed to shock and overwhelm. It is designed to jar your senses, evoke awe and wonder, and even strike a bit of terror with in you. It is a fearful, wonder-filled demonstration of God and his vengeance.

Our God is awesome. He is to be feared. He is to be worshipped. We are to stand in awe of him and revere him; maybe even be a little scare of him.

Maybe you have read that part of the Chronicles of Narnia where the kids are talking to Mr. & Mrs. Beaver

about the great lion, Aslan. Hearing that he is a lion Lucy is filled with some trepidation and asks, "Is he safe?" Mr. Beaver responds by saying, "Safe? Safe? Of course he is not safe; he is a lion! But he is good."

That's our God. He's not safe, but he is good. And you must stand in awe of him. You should understand that he and he alone is to be worshiped and feared.

In this passage, the Lord is announcing the downfall of Nineveh. As he makes the prediction of the coming destruction of the city he uses it as an opportunity to introduce himself. And our response is to be nothing other than awe. Behold your God.

This morning I want to introduce you to your God. I want you to stand in awe of him as you are introduced to his God's person, plan, and purpose.

I. God's person [1-7]

I have a friend who is single. She's been on one of those online dating sites to try and meet people. The other day she posted that she went on a date with a fellow who said he was 6'2". She notified us that she is now to be considered 6'2".

In other words, the fellow wasn't altogether honest on his profile. He was making himself out to be tall dark and handsome in order to woo in some lady. The package was not quite up to description, shall we say.

There's a sense in which the Ninevites needed to be brought up to speed on who God was. They had some conceptions about him, but the profile they had of God wasn't quite accurate.

In 2 Kings 18 the Assyrian King Sennacherib came up to Jerusalem. His spokesman, the Rabshekah, spoke to Hezekiah and his men. He said, "Are you relying on the Lord? You know that no other god has been able to stand up and resist us, don't you? Do you think your God can protect you?"

All in all, they equated Judah's God with all the other gods that were out there. So there's a sense in which the Lord clarifies for them exactly who he is. He's not at all what they thought he was.

When you look at this passage, you read about a God who is, first of all, **fierce**. He describes himself as a jealous and avenging God. He is avenging and wrathful. He keeps wrath for his enemies. He will not clear the guilty.

In verses 3-6 the Lord is one who is so fierce that the earth rattles, shakes, and bends before him. Forests wither, seas dry up, rocks break, mountains shake in their boots. The question he asks is simply this: Who can stand before his indignation?

The Lord is shown to be a fierce God; one who clenches his fist and makes the whole earth to melt. He's so fierce that nothing in his way is safe. And the implication is, who are you Assyria?

Again, remember that Assyria was the superpower of its day. It was at the height of its power. It was thought to be indomitable.

And the point here is, think again. Judah's God could trample it down like it was nothing.

But not only is God said to be fierce, he is also described as **invincible**.

We may use the word "omnipotent," but I want a word that describes the war like feature of his strength. In

verse 3 he is said to be “great in power,” which is his omnipotence. But his power is shown in his sovereignty over the elements. There’s a cataclysmic aspect to his power. Note how it says that his way is in the *whirlwind* and *storm*. The clouds are the dust of his feet. That’s giving this picture of him being so big that the clouds in the sky are only reaching up to his ankles. He’s going to crush whatever might be under those feet.

But notice this. Even though he’s described as ***fierce*** and ***invincible***, and he’s also described as ***good***.

Look at verse 3. It says, “The Lord is slow to anger.” Then in verse 7 it says, “The Lord is good.” He is “a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him.”

Now, when we read this, we may have some difficulty with it. How can he be slow to anger and as fierce as he says he is? How can he be good and yet so terrible that the earth trembles before him? How can he be an avenger who keeps wrath for his enemies and yet someone who is a stronghold in the day of trouble?

But I love how these phrases that speak of the radical benevolence of God are mixed right in with these expressions of how terrible he is. And the best part about it is that there’s no attempt to reconcile them.

We might be sitting here thinking: How do these things connect? How can you have these seemingly opposite extremes all united together?

The fact of the matter is, God doesn't need to explain himself. This is just who he is. He can be kind and he can be angry. He can be your best friend, or he can be your worst enemy. You can either feel his wrath or you can receive his benevolence.

The question is, which is it going to be?

So there's a sense in which the Lord offers terms of peace. Nineveh is again offered a chance to repent. Jonah gave him 40 days. Nahum gives them about 40 years.

It just goes to show what the Apostle Paul means when he says, "Today is the day of salvation." When the Lord offers grace, you don't sit around and question the legitimacy of it. You don't make philosophical claims about what kind of being he is. You must simply acknowledge who he is and you best repent while you can.

So Nahum starts off by introducing them to the Lord. He seeks to clear up any misconceptions and let them know that what is coming against them is good God who can

be terribly fierce and utterly indomitable. He will make an end of you if you do not repent and turn to him.

But not only does he introduce us to the Lord by telling us who God is, he also introduces us by telling us what God has decreed.

II. God's plan [8-]

What is God's plan for Nineveh? What will he do to his enemies? In short, he will make a complete end of them. That is repeated several times over in the passage.

In verse 8 he says he will make a complete end of them. In verse 9 he says he will make a complete end of them and they will not rise up a second time. In verse 12 they will be cut down and pass away. Verse 14 says their name will not be perpetuated because they will be in the grave. Verse 15 says they will be utterly cut off.

So the Lord has already ordained that Nineveh will fall. And, as I mentioned last time, that is exactly what happened. In 612 BC the city of Nineveh was conquered by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes. And, with the collapse of Nineveh, the Assyrian Empire basically was brought to an end. There were a couple more skirmishes after this, but they were rather insignificant. When Nineveh fell, Assyria (as a state and nation) basically vanished off the face of the earth, never to exist again.

But I want you to take another look at these verses. It is one thing to say that God was going to bring Nineveh down. There would be some credibility for God's being the awesome God that you should fear. But, if that were all he said, there would be some room for criticism. Someone could easily say, "Well, no nation ever lives

forever. All nations go the way of the earth at some point. And if you make a vague, general prediction like that, it will likely come true at some point.”

In other words, some people might say that this is a lot like a horoscope. Horoscopes are silly things because they are so vague. They apply to almost anyone at any time. “You will meet with unfortunate circumstances as a result of certain companions.” Well, who hasn’t, right?

That’s where the book of Nahum really excels. Nahum doesn’t just give some obscure, undefined prediction. The Lord actually puts some specificity into these words. It is actually quite remarkable how acute Nahum’s prediction is.

So, you want to know how awesome our God is? Then, just listen to what Nahum has to say about what God will do to Nineveh.

First of all, look at verse 8. Notice how it starts out. It says, “With an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of them.”

Now, I’ve talked about the impenetrable walls of Nineveh. How do you attack a city that has walls over 100 feet tall and 100 feet thick in places? It’s not like you can punch a hole in it or easily scale it. You understand that the Ninevites were in the Titanic of fortresses.

Nineveh was not only a glorious and beautiful city, it was an impervious bunker.

But we all know what happened to the Titanic, don't we? Well the same thing happened to Nineveh. The historians tell us that there was a river that flowed right through the city of Nineveh. That river helped to make Nineveh such a wonderful city. There are many things that could be said about this river. But one thing in particular is of note: that river became its downfall.

You see, the Lord brought rain; a lot of rain. There was an unusual amount of rain. We read in verse 3 that "His way is in the whirlwind and storm." And it was with storms that God caused the river to exceed its banks. The rising river ended up eroding a hole the wall of the city. And that gave the Babylonians and Medes access to the city. They entered through the eroded wall and took the city by storm.

Look also at verse 10. It says they are "like drunkards as they drink." This too is not just some literary flourish. It is a testimony of what was going on in the city. There is the account of Diodorus Siculus (a Greek historian from the first century BC). In his book he said that the king of Assyria, when the siege was started, was so confident in his defenses that he threw a party. He threw a party for his soldiers and they all got drunk as a skunk. And it was

while they were completely inebriated that the enemy came in. And that is part of what make the slaughter so great. They were so drunk that they could not defend their city.

Verse 10 also says that they would be consumed like stubble fully dried. You know what that means? It means there was fire. The best way to get rid of your trash, your stubble from the harvest, is to burn it. And it burns best when it is fully dried.

It's no surprise that the city of Nineveh was burned after it was breached. They almost always set fire to cities when they attacked them in the ancient world. It still happens in many places today.

But the kind of fire that burned in Nineveh is what is amazing. It is said that, when the city of Nineveh was excavated in the 1840's, the throne room of the king still had soot and ash stuck to the walls. They actually found that the fire was so hot that it actually bent some of the giant stone walls. The flames had to have been incredibly fierce to bend them in and leave charred scars for over 2200 years!

So now you understand the image. Nineveh would be consumed like stubble fully dried. It would not just be any fire, it would be a blaze of infernal proportions.

Now, look at verse 12. It says, “Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away.” What is this talking about? It should not be forgotten that at the time of Nahum, Nineveh was at its peak strength. The empire was the strongest and largest of empires at the time. For all intents and purposes, it looked as if the Assyrian Empire would last for hundreds of years.

But that was not the case at all. As a matter of fact, it is almost miraculous how quickly it fell apart. Keep in mind that the fall of Nineveh happened just 40 years after Nahum wrote this. That is not a lot of time for a whole empire to collapse, especially when it was at its height of power.

Moreover, the city of Nineveh fell in just 3 months. That is not a long time to lay siege to a city, especially one like Nineveh. It took Alexander the Great 3 years to capture the city of Tyre. The Philistine city of Ashdod resisted Egypt’s siege for 29 years. Great, powerful Nineveh went down in just 3 months. And it isn’t because it was weak. They had fortifications and food and supplies that would have lasted a very long time. They had soldiers and weapons. They didn’t need to worry. And they didn’t worry. That’s why they held their drinking party.

But though they were at full strength and many, they were cut off.

And finally, you should see the specificity of Nahum even in the idea of their coming to a complete end. As I mentioned at the beginning, that was repeated throughout our text. And for good reason. Nineveh faded into oblivion after this. After it was conquered, it completely disappeared from existence. It wasn't until the mid 1800's that it came to be discovered. Some random farmer happened to unearth a statue that ended up leading to the excavation of the city. They found what might be called "the lost city of Nineveh."

You see what I'm driving at here? This is no horoscope. This is not some crazy prophet spouting off vague, generalities of a possible breakdown of Nineveh. Nahum is writing the history some 40 years before it happened. He's detailing for us the finer points of the very events that transpired.

And this shows you that this book has a supernatural origin. This shows you that this God is, not only one you shouldn't mess with, but it shows him to be the one who deserves our faith, our worship, our allegiance. He is the God who is to be feared.

But there's one more thing in our text. This is not just showing us the person and plan of God. We also are introduced to God's purpose.

III. God's purpose [12-15]

What is God's purpose for bringing down Nineveh? Is it just because he is angry and fed up with these wicked people?

No. Not at all. Our text makes it clear why he is so dead set against Nineveh. It was his care for his people.

You'll notice that in our passage the Lord has two audiences. On the one hand He speaks to the Ninevites, but he also speaks to the people of Judah.

Remember that Judah was captive to the Assyrians. They were a vassal state and basically enslaved to the tyranny of Assyria. But God says, in verse 13, that he is going to break the yoke from off their backs. He's going to burst the bonds that hold them. The reason he is bringing Nineveh down is because he has a great love for his people and desires their salvation.

You see that even more clearly in verse 15. He announces to his people, "Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off."

The image is of a runner after a war. When a war was over a messenger would be sent back to his city. He

would declare the victory so that it could be more widely known. He's declare that the enemy has been defeated and that they were free.

So the Lord's announcement is a proclamation of comfort. It is a declaration of peace to his people. They could rest knowing that God cared for them and would come to them. He would deliver them and bring new life to them.

So God's purpose was a saving one.

And really, this stands as a reminder of what God is doing for us in and through His Son. The Lord's beef with Nineveh must be understood in light of the greater work of salvation. Nineveh was nothing more than an instrument of Satan. It's evil and its tyranny was a mark of the serpentine beast who has always beleaguered God's people. And Nahum's prophecy is simply a declaration of the gospel promise: Satan will be crushed. God will save his people. He who oppresses us with temptation and is the very cause of death in this world will be crushed.

The Lord will bring down his enemies and will provide for the eternal comfort of his people.

And this is why you should worship him. This is why you should fear him. He is coming to rescue his people. One

day, you can be assured that Jesus Christ will come on the clouds. He will break forth into this world once again and, when he does, he will break out upon his enemies. For he loves his people and he intends to rescue us.

Conclusion

Perhaps you have heard of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. One of the 7 wonders was a statue of Zeus in the temple which was built at Olympus. The statue had Zeus sitting upon a throne and it was 40 feet tall (equivalent to a 4 story tall building). He was 40 feet tall sitting down. And the temple itself wasn't that much bigger. Maybe if the temple was 5 or 6 stories, you get this idea that if Zeus stood up, he would break through the ceiling of the temple.

The architect did that on purpose. He wanted to portray Zeus and overwhelming in stature. Someone who would cause great havoc if he were provoke to rise up.

Well, the face of the matter is, Zeus didn't make it. He and his temple are no more.

But what we find in Nahum is something similar. We find a God who is terrible. He is the avenging God. In his fierce anger he will tear his enemies apart and cast them down. When he rises from his throne, there will be havoc. And none will be able to stay his hand.

And this is for us and for our salvation. This description of God and his ways are to remind us that he and he alone is to be feared. He is the one who deserves our worship and admiration.