

Good morning! I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Nahum. We began looking at this book a couple weeks ago. This morning we will be concentrating on chapter 2.

Nahum is a short book. There are only three chapters. I am thinking that when we finish it up we will head over to the New Testament and work through 1st Peter.

But this morning we turn our attention to Nahum 2. And as we read this portion of God's holy and inspired word, let's give it our highest reverence.

The book of Nahum was written to remind us that the Lord is our Rescuer. God is our God and he delivers us from evil.

This is very important to keep in mind when reading this book of the Bible. For Nahum's prophecy is rather intense. You probably got that from our Scripture reading today. Nahum speaks of God's judgment and he does so in rather graphic terms. As he predicts the fall of Nineveh he does so in ways that can make you shudder.

And it could be very easy to slink away from this book. The things it says and the images it portrays could make us very uncomfortable, perhaps even fearful. We may not like what we read because of how terrible the presentation of God's anger is

But we will have a radically different view if we understand why this is here. This is showing us how God rescues his people. The destruction we read about is a message of God's deliverance.

We have had a lot of superhero movies produced over the last decade or so. We all know that the plot line of these movies is not altogether original. People will often make fun of the Hallmark movies because they seem to regurgitate the same plotline, but the same could be said for the Avengers or some DC comic.

A bad guy comes and poses some oppressive threat to the world. The good guy rises up and eventually defeats the bad guy. Then they live happily ever after. If you add a bunch of explosions and chase scenes, you can potentially make millions of dollars.

But what makes the movie so satisfying? It is that the good guy rescues the people. And he rescues them by utterly defeating the bad guy. They are delivered from their oppression and they are free to live a normal life without any fear.

And we love it. We can't wait for the next movie to come out. We will pay lots of money in order to watch it.

The fact of the matter is that all of these stories are simply copies of our story. They are nothing more than incarnations of God's story. And that is the story that Nahum tells.

Nineveh has been the oppressor. And Nahum is essentially setting forth something of that cinematic last battle. It is the confrontation of the good guy and the bad guy, wherein the bad guy comes to a crushing end.

When you read this book in that light, you will probably enjoy it much more. You won't find it to be intimidating or terrifying. You will find it to be a powerful testimony to God's deliverance.

And as we come to chapter two we may keep that in mind. For in this passage Nahum describes fall of Nineveh. He really does set for the crushing defeat of the bad guy, who's name is Assyria.

In the first chapter of Nahum, we read of how God had *decreed* the fall of Nineveh. It was primarily a declaration or an announcement of the Lord's intent to bring Nineveh down.

As we come to chapter 2 we get more details. You can say that chapter two is more of a *description* of Nineveh's fall. In this chapter we are told some of what happened when Nineveh fell. There are points where you actually feel like you are right there in the streets of Nineveh watching everything unfold.

As I mentioned last time, the siege upon Nineveh was a mere three months. But this chapter is amazing because it gives us a summary of what happened in that three months. Nahum whittles the battle down to one chapter; less than 350 words. And maybe you caught that as we read it. For you get a summary of the battle; its beginning, middle, and end.

But what is interesting about this chapter is the literary style that Nahum employs. Nahum not only describes the fall of Nineveh, he describes in ways that help us

understand some things about God's delivering judgment. He describes the downfall of Nineveh in 4 ways. He describes it theologically, covenantally, visually, and poetically.

And as we look at what this passage says about God and his judgment, we understand more specifically what God does for his people in his judgment.

The text begins with a theological description of God's judgment.

I. God's judgment is described theologically [1]

Nahum begins this part of his prophecy by saying, "The scatterer has come up against you."

The thing I'd like you to zero in on is the word "scatterer." The word, in one sense, refers to the armies of the Babylonians and the Medes. But its primary referent is the Lord. The Lord is the scatterer. He's simply using the Babylonians and the Medes to do his work of scattering.

But what I want you to see is that this idea of "scattering" is a way of understanding God's judgment. When God judges, he scatters. You could say that God's judgment is like dropping one of your Lego creations. When it hits the floor it breaks into pieces, which fly off in all different directions.

And this isn't the first time that we hear about this kind of thing in the Scriptures. You may recall the whole incident at the Tower of Babel. Back in Genesis 11 we read about how the people all joined together. They united as one in order to make a building that would reach to the heavens.

Well, that was directly against God's command to "fill the earth." Man was supposed to spread out over the earth

and take dominion of it. But in an act of sinful defiance, they all came together in one place.

So what does God do? He comes down and scatters them. He confuses their language and makes them disperse across the face of the earth. In his judgment he caused them to scatter like cockroaches when you flip on the light.

Similarly, Jeremiah talks of God's judgment as a scattering. There are a couple places in the book of Jeremiah where you can find this. Most notable of all the references is Jeremiah 51:20f.

Speaking of Babylon, Jeremiah says, *"You are my hammer and weapon of war: with you I break nations in pieces; with you I destroy kingdoms; with you I break in pieces the horse and his rider; with you I break in pieces the chariot and the charioteer; with you I break in pieces man and woman; with you I break in pieces the old man and the youth; with you I break in pieces the young man and the young woman."*

Of course, this was the threat to the people of Israel. God said that if they would not obey, he would scatter them among the nations (Deut. 4:27). But here in Nahum the Lord is saying that Nineveh will be scattered.

It is good for us to understand this. It's good for us to think theologically and get a good understanding of what God's judgment is like. For, if we understand that God's judgment is a shattering and dispersing, we get a better idea of what is going on around us.

But think about this idea of judgment by scattering. What do we see when we look around at our culture? We find families that being scattered. They are breaking into pieces and going their separate ways. Divorce is not just a sin that we can commit; it can be a judgment of God. For a husband goes one way, the wife goes a different way. And the children typically end up going in another direction.

And when many of your families are being scattered, there's no way to keep a culture together. Your culture begins to collapse because families are not united. So you find that civilization begins to be shattered into pieces and cannot hold together.

Or take for instance a lot of the churches that we see around us. Just over a hundred years ago these mainline churches turned their backs on God and his word. And what was God's response? He has become the scatterer to them. The membership of those churches has been drastically falling. As the Lord brings his judgment upon them they are finding that the people are being scattered.

Really, this idea of scattering helps us to understand what happened to Jesus when he was crucified. When he was on the cross, the Bible says that his bones were all out of joint. You can imagine hanging in that God forsaken position; arms stretched out wide and how that would wreak havoc on your joints and your back.

As the curse of sin came down on Jesus, he experienced the scattering judgment of God. He faced the Scatterer.

And that reminds us that the peace we have (and the reuniting of our flesh and souls at the resurrection) is ours because Jesus had been (in a sense) broken into pieces on our behalf. And the beauty of the gospel is that it unifies. God, in his favor, picks up the pieces and restores families and churches.

But this is how we should understand his wrath. It is a scattering.

But, as we move into the second verse, we are given another perspective. God's judgment is not only seen from a theological perspective, we also view it from a covenantal perspective

II. God's judgment is described covenantally [2]

I don't try to use big words when I preach. And while I love the word covenant, I recognize that not everyone understands it. You can think of a covenant as a relationship. When you make a covenant, you make promises which tie you into a relationship with someone.

That's what had happened to God and his people. Israel and Judah had been tied to God in a relationship by virtue of a covenant.

And when you look at verse 2 you see that relationship. God is thinking about his people and the covenant he has with them.

It says, "For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel, for plunderers have plundered them and ruined their branches."

Now, Israel had fallen to Assyria about 60 years before Nahum wrote this. The southern kingdom of Judah was being oppressed by Assyria. God had used Assyria as his rod of discipline. Assyria was the tool he used to punishment his people for their sins. That's why it talks about their being plundered.

But the first part of the verse talks about their restoration. The majesty and excellency of Jacob and Israel was going to be restored.

How was this majesty going to be restored? It was going to be restored through the judgment that came upon Nineveh. As God judges his enemies, he liberates his people. They have the chance to flourish.

Albert Barnes, in his commentary, points to the book of Acts as another example of how God often does this. The book of Acts tells us the death of Herod. Herod presented himself before the crowd and they said, “This is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” And we are told that God immediately struck him down. The text says that he was eaten by worms (It made the point that Herod not, in fact, divine). But the very next verse says that the word of God grew and multiplied.

In other words, you see how God’s judgment had played to the advantage of his people. Herod died. And, as a result, the church had greater liberty. God’s judgment on Herod resulted in the church being able flourish. It was now free to carry on its ministry and increase.

That’s this covenantal perspective. The judgment that came upon the enemy of God, allowed the people of God to experience a time of restoration.

And that is why God’s judgment is not something that we should fear as Christians. That judgment is not coming upon us. Christ endured the judgment we deserve. But

more than that, God's justice is something that liberates. It is a freeing thing for those of us who are in Christ.

And as we look to the future we have great hope for what will happen when Jesus comes again. When Jesus comes he will defeat Satan. He will be thrown into the lake of fire. All the oppressive forces that stand against us will go with him. And that will be our liberation. The restoration that Nahum speaks of here will come to us at that time. And God's kingdom will have a new majesty. It will have an excellency that it could never have while Satan lurked about. But when he is gone, the church will have a glory that flourishes forever.

So when we talk about God's judgment we can understand it from these perspectives. We can see how it is presented in a theological way. We can see how it is presented in a covenantal way. As we move on to verses 3-10 we find that it is also presented in a visual way.

III. Visually [3-10]

In verses 3-10 Nahum's prophecy becomes very graphic. Nahum almost makes you feel like you are right there on the streets of Nineveh, watching all that transpires as the city is attacked.

-- In verse 3 you get the feeling that you are standing on the walls of Nineveh. As you look out you can see the Babylonian army approaching. We see their red shields. We see the soldiers in their scarlet uniforms. We see their chariots. You even see them flash as the sun reflects off of the metal. We see all the long, wooden spears that the soldiers carry in their battle ranks.

-- In verse 4 the camera cuts to the streets down below. Inside Nineveh chariots race through the streets. They are rushing to and fro. Again, you get a flash of light as it races past ("they gleam like torches; they dart like lightning.")

There's a little confusion as to who it is that verse 4 is referring to. Is it the Assyrians rushing to muster their army after seeing the Babylonians? Or is it describing the Babylonians racing through Nineveh as they cut people down?

I think that Nahum does that intentionally. The point is to give you a sense of not knowing what is going on. It

creates the kind of confusion and panic that the people of Nineveh would have experienced.

If you ever watch war movies, you get this same sort of thing. The director will take quick shots with the camera of all kinds of things. There's a soldier running. Now there's a shot of a tank rolling by. It's fast and you don't have a lot of time to discern what exactly is going on. One of the tricks of cinematography is to make the camera shake a little. That makes you feel like you are right there in the battle. It creates a feeling of confusion and a sense of panic.

That's what Nahum is doing. He uses short sentences; he wants you to feel something of the horror of it all. Inside you may feel a little frantic and you ask, "What's going on?" That's the feeling that the Ninevites would have had.

-- Verse 5 talks about the officers. It says that they stumble over one another. Maybe it is because they are so drunk (as we talked about last time). Maybe it is because they are scared. They've been caught off guard. The Babylonians somehow breached the city and now you are scrambling to defend it.

Whatever the reason, you get the feeling people are running into each other and there's no coordinated

defense. They are so frantic that they knock one another over and trip. They are trying to get to the wall to their defense positions, but there is so much confusion that it becomes almost impossible to keep your footing.

It's already telling you that they have pretty much lost and the battle has barely begun.

-- Verse 6 may be reminding us once again of the floods that came and washed away the walls. The river gates are open it says. The palace melts away. You can almost see the erosion.

-- Verse 7 talks about the mistress who is stripped and carried off. And then the slave girls are depicted as wailing.

The commentators have some differing opinions on this. Some say it refers to the *goddess* of the city. It was the custom to take the gods away when you conquered a people. Some say it refers to the *queen* of Nineveh. Maybe she was taken captive and ravished. Again, it was often the sign of conquest to add women to your harem. Still others suggest it refers to the *king himself*. Some of the histories report that the king was rather effeminate. This could possibly be a reference to that.

However you want to take it, it's a terrible picture. It's a picture of defeat. It's agony and degradation.

-- In verse 8 the people cry out, "halt, halt!" In other words, people are begging for mercy, calling upon the intruders to stop. But their screams are being ignored.

-- In verse 9 someone starts chanting. "Take the silver! Take the gold." You not only see the Babylonians hauling away the plunder, but you hear them encouraging one another as they loot all the treasures of Nineveh.

It's like someone in Detroit breaking the windows of an Apple store and saying, "Get the ipads! Get the earpods!" it's sort of reminiscent of the first verse and the kind of scattering that occurs. People are scattered, money is scattered. Everything is scattered.

-- Finally, in verse 10 you can see the utter despair of the Ninevites. Their hearts are said to melt. You see them fainting with fear; their knees are trembling and faces grow pale because of the loss of blood. There's just no hope. It's desolation and ruin.

All in all, in verses 3-10 you get a visual depiction of the battle. And it is a horrible picture. The description is almost like a horror film. It displays nothing but fear, confusion, panic, hopelessness, suffering, and death.

It reminds me of the passage in the NT where Jesus talks about God's coming judgment. You get a sense of the

same sort of panic and hopelessness. Jesus says that people will flee to the mountains. They will ask the caves and the rocks to collapse upon them. God's judgment will be so horrifying that and merciless that they will cower and desire a swift death.

And it is a reminder that when God judges, it is final. There's no mercy in that moment. It is the end. And for those of us who are God's people, we say "Amen!" It is the time of our liberation.

But it's also a good reminder that if you have not put your faith in Christ, it's ever so important to do so.

In the last couple of verses there is another depiction of God's judgment upon Nineveh. In verses 11-13 God's wrath is depicted metaphorically or poetically.

IV. God's judgment is presented metaphorically [11-13]

You know what a metaphor is, right? It's a poetic way of making a comparison. You describe something by making a comparison to something else.

In a very poetic way Nahum compares Nineveh to a bunch of lions. In verses 11-12 the lions are presented as being strong and mighty hunters. They are sitting in their dens feeding on their prey. Like a lion Assyria had captured other nations and subdued them. And in verse 12 you can see the lion sitting in the cave chewing on the flesh its torn off.

This comparison to a lion is not without warrant. One of the primary symbols of Assyria was that of the lion. Just like in America we have the symbol of an eagle, the nations of the past had different symbols they used. Assyria was fond of the lion. As a matter of fact, when Nineveh was excavated, they found statues of lions and statues which had the body of a lion with the head of a man on it.

So Nahum takes up that image of the lion and uses it here. And it is true; Assyria was as mighty as a lion. But look what happens to the lion in verse 13. The young lions end up getting devoured. The devour-ers get devoured.

It says, “Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard.”

You’ll notice that there is another image presented there. He’s called “the Lord of hosts.” The hosts were a way of talking about armies. The Lord is depicted as leading an array of soldiers against Nineveh. We know that he didn’t do that. But the Lord is something of the general of this army. He’s coming against Nineveh with everything he’s got. And Nineveh is going to be decimated by this attack.

Now, what do we take away from this? I believe we can look at it as a great comfort. Yes, the picture here is of a great and mighty foe, but we are assured that our God is greater. Assyria was a superpower which seemed like a lion that could tear anything apart. But what we read here kind of reminds us of how the Spirit of the Lord came upon Sampson in the book of Judges. Sampson was able to rip the lion apart with his bare hands. It really posed no threat to Sampson.

The imagery is a reminder that God can and does put an end to his foes at will. It doesn’t matter how much

earthly power they may have. Our God has the ability to stop them in their tracks.

And with that, we have an assurance of what the gospel is really all about.

Scripture says that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking who he can devour. But what is going to happen to this great fiend? The Lord will strike him and all the antichrists which are the embodiment of him. They may gather together and be arrayed as one great army of evil, but they will be brought down. They will be thrown into the lake of fire and the smoke of their torment will rise up forever and ever.

But we've even already witnessed this in Christ's first coming. When Jesus was crucified, it seemed that Satan had the upper hand. It seemed that he was at the height of his power. But then Jesus rose again. He stopped the evil right in its tracks. He showed that he was the greater power. He was the real conqueror.

Conclusion:

So, again, it comes back to what I said at the beginning. Nahum reminds us of the gospel. It reminds us that the Lord is our rescuer. It reverberates with the promise that God will take away all evil from this world and bring life to his people.

We might live in an oppressive world. All that seeks to steal, kill, and destroy may look as if it will never end. But we can be assured that no power that exalts itself against Christ will last long in this world.

The kingdom of sin and Satan has already suffered a debilitating blow. Christ has died and been resurrected. The lion has, in a very literal sense, lost its teeth. We may rest assured that all the powers united with him will also come crashing down. One little word shall fell him.