

Nahum: My Stronghold and My Refuge in the Day of Trouble



From time to time, I come home and my wife has one of her favorite movies on in our bedroom, a movie called Pollyanna. I am sure most of us are familiar with it; it is a Disney movie. My favorite scene in the movie is when Reverend Ford is preaching his famous sermon. Now as an entertainment studio, Disney has many artists, and artists like to tell stories, not only through the words that you hear, but through pictures that you see. In this movie, the sermon that Reverend Ford is preaching deals with the character of God. While he is preaching about the character of God in his thunderous voice, the chandelier of the church is shaking. Women sitting in the pews are fidgeting. The men have perspiration running down their brows. They wipe their brows and loosen their ties. All of a sudden, the camera cuts away to Aunt Polly who is sitting very stoically. Later in the movie, Pollyanna observes Reverend Ford practicing his sermon out in the countryside. He has not audience except one in his mind. Pollyanna comes upon him while he is rehearsing his sermon. When he notices that she is observing him preaching, they enter into a conversation. She points out to him this thought that instead of preaching from the text you preach from, why don't you preach from a glad text of the Bible? Now, if you have watched the movie Pollyanna, you know there is a theological thing going on from Disney, which is this truth; Reverend

Ford and Pollyanna have two different views of God. At that very moment, Reverend Ford is confronted with this thought, is my view of God correct? A little bit later on in the movie, he is actually going to preach from a glad text instead of from the text he had intended to preach. It insinuates that Pollyanna's view of God is correct and Reverend Ford's may not have been.

We are at exit 34 in our journey down Route 66. The book of Nahum is the seventh in the Minor Prophets of the Old Testament. There is a good chance, if you have never read or studied the book of Nahum before, your view of God may be challenged in this lesson. That is not to say your view of God is wrong, but possibly not complete. We need to hear what the Minor Prophet, Nahum, has to say so that we truly understand the big picture of the Bible, not only who God is, but what God has done for us in the Christ event of when He redeemed us from sin. Nahum contributes mightily to that story.

We are going to read the first eight verses of Nahum chapter 1. Nahum is best captured by this theme: My stronghold and my refuge in a day of trouble. Nahum is actually going to present our God, our Savior, the Lord Jesus, as our stronghold and our refuge in the day of trouble. The book of Nahum is an oracle concerning Nineveh. This is not about the children of Israel. It is about Nineveh. We have already had a prophet bring a message to Nineveh, and Nineveh repented and God spared their city. Well, that was earlier in time, perhaps 100-120 years earlier.

Scripture

"An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

God's Wrath Against Nineveh

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way

is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness."

When I read that first phrase in verse 1, I thought the Bible was going to tell us Nineveh is bad. It sounds like Nahum is telling us God is bad. In the cultural thinking of today, if we read these verses to the world, they would say our God is bad. Yet, look what Nahum says in verse 7, "*The LORD is good.*" Whoa! "*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him. But with an overwhelming flood He will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.*"

Nineveh

I think most students of the book of Nahum would agree that if we were to capture the big story of Nahum as it speaks about Nineveh, it would show us three things about God's judgment of Nineveh.

Chapter 1: God's Judgment is decreed.

Chapter 2: God's Judgment is described.

Chapter 3: God's Judgment is deserved.

Verse 1 of chapter 1 says, "*An oracle concerning Nineveh,*" and then all of a sudden, we discover that God has declared judgment against Nineveh.

When we get fully into chapter 2, we see that judgment described. But, when we come to chapter 3, there is not a doubt in anyone's mind after hearing this oracle that the judgment is deserved. As a matter of fact, the last verse of the prophecy ends with everyone standing and clapping when they hear what God is going to do to Nineveh. Everyone is clapping!! Why? It is because at that time there was not a people group on the planet within the sound of this prophecy who had not been affected in a negative way by the Assyrians, Nineveh being its capital. Can you imagine a great city falling and the whole world clapping?

- **History of Nineveh**

If you are not careful when you read the book of Nahum, you will think it is a book about Nineveh. It is, but it is more than a book about Nineveh. Nineveh was a city founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10 and 11). He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. He was instrumental in founding many cities that ultimately developed many civilizations. From the city of Nineveh came the Assyrian empire, Nineveh became its capital. We are not exactly sure what period of time this was. We can't pinpoint this to within a few years because Nahum just doesn't give us enough information. We do know that he is prophesying about the destruction of Nineveh, and Nineveh will fall in 612 BC, so it is before that. He talks about the fall of Thebes in chapter 3, and that was in 686 BC, so we know it is after that. Somewhere between 686 BC and 612 BC, Nahum is prophesying concerning Nineveh. At this time, Nineveh is a world power. It is a great, great, city. This passage teaches that Nineveh will basically be no more after God judges it. You do realize that even as much as the Bible and ancient history talks about the sin of Nineveh, we had no evidence at all, archeologically, of this city until 1824. For centuries, archeologists had been looking for the ancient city of Nineveh and just never found it until 1824. The reason was because it was completely destroyed. When we study the writings of the ancient historians, we discover that Nineveh was a great city and was at the height of its glory at this time. This city actually had three parts. It had an inner city, which was protected by a wall, an outer city, which was

protected by a wall, and then outside the outer city walls, you had the suburbs of Nineveh. Many people believed when Jonah talked about the city being three days journey, he was not talking about the inner city or the outer city, but about the suburbs. If you went from suburb to suburb, it was three days journey. When talking about the inner city, historians tell us it was so great that the wall around the inner city actually totaled eight miles.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of flying over Darlington Speedway. It is a two and a half mile speedway. I saw it from the air. It is absolutely amazing. Can you imagine a NASCAR track eight miles in length? Why would I compare the wall of Nineveh to a NASCAR track? It is because historians say they raced chariots on the top of the inner city wall. The wall was 100 feet tall. In NASCAR, they sometimes talk about the cars being three abreast. That is dangerous in NASCAR. Historians say that when they raced the chariots around the inner wall, it seemed like they were racing at the speed of lightening. Notice that Nahum picks up on that. Please don't let someone tell you this is a prophecy about an automobile. It is not. It is trying to tell you how fast the chariots were in that day and when they raced around the city walls, they raced three abreast.

- **Sin of Nineveh**

This city was not only great in its material things, it was great in its sin; therefore, it is described as a wicked city. When the Assyrians would go into a country and capture it, they would take the best from the land and bring them back to the city of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. They would separate husbands from wives and children from parents and send them to the far regions of the empire so they could never find each other again...whoa...they would completely break down families in order to break down the culture from which that family came. This is why we talk about the ten 'lost' tribes of Israel. When the Babylonians took over the Southern Kingdom, they were humane in their deportation. King Nebuchadnezzar allowed families to stay together. He allowed the Jews to start their own

parts of the city in Babylon. They started businesses, they built homes, and they planted vineyards. Not the Assyrians, they completely disassembled prior cultures. They were wicked. This is why the whole world is clapping at what God does to Nineveh when the book ends. As He decrees their judgment, as we see it described, we sit back and say they deserve judgment.

Attributes of YHWH

But through Nineveh's sin, we discover who God is. When the first verse says, "*An oracle concerning Nineveh*," you immediately expect the Bible to plunge into this talk about Nineveh, but it doesn't. It starts out talking about God. Verse 2 said, "*The LORD*," capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. It stands for the personal name of God. It is our name Yahweh, the famous Tetragrammaton (which means consisting of four letters 'YHWH'). Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God, avenging and wrathful, whoa! That is not the way we normally talk about God. As a matter of fact, many times people out in the world (usually not in the church) have said to me that if God is such a loving God, then tell me why...or, if God was such a loving God, then why wouldn't he let...or why would he... Now please understand that what we are studying here in no way says God is not a loving God. As a matter of fact, I am saying that because God is holy and God is loving, He is jealous, He is avenging, and He is wrathful. Amen? You are never in a debate about whether God is loving or wrathful. He is loving, but He is also wrathful.

- **Jealous**

The Bible says, "*The LORD is jealous*." remember, when God revealed Himself to the children of Israel at Mt Sinai, the first thing He said to them was I am a jealous God, and I will share My glory with no other. In my own terminology, God was saying I will not let you mess around on Me because I am a jealous God. Whoa, did you hear that? God is jealous! As I study this passage, as I study this thought and this attribute of God, I really believe that jealousy is the protecting part of the love of God. When

the Bible tells us that He is a jealous God, it is saying God is a very loving God. Listen, if the person you think loves you is not jealous, they probably don't really love you.

In our society, we have made jealousy a very negative thing. We usually apply it to men who are jealous of their wives. They are constantly accusing their wives of certain things, so we talk about them being jealous. Now, ladies will often ask other ladies if their husband is jealous. If a lady says her husband isn't jealous, they will tell her she is so lucky to have a husband who is not jealous! Are you kidding me?

Now there is a right way and a wrong way to exercise jealousy, but when the Bible says the Lord is jealous, it is saying He is a loving God and He is protective of Himself and those He loves. So, it is God's jealousy for Himself, and His jealousy of His bride, Israel, that He is going to judge Nineveh.

- **Avenging**

The Lord is both "*jealous and avenging*." Now, He is not revengeful. Some of us get mixed up on vengeance and revenge. Let me remind you that the Bible says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Do you understand that? Vengeance is God's, vengeance doesn't belong to you, nor does vengeance belong to me. Be careful when you are revengeful, you are really messing up. When you try to get revenge on someone, you are saying God doesn't do His job very well and you have to take matters into your own hands. If you are a believer and you try to practice revenge, you are taking matters into your own hands. How many times have you wanted someone to pay? How many times have you wanted to get even? How many times did you want to get back at someone for what they did? When you are having those thoughts, remember that God says it is not your call; it is His call!

So, what the Bible is establishing here is the sovereignty of God over the nations. But again, He is not writing this to the Ninevites. He is writing this

to the Southern Kingdom reminding them that He is a jealous God, and He is an avenging God. His meaning is, I am jealous of you and I will protect you, and one of the ways I will protect you is that I will act in judgment against Nineveh. You see, the reason I don't believe God wants us to play this vengeance game is because you and I would act out of hurt. When you act out of hurt, it is usually retaliation; you are just retaliating. We base our retaliation on how much we hurt. That is not vengeance. Vengeance is when God makes someone pay for what they have done. God goes deeper to the core than just the hurt; God knows the cost. You and I don't know the cost. The emotion of a hurt prevents us from being objective in analyzing the true cause. Therefore, we are not a good judge. We had better be thankful our Lord is a jealous and avenging God. He does it in proportion to the sin that has been committed because He is ultimately making them pay the right amount for what they did.

- **Wrathful**

In the next verse, He is "*avenging and wrathful*." This word, "*wrathful*," means 'to cross over.' It is the word that was used when the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan River. That is the root. The picture of God as a wrathful God is Him being loving, kind, and gracious, then crossing over to being wrathful. Many years ago, I read a definition of God's wrath that stuck with me. It was defined simply as this, 'God's wrath is His holy hatred of sin.' When you see God's wrath in the Bible, it is God's holy reaction to that which is unholy. If you are holy, you must react to what is unholy. You understand that, don't you? God is wrathful. The Bible basically says He is going to take His wrath out on someone, and He is going to take His wrath out on His adversaries and His enemies.

- **Slow to Anger**

Now the Bible introduces this thought, God's angry. But the next verse says "*the LORD is slow to anger and great in power*," but He will not let the guilty get by with what they are doing. He will not clear the guilty. He will not let them go unpunished. God is a jealous God, He is an avenging God,

He is a wrathful God, and now, we understand that He is a patient God. He is slow to anger. This word, "*anger*," in the Hebrew means 'to breathe hard.' It means the situation is causing a person not to breathe normally, not to think normally, but to breathe hard, so He is laboring. Sometimes, we think patience is a sign of weakness. But notice the Bible is trying to say here that God is not weak, but meek. In the Bible, meekness is not weakness. Meekness is power restrained, power controlled. So when the Bible says the Lord is slow to anger, but please don't think He is a passive God or a sissy God. Please don't think it is a sign of weakness. It is a sign that God is powerful, but He is patient. He controls His temper. He controls His anger. It is slow to build.

God's Anger Unleashed

Now, Nahum tells us the clouds are the dust of God's feet and He is in the whirlwind and the storm. You're getting this picture that God is getting angry, getting ready to unleash His anger. Guess what happens...the seas dry up, the rivers dry up, and the fertile places on the planet wither. Then, it talks about the mountains that stood from the foundation. When the Bible talks about nature and the mountains, it uses the term "from ancient," which implies they are really, really, really old. The picture is these things have stood forever, (though we know they really had not stood forever) and God steps into nature as a jealous, avenging, and wrathful God, and the mountains shake! The hills start melting away, and the earth starts trembling.

- **But He is Good**

Then, Nahum says, who can stand before the indignation of God? In the Hebrew, this word, "*indignation*," means 'to foam at the mouth.' You get this picture of God's anger boiling. It talks about the heat of His anger, and the fierceness of His anger, meaning 'to burn, to be hot.' Who can stand before God in the burning hotness of His anger? Whoa! The answer is no one. That is the picture of Nineveh. Now, I don't know about you, but if I am reading the text, I might say the Lord is a bad God; He's bad!

Have you seen the movie or read the book, The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe from the book series by C.S. Lewis, The Chronicles of Narnia? In ^(a) The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, when the children get into the land, they meet Aslan (which is Turkish for lion) and discover he is a lion. The children asked the question; ^(a) "Is he safe?" The answer was of course not! Then C.S. Lewis has that famous line in the book that he is not a tame lion, ^(a) "But He is good."

Do you know what the symbol of Assyria was? It was the lion. When you read these first verses, you begin to understand that what is going to be unleashed on Nineveh is the Lion of God! Is He safe? The answer is of course not! He is not a tame Lion, but He is good. Our society can't handle that. We can't understand a wrathful, vengeful, jealous God who gets angry and annihilates what stands in opposition to Him, and yet still have the attributes of goodness. Amen? Verse 7 says, "*The LORD is good.*" The Psalmist kept singing the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever!

Remember this isn't written to Nineveh. This is not giving Nineveh a chance to repent. Jonah went to Nineveh and gave them a chance to repent, and they repented. But since then, they had repented of their repentance, if I can say that. They quit repenting! They were back to being evil and God is getting ready to judge them.

Let me tell you where we struggle as a society. When someone gets mad and loses their temper, they usually take it out on the ones they love. Have you ever been on the other end of that? This is why we don't want anyone to get mad. This is why we don't want anyone to get angry, because when people get angry, the anger destroys everything in its path.

- **But He is Our Stronghold and Our Refuge**

So, here is the picture; God is boiling hot! Someone would say you better get out of His way. Not if you're His, because He is our stronghold in the day of trouble, He is our refuge. The Bible says, "He knows those who take refuge in Him." This means that when He is angry, God never loses control

but is always in control. When God vents, you don't ever have to worry about being on the wrong side of that if you are His because He knows you are His. When God gets ready to judge the world, God's children never have to worry because He knows who we are! What we know about the Lord is that He is good, and He is our stronghold. We take refuge in Him and He knows who we are.

Good News!

But we are like the children of Israel; we are waiting for some good news to be preached from the mountain. In chapter 1:15, there are some feet that appear on the mountain and they are going to announce some news. This is saying that Israel can look forward to the day to come when God judges Nineveh and the Assyrians fall. Isaiah chapter 52:7 uses this same Hebraism, except he said, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news." A messenger comes from the war and he has good news, the enemy has fallen. You look down at his feet, they are dusty, sweaty, bruised, and blistered, and you say, how beautiful are those feet! Why would you say this? It is because those feet brought you good news.

What is the good news of Nahum? God's enemies will be judged! He was true to His Word. He ran Nineveh into the darkness. For centuries, people heard about this city but couldn't find it. When we did find it, there was very little left. As a matter of fact, the main thing archeologists have found in the city of Nineveh is a big ash heap. God said He would run them into the darkness and into nothingness, and He did.

Now, what is the story for us? How does this contribute to the big story of the Bible? It tells us we don't want to be on the wrong side of God's wrath. The next time you get into a conversation, and get into the moral argument that if God is such a loving God He wouldn't send people to Hell. You need to clearly say, "Oh yes, He will! YES, HE WILL! Let me tell you what God will do to drunkards, adulterers, the sexually immoral, murderers, liars, gossipers, those disobedience to parents. He will cast you

into an everlasting lake of fire, and you will be separated from Him forever and ever because He is jealous, He is avenging, and He is wrathful. He is slow to anger, but when He gets there, He will unleash His holy hatred against all things that are unholy. That includes you and that includes me.

We need to look to the mountain to see if there is some good news. In Romans, Paul took this figure from Nahum and Isaiah, and in talking about the gospel, he talked about how we cannot be saved until we hear and we can't hear unless someone is sent. When that sent person comes, we see how beautiful the feet are of him who preaches good news.

In the context of the book of Romans, who is God's enemy? It is not Satan; it is sin. The book of Romans is not a book about Satan; it is ultimately about sin. And God took sin on, in the person of His Son. On the cross, His Son paid the penalty of sin and God unleashed His holy hatred against His Son on the cross, and judged Him a sinner for you and for me. It wasn't because God was hurt; it was because there was a cost that had to be paid and Jesus paid that price! When the gospel was introduced to you, far more was introduced than just the good news that the penalty of sin has been paid in the proclamation of the gospel. Particularly in the book of Romans, Paul labors to say that not only has the penalty been paid, but the power of sin has been defeated! If you are God's child, you don't have to live in sin anymore! You have been set free. I get tired of hearing the testimonies of people raised in church under the gospel, who just believe that salvation was a free pass out of Hell into Heaven, and never considered what salvation really is. It is God unleashing His holy hatred against sin. He didn't just pay the penalty for sin; He broke the power of sin so we can lead victorious lives in Christ. We are not just forgiven; we are free in Christ!