

Route 66

Nahum: Taking Vengeance

Part 34 – April 18, 2010



Nineveh from "Wonders of the Past" (1920)

The book begins: "An oracle concerning Nineveh." – *Nahum 1:1a*

Now, Nineveh was the *capitol* of Assyria (one of the most *vicious* powers ever to exist). Picture an empire ruled by Hannibal Lecter and you get a realistic representation.



Anthony Hopkins; *The Silence of the Lambs*

It wasn't enough to *conquer*; they filleted, dismembered, gouged, and impaled the living, and humiliated and mutilated the dead. In one ancient inscription, the Assyrian king, Ashurnasirpal brags: "I skinned all the nobles who rebelled against me and draped their skins over the walls."¹

Their strategy was to *terrify* their enemies ... and it *worked!* And these are the very same people who received the Lord when Jonah walked their streets proclaiming impending doom! The king and the nation repented, and God relented and spared them.



Prism of Sennacherib

But, it "didn't take". They *re-repented* ... or, *un-repented*. And about three generations (60 years) later, they wiped Jonah's nation of Israel off the map (721^{BC}). We must not take the continuation of our faith for granted.

Then they turn south and destroy 46 cities and countless villages on a 20-year campaign to Jerusalem (as recorded on this 2,700-year-old Assyrian record).

But at Jerusalem the prophet Isaiah and King Hezekiah desperately prayed, and God caused 185,000 soldiers to die during one night.² This was not only divine *protection* for Jerusalem, it was divine *judgment* and *warning* for the backsliden believers of Nineveh. But, it had no effect in turning them back to God. And, they extorted oppressive annual taxes from Judah.



Model of Ancient Jerusalem

And somewhere in Jerusalem during the siege, there may have been another person praying; a boy who would grow up to be known as the poet prophet ...

The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. – *Nahum 1:1b*

¹ Albert Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, volume 2", page 124

² 2 Kings 19:35 and 2 Chronicles 32:20-21

The location of Elkosh [EL-kahsh] is unknown. But, some speculate that it was later *renamed* “Capernaum” [kuh-PUHR-nay-uhm], which means, “village of Nahum”. If this is true, his family lived in the north and must have fled to the south.



Let’s look at the 19 kings of Judah. Nahum fits in that “no-man’s land” between the gray dots of the *early* prophets (*Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah,*) and the yellow dots of the *later* prophets (*Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah*).

And you *know* that name must’ve given him trouble ...

People would ask, “Who’s that poet-prophet?” “Oh, he’s Nahum.” “That’s what I want to find out - his name.” “And that’s why I just told you, he’s Nahum!” “When did you tell me his name?!” “Just now I said, he’s Nahum!” “You did *not* say his name!” (That was Habakkuk and Costello!)

Nahum’s name means *comfort* and *consolation*. And God *chose* Nahum to proclaim Nineveh’s inevitable doom, *not* as a warning to the Ninevites this time, but as *comfort* and *consolation* to Judah! God has been patient, but Nineveh’s “party” will soon be over!

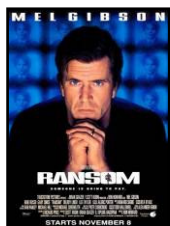
- God’s longsuffering must not be construed as indifference.

Nahum writes this about 50 years *after* the failed siege. Many believe the deaths of the 185,000 Assyrians inspired his opening.

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. – *Nahum 1:2-3a NIV*

Wow, “jealous”, “avenging”, “filled with wrath”; that’s *scary* stuff. It’s easy to get hung up on Old Testament descriptions like this. When I’m jealous or vengeful or “wrathy” it’s so *contaminated* with sinfulness, stupidity, and short-sightedness that it creates a toxic fruit that ends up poisoning both my enemy *and* myself! So, we have to remind ourselves that God’s wrath is a core component of his *goodness*.

We talked about God’s *anger* in “Lamentations”, and how it would be evil to be in the presence of evil and *not* be angered by it. But now we’re adding concepts like “jealousy” and “vengeance”.



Have you ever seen the movie: “Ransom”? Mel Gibson plays a well-known public figure whose son is kidnapped. And he becomes convinced that his child will be murdered, regardless of whether or not he pays the \$2 million ransom. So he goes on television with this big pile of money and tells the kidnapper that he’s never going to receive it; instead it’ll be a bounty on his head, dead or alive, until the son is safely returned.

The father is *filled* with righteous wrath and protective jealousy. And we connect with him on this intense emotional level, because we recognize his reaction as an expression of *love* and *justice*, and we're designed to desire and delight in altruistic vengeance.

- If God tolerated evil He would not be worthy of worship.

God's jealousy is untainted with envy; his vengeance contains no thirst for revenge. And His wrath is protective and redemptive.

Nahum says, though God is great in power, "[He] is slow to anger". The exercise of His vengeance is *always* a last resort.

Nahum then goes on to confirm that ...

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh ... - *Nahum 1:7-8a NIV*

Only the Lord can know when grace can no longer be granted, and the time for righteous, redemptive wrath has come. For Nineveh, it was 612^{BC}, and at the hands of the Babylonians and the Medes. It's 100 years too late for Jonah to see it, but his wish comes true, and the Assyrians' reign of terror comes to an abrupt end.



In the photo to the left is what remains of a head from a *huge* bull-man statue.



And to the right is an excavation of some of the participants of the final battle in Nineveh.

However, when Nahum authored this book (about 40 years *before* Nineveh's destruction), their fall was *inconceivable*.

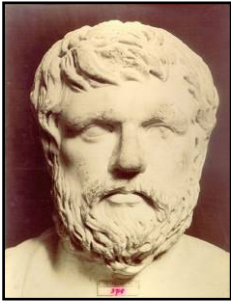
The walls of Nineveh were almost 8 miles around. They were 100' tall and wide enough for three chariots to ride side-by-side. Towers stood atop the walls an additional 100' high. A moat around the city was 150' wide and 60' deep. Nineveh had enough stored provisions to withstand a 20 year siege. It was a city filled with gardens and parks and even a zoo. The royal palace had an area of almost 100,000 square feet (three city blocks!) There were 15 main gates with huge stone bulls standing guard. - *Al Maxey, paraphrased*



So, how do you suppose their enemies defeated them?

The victory is documented by Nabopolassar [NAB-uh-puh-LASS-uhr] (a Babylonian king and father of Nebuchadnezzar), on this tablet, known as "Babylonian Chronicle ABC-3".

But, the details of the battle strategy aren't given.



Xenophon

However, the Greek historian, Xenophon [Zin-uh-fun] (circa 400^{BC}) attributes the fall of Nineveh to flood water that washed away part of their defenses.³ Remember that 150' moat that was meant to protect them? Well, archaeologists have discovered ancient river-gates upstream that could have been used to create a man-made flood to wash away those walls.

What was it Nahum had said, 40 years earlier?

With an overwhelming **flood** he will make an end of Nineveh (1:8a)

And as if that's not enough, check out these two statements:

The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. ... Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away. - *Nahum 2:6;8a NIV*

And Nineveh is utterly destroyed at the *zenith* of her power! If we *won't* submit to God's will, we *will* become objects of his wrath; not because he's threatened by dissidents, but because to reject him is to embrace the infection of darkness and evil.

"I will prepare your grave, for you are vile." - *Nahum 1:14 NIV*

And the Lord did such an effective job, that when Xenophon marched over the area (with 10,000 men) just 200 years later, there was *no* evidence that a city had ever even been there! Many scholars used to think Nineveh was a mythical land that existed only in the imaginations of the writers like Nahum ... until 1845 when Sir Austen Layard confirmed the lost ruins.

Nahum's entire small book (three chapters) describes the doom of Nineveh, but the very last verse really sums up the situation:

Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty? - *Nahum 3:19 NIV*

In 1:15, Nahum tells his own people to get ready to celebrate, not to *gloat* over revenge, but to *rejoice* over justice.

Every sin, every crime, every offense, every misdeed will be avenged, so that the infinite worth of God's glory can be upheld and displayed as the ultimate good and truth and treasure. Some will pay their debt to God *themselves*, in hell. Others will have their debt paid for them, on the cross.

He's so devoted to justice He offers to pay the penalty Himself! And out of His righteous wrath, He has ransomed His only Son.

³ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.4.12