

## **Nahum: Wickedness Will Not Prevail!**

*Various bible passages from Nahum, from the series, "Ancient Messengers Modern Message"  
Message from the Master Broadcast July 22, 2007 by Pastor Daron Lindemann*

"Only the strong survive," they say. In our world today it takes power – not just to get things done, but to stay ahead of the game. Drive your computer with anything less than the latest power and you're already a few steps behind in your productivity. Barry Bonds approaches the Major League record for career home runs with a mighty swing not found in the average batter. Communicate on a mobile network with a weak signal and your dropped calls will irritate friends and clients alike. Call customer service with a complaint and unless you've mastered Dale Carnegie's suggestions for influencing people with powerful persuasion you may find yourself disappointed in the results. Companies merge and remerge, others engage in hostile takeovers, and unless workers have collectively formed a strong union the employee these days has little say in response to the power of big business. Powerful evil rules our day as well with deadly terrorism and the threat of bomb blasts gripping peaceful citizens with fear.

The prophet Nahum wouldn't be bothered in the least by any of these previously mentioned power plays. As a matter of fact, he might counter by stating, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." That puts a different perspective on the survival of the strong, doesn't it? Text book examples would include Enron in the business world and the revolving door of champions in the sports world where yesterday's dynasties quickly become today's pushovers. The Bible cites such examples as the rescue of God's people from Egypt, and history provides accurate accounting of the fall of the Roman Empire and more recently the Soviet Union.

Brute earthly power means little or nothing to the all powerful Creator from heaven, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ruler of nations, chief commander of planets and floods, author of winds and hurricanes, designer of flowers and earthquakes, and provider of sunshine and storm. Nahum agrees when he says, "*The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry ... The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it*" (1:3-5).

The book of the prophet Nahum reports a power play in the ancient world. It reveals to us how far the Lord God will go to protect and preserve his believers against the most powerful of threats, and how much he will do to those who want to step toe-to-toe with him and challenge his authority.

Targeted by Nahum's and God's attention is a city you've heard of before. It has recently flourished as a result of the blessing of God who, in his mercy, had sent the prophet Jonah there to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. The city is Nineveh, capital of world power Assyria. The result of Jonah's preaching in Nineveh had been nothing less than a spiritual makeover. "*The Ninevites believed God ... When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened*" (Jonah 3:5,10). That was over 100 years ago. It was a time when the Lord's message of grace and guidance was falling on the deaf ears of the Israelites, so he decided to pack up and take his saving mercy elsewhere. Not just anywhere, either. The Lord turned away from the callous and complacent hearts of Israel to what appeared at the time to be the even more callous and even more complacent hearts of their enemy, Assyria, and its capital, Nineveh.

When Jonah received his assignment from God to preach in Nineveh it would have been like God telling you to travel to Afghanistan, find the ringleaders of Al-Qaida, and tell them, "God loves you and so do I." Assyria had terrorized the Israelites for centuries as it positioned itself to be the world's premier power, often times engaging in military conflicts against its arch enemy, Egypt. It so happened that both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah found themselves in a pickle, geographically speaking, because as Egypt and Assyria lobbed bombs at each other they had to do so over and through Israel and Judah situated directly between them, with Egypt to the southwest and Assyria to the northeast.

*The People's Bible* commentary explains the strategies of one Assyrian king named Ashurbanipal,

More than once, the armies of Ashurbanipal had swept down the highways of Judah on their way to war with Egypt – the only nation able to stand up against the Assyrians and have at least a fighting chance to succeed. The Assyrian emperor, as was his custom, demanded that Judah, as a vassal of the king, provide troops for these military campaigns. He was quite willing for the blood of Judah's sons to be spilled in order that he might realize his imperialistic ambitions. The tiny kingdom of Judah was powerless to resist any of these unwanted incursions (“Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,” pp. 6,7).

This was the kind of king and his people to whom the Lord turned with a message of mercy through the prophet Jonah. It's not hard to understand how Jonah didn't jump up and down when God handed him his assignment, and more than that, when the city of Nineveh and its king repented.

Only a few generations later, however, the Assyrians and Nineveh forgot the Lord God completely as they gained more and more prominence and power on the world stage. In turn, their ears became deaf and their hearts became calloused to the message and mercy of God. More than that, their hearts swelled with pride and their eyes lusted greedily after even mightier prominence and power. They spurned the God who had forgiven them and spat in his face with such arrogant boasting as one Assyrian king who claimed, “*Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ... How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand*” (2 Kings 18:33,35).

No wonder the book of Nahum begins, “*The Lord is 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*” (1:2). The Israelites who had previously walked away from the Lord had learned their lesson when he let them walk away and gave his love to their sworn enemy, Assyria. In Nahum's day it was this very nation of Assyria who didn't just walk away from the Lord but stepped up to him with chin up and chest out claiming superiority, and making every effort to bully the Israelites again like it had done before. The Lord God doesn't sit on his hands but takes action and counters with avenging wrath.

Before we cheer for the downfall of Assyria, it's best if we pause to learn a lesson from their sad story. Ignoring God's mercy, and worse yet challenging God's superiority, mocks his saving love and makes a sham of his gracious zeal. Receiving God's mercy doesn't give anyone – not the Assyrians, not us – the right to mishandle that mercy and do what we want with it. Ignore it, challenge it, mock it and God will not only take it away but he'll replace it with his wrath and vengeance. The saving mercy of God is not a toy! Playing with it is much more devastating than playing with a book of matches that can torch up into an unstoppable forest fire devouring everything in its path! Let's confess right now that we too often toy with the mercy of God, playing fast and loose with it like a child playing with gasoline. Stop before it's too late! Treat God's mercy with the same care as he does! Believe it, appreciate it, treasure it, live by it, share it, and follow it. And you'll find that humble trust in God's mercy empowers you to stand up against the most intimidating fears, the most threatening bullies, and the most depressing anxieties. Nothing is stronger than God's love for you.

When someone or something threatens God and gets in the way of his love for you, stand back because God's avenging justice wreaks havoc to protect you, as God did to the Assyrians and their capital city, Nineveh, in order to protect the Israelites. “*The Lord is good,*” Nahum tells us, “*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; he will pursue his foes into darkness ... they will be consumed like dry stubble*” (1:7,8,10).

Nineveh had become the mightiest city on earth with walls 100 feet high and wide enough so that three chariots could ride abreast on top of the wall. Thrust into the sky at certain locations on the wall were towers extending another 100 feet. In addition, the walls of the city were surrounded by a huge moat half of a football field wide and 60 feet deep. Nahum's prediction that Nineveh would fall seemed very unlikely, even ridiculous. But recall the words of Nahum. He prophesied that “*with an overwhelming flood [the Lord] will make an end of Nineveh,*” and that's exactly how it happened!

In 612 B.C., roughly 50 years after Nahum's words of warning, the Tigris River, on which the city of

Nineveh was located, overflowed its banks and destroyed a small section of the city wall. The Babylonians had their eye on overthrowing the Assyrians, so when their spies discovered this breach in the wall, it was the beginning of the end for Nineveh. The Babylonian army invaded through the breach, besieged and plundered the city, and set it on fire, fulfilling not just the prophecy that a flood would make an end of Nineveh, but that a fire would consume the city. God had promised to wipe Nineveh from the face of the earth, not to be rebuilt, and he kept that promise. After its destruction in 612 B.C. the city of Nineveh was not discovered by archaeologists until A.D. 1842. Since then every single detail of every single prophecy in Nahum – such as the destruction by flood and fire, the capture of fortresses around the city, the siege, and the city leaders trying to flee – has been authenticated by archaeological finds and historical records.

The destruction of the world's greatest city and the details of its judgment, precisely fulfilled by the divine activity of God, lead us to gasp in awe at the greatness of our God. With humble faith we bow before him, amazed at his superiority over the greatest of powers. With strengthened faith we step forward, facing tomorrow and all its troubles with courage because our God will not leave us alone, will not ignore our enemies, and will not let any of them have their wicked way.

When God says that he will rescue Israelite slaves from Egypt, he does it, and not even Pharaoh can stand in his way. When God says that ex-slaves outnumbered and out-skilled by expert armies should charge into battle for a victory, he does it, and not even Goliath can stop him. When God says that his people should give the first and best of our income and wealth to him in generous portions because he'll replenish it with even more, he does it, and not even prime rate or deep debt can rob us. When God says that his Son, Jesus Christ, will be born in Bethlehem, crucified in Jerusalem, and rise from the dead three days later, he does it, and not even Caesar Augustus, Pontius Pilate, or Roman soldiers can stop him. When God says that nothing can separate you from his love and he'll turn the most terrible calamity into the most rewarding gift, he does it, and not even cancer can outmuscle his mercy.

Critics of the book of Nahum claim that because of its detailed description of destruction that annihilates the most impregnable city on earth, it must have been written after the fact, or at least while the city of Nineveh was in the midst of being destroyed. Christians who hear the message of Nahum, on the other hand, believe that our God is the Lord of history, the Lord of nations, and the Lord of the greatest powers on this earth who makes promises and keeps them down to the tiniest detail.

So we say with the prophet Nahum, *“The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (1:7)*. Amen.