

The Beginnings of Nahum

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[0 : 00] Now we begin this evening to look through the book of the prophet Nahum. Now this is not an easy book. It's not a nice book in the sense that much of it, most of it perhaps, is concerned with judgment and with destruction.

And that makes it one that is not readily one from which one can pluck nugget verses here and there with the possible exception of verse 7 in chapter 1, which of course it's a delight always to preach on.

But the rest of the book is much of it is about judgment, much is about destruction. But it is about the destruction of the city of Nineveh and by extension by the destruction of ultimately all the Lord's enemies and the enemies of his people by which this points us forward, not only to the time when Nineveh itself would be destroyed, which Nahum is prophesying, but also points us on to the end of time, to the last judgment when we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and when, you know, everything will be judged, whether it's good or bad.

And remember that Jesus says in Matthew's account of the gospel that men shall give account for every idle word that they have spoken, not merely every sinful word, not even every blasphemous word, but every idle word that they have spoken.

And so how precise and how fine-toothcombing the judgment of the Lord is going to be in that day. And as Peter says, the righteous, excuse me, be safe, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

[1 : 41] Well, here we have this prophecy of judgment upon those who have made themselves the enemies of the Lord's people and by extension the enemies of the Lord as well.

But at the same time as we have this judgment, we also have the Lord repeatedly saying, particularly in chapter 1, to his people that he desires to be good to them, to be their protector, to be their helper.

And that because this is so, and because they can be confident that he will destroy and judge those who are seeking to destroy them, they should renew their relationship with him.

They should pay their vows, verse 15, and keep the solemn feasts. In other words, to strengthen their relationship with the Lord, because only in the Lord is there protection and defence, both in the last day, but also even in the days of trouble in this world.

Each day, remember, of this world's life, let alone of our life, is before the Lord's eyes as though it were right in the present.

[2 : 51] The Lord, remember, of being an eternal God, as we've mentioned many times in the past, sees past, present and future as though it were all right there in the palm of his hand. So once an evildoer or a sinner, including sinners such as ourselves, may have a tendency for something that was committed maybe 20, 30 years ago to shrug our shoulders.

Yeah, well, it was a long time ago. You know, a lot of water's flowed out in the bricks since then. No harm done, really, to the Lord. That particular sin is as though it was right there that moment.

Not only does the present matter with the Lord, but past, present and future are all before his eyes as though they were right there that moment. So even sins of long ago will be brought up before the Lord and must be given an account for it.

And either we ourselves must answer for them or somebody else must answer in our step. And obviously we know what the answer is to the Lord's people. Who must stand in our place?

It is the one advocate, the one substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. But without such a substitute, without such a protector, we and all those who may call themselves Israelites or church members or Assyrians or Judeans or whatever it may be, there is no protection for any race or people under heaven save that of Christ.

[4 : 12] So when the Lord talks about his judgment, ultimately it is the last judgment it points us forward to. And that last judgment has all been committed to Christ.

We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This book then, like all prophecy, and ultimately like all scripture, is pointing us to Christ.

And although we must perhaps pick apart to some extent, in order to find the Christ-centered references, we have to remember that all scripture is given by inspiration of God.

That means it is breathed forth by the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit has inspired men to write down that which God dictates. And everything which God dictates, everything that God breathes out and causes to be written down, he inspires by his spirit, will, like that spirit, point toward Christ.

And although this is in a sense one of the most perhaps difficult books of the Bible, which to find that which is positive and God-honored and Christ-centered in that sense, yet we must approach it with that spirit in mind.

[5 : 27] That because God has given it, he intends us to have it. And if he intends us to have it, then there must be that within it which is to our profit and to our good. So therefore we turn to this prophet, Nehom, of which he speaks of the burden of Nineveh.

Before we come to the burden of Nineveh, let's just take the name, Nehom itself, that properly speaking, in Hebrew there are both that soft H, which is like our H, a H sound, and there's also a hard H, which is more of a H sound.

Now it is the latter which, properly speaking, Nehom is, it's not technically Nehom as we would say it, it would be Nehom. So that would be Nehom, that is how it would be pronounced with a H sound.

And that name, Nehom, it means comfort. And if you were to look at, you know, in, for example, a famous verse in Isaiah 40, verse 1, you know, comforti, comforti my people.

It's the words Nachmu, Nachmu. Now the U sound at the end is a plural addressing people. So it's like the word Nehom, but it's Nehomu, Nachmu, comfort, you comfort, plural, comforti, comforti, my people, Savior God.

[6 : 45] So it's this word that means comfort. Some take it to mean also revenge, band in with it, and that's perhaps going by what the prophecy contains. And this is the vision of Nehom, the El-Keshite.

We don't know exactly where El-Kesh or El-Kesi, the village was. Most commentators say it was in Galilee, and that whilst that may be where Nehom was born, and perhaps it might potentially be a reference to his descent, you know, as in somebody being an Ephraimite, for example.

So an El-Keshite would be a family within a particular tribe. It is traditionally thought that he came to reside in the place which subsequently became known as Capernaum, as in the village of Nehom in Galilee.

So, you know, when the Jews later on say to Jesus, look and see, there's no prophet ever comes out of Galilee. You know, they're not speaking the truth, because Nehom at least was from Galilee. The burden then of Nineveh. Now, if we're in prophecy, something is described as a burden. It usually means a future prophecy. Now, I think, well, surely all prophecies are future.

[7 : 57] Well, some prophecy might be almost immediate in its fulfillment, but this prophecy is predicting events which are a good century ahead of Nehom.

The fall of Nineveh, which is described here, bear in mind, of course, another famous set of references to Nineveh is the Book of Jonah, where the city of Nineveh repents when the Lord asks them to, or sends his prophets saying, yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed, and they all turn and they all repent.

That's about 150 years earlier. And since then, of course, Nineveh has become the capital of a mighty and oppressing empire.

It was a very ancient city, a very ancient foundation. We go back to Genesis chapter 10. We find the roots of it there from verse 8.

Cush begat Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Wherefore, it is said, even as Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord.

[9 : 01] And the beginning of this kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Akkad, and Calne, in the land of Shinar. So, often speaking, Babylonia. And out of that land went forth Asher, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth and Calah.

And those in between Nineveh and Calah, the same is a great city. So, that's how ancient Genesis chapter 10, we've got the references to the original stipend, and building of Nineveh.

And it is Asher, from whom, of course, we get the origins of Asheria, or Assyria, which was the wider land of which Nineveh became the capital.

And the Assyrian Empire was utterly ruthless, totally brutal, in the way that it conquered and destroyed the lands that it conquered.

It was different from how the Persians governed, and how the Babylonians also governed. They were bad, but the Assyrians were the worst of the lot. Their tendency was, not only to conquer, but then to effectively suck all the good, all the wealth, all the benefit out of all the countries, and focus and concentrate it in the capital, in their empire, in the centre of their world.

[10:18] As opposed to govern the nations, reasonably sort of benignly, albeit with their own people, as later empires did, they suck everything out, and wiped out whole populations, as well as carting some off into exile.

So, the city that is described in its downfall here, you could say is well and truly getting its confidence, but we never like to read of destruction, we never like to read of judgment, it makes us uncomfortable.

We prefer to read of blessing, we prefer to read of God being kind, and patient, and generous, and so on. And that is part and parcel of the viewers. But also, there is the side of God, which is absolutely just.

what kind of ruler or government would it be, which, even in a secular society, was yes, they were seeking to do good, and help, you know, children's charities, and hospitals, and those that tried to help the poor, and so on, but at the same time, did absolutely nothing, to restrain crime, or evil, or violence, or oppression, you know, didn't bother with a police force, didn't bother with enforcing any laws, they tried to be as nice as possible to everybody, but crime lords, and gang wars, and so on, could just go absolutely unchecked, and nobody had any defence, anywhere.

If nobody is brought to justice, if there is no enforcement of law, or law, of order, of crime and punishment, then nobody is safe, and nobody can get on with their lives.

[11:53] So, if you like, the negative side of justice, is just as vital, as the positive side, of encouragement. So, the burden of Nineveh, this is a future prophecy, and almost in terms, if you think of, if it's a distant future, this is one reason, why it's described as a burden.

It's almost like something, that until it is fulfilled, like the nation of God, has to carry it, like a burden on his shoulder, until finally he's relieved of it, when the prophecy, is fulfilled.

So, the burden of Nineveh, the book of the mission of Nahum, the Al-Kashai, God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth, the Lord revengeth, and is furious, the Lord will take vengeance, on his adversaries, and he reserve a wrath, for his enemies.

The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all, acquit the wicked. The Lord hath his way, in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds, and the dust, of his feet.

Now, this is a reference, obviously, when it says also, you have you got the sea, make it dry, that as creation is seen, in all its power, in all its, you know, storm and tempest, instead of being afraid of this, those who are the Lord's servants, almost gloriated in it, as they saw this, our God, who is so powerful, look, he controls, all these things.

[13:20] You tend to know this, don't you, well, maybe you don't, but, it often seems to be a feature of, when natural disasters occur, tile waves, or storms, or typhoons, or whatever, then, if there's any reference, to God at all, in them, it tends to be, almost a fist shake, oh, how could God do this, we've never deserved, this kind of punishment, how could any God of love, allow this to happen, in so much destruction, and the, the unspoken assumption, is, we are good, we are neutral, we are, we are, you know, nice people, if God was a God of love, how could he let these bad things, happen to us, and yet, prior to them happening, was there any acknowledgement, of this God of love, this God of goodness, I know, men describe, goodness, in terms of, what they themselves, are like, you know, in those days, there was no king in Israel, every man did that, which was right, in his own eyes, there's one commentator, I said, it's an unwritten rule, that if you're on the road, then by definition, everybody who drives slower, than you is an idiot, and everybody who drives faster, than you is a maniac, we always take ourselves, as being the golden rule, and it's the same, when it comes to God, we take ourselves, as the golden rule, if bad things happen to us, it must be God's fault, if good things happen to us, oh well, that's because we're so good, and because we do,

God however, is jealous, and God being jealous, doesn't mean that he, envies what other people have, remember the distinction, between jealousy, and envy, envy, is to desire, that which belongs,

to somebody else, jealousy, is a desire, to protect, and conserve, that which is your own, if for example, I fall in love, with my neighbor's wife, I may envy, my neighbor's wife, but if I see him, casting his eyes, on my wife, I am jealous, for that which is mine, so where it is your own, there is jealousy, God is a jealous God, he doesn't envy anyone, he controls the heavens, and the earth, he's already got it, at his disposal, but he is jealous, for his own people, and the Lord, revenge it, it says it twice, and is furious, now, we don't tend to think, of the Lord, all being furious, in a way that the man, is furious, but God's fury, is not, momentary, in a way that, that a human being, says we tend to, flash into a rage, at the least provocation, and then, once we've expended, our anger, well it subsides again,

God is not like that, he is in complete, perfect control, of his fury, of his revenge, of his judgment, when it says, you know, in Romans, for example, in chapter 12, at verse 19, dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place, of the wrath, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord, as I reference, to Deuteronomy, 32, at verse 35, and if we can trust, and believe, that God, has the perfect judgment, and revenge, of its required, vengeance, and so on, and justice, in the palm of his hand, it enables us, to let go, and that is what, Paul is talking about, there in Romans, he says, no, don't avenge yourself, because if we try to do it, we'll do it badly, we'll do it either, using rage, instead of animosity, and our hurt feelings, and our judgment, will be clouded, and if we lash out, it will be disproportionate, and we'll afterwards, regret it,

God doesn't lash out, God's fury, is measured, it is kept, perhaps, it builds, to the final, crescendo, but it is always, absolutely, proportionate, and what we find, so often, with the Lord, both in scripture, and in providence, is, that where God's providence, and justice is concerned, so often, that punishment, absolutely, fits the crime, that which is returned, upon the heads, of those who seek, to do evil, is exactly, what they themselves, sought to do, you know, there's that reference, you get, in the Old Testament, quite often, you know, he himself, has dugged a pit, and he has fallen, in himself, and the perfect, proportionate justice, that which he intended, to happen to somebody else, has happened to him, you can't argue, with the balance, and the justice of that, and in Psalm 94, we just read, the first few verses, we need,

O Lord God, to whom vengeance, belongeth, O God, to whom vengeance, belongeth, show thyself, lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth, render a reward, to the proud, Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked, triumph, how long shall the utter, and speak hard things, and all the workers, of iniquity, boast themselves, they break in pieces, thy people, O Lord, and afflict, thine heritage, they slay the widow, and the stranger, and murder the fatherless, yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God, of Jacob, regard it, and we see here, with the psalmist, he is not saying, oh, I really want to get back, that he's wicked, rather he's saying, Lord, you look upon him, he is taking the burden, of his desire, for vengeance, not into his own heart, when it will eat away, as a canker, but rather, he is taking it, to the Lord, that the Lord's vengeance, which will be, perfect, which will be, measured, which will be, proportionate, which will be, exactly, just, remember that God, has an interest, in justice, every bit as much, for the condemned, as he does, for the vindicated, he is not, intended to be, unjust, even to those, who end up, being punished, or condemned, or consigned, to a lost eternity, he is not going, to be unjust, to them, he is every bit, as concerned, to ensure, that they get, the last drop, the last measure, of such, righteousness, righteous justice, as is due to them, as well as, condemnation, if there is, any good, any mitigating, circumstances, any blessing, anything, that is right, that will be, taken into consideration,

[19 : 53] God, in a sense, if we can say it, this way, I seem to contradict, what it says here, but is that, God in a sense, does not take sides, although you can see, obviously, one sense he does, but God is concerned, rather with, absolute, righteousness, he knows, his people, Israel, and the Christian church, are often, unrighteous, where there is, unrighteousness, that will be punished, where there is sin, that will be punished, the great offer of grace, is that he comes himself, the saviour, to take that punishment, for those who are his children, but it still gets punished, you know, where God is concerned, with righteousness, those who are sinning, with a hand, of course, they'll get judged, and condemned, but so, the sins of his own people, in that sense, you could say, God does not take sides, but where God, is jealous, for his own people, you have to, if you think yourself, into this situation, let's say, that you are, an employer, or a landlord, or something like that, and somebody, who lives in a house, that you own, and they're paying you rent, or whatever, or they're, they're employed, in a firm, of which you're the boss, and you hire them, and so on, all such wealth, or shelter, or blessing, they owe to you, you know, you've done them good, and they never say a word, against you, they're never bad to you, but quite often, maybe they're, they're nasty to

your children, or they're rude to your wife, or husband, or they kick your dog, or perhaps they, deface your property, but they never say anything bad to you, they never say a cross word to you, but, they are cruel, or unkind, or disrespectful, to your loved ones, to your family, to your property, to your pets, or whatever, how are you going to feel about that person?

Because, you will feel, and you will sense, the injury done to those, who are beloved by you, if it's done to your family, to your nearest and nearest, to your children, to your spouses, to your pets, you will feel it, and you will form, an animosity, and a desire, for righteous judgment, against that enemy, even though they've never done a thing to you, but what they have done is, they have attacked those, who are dear to you, God is jealous, and the Lord, revenge it, and is furious, he will take vengeance, on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath, for his enemies, they may not have lifted, a finger against the God, of all heaven and earth, because they can't get at him, but they have certainly, lifted a finger, against his people, and in treading, his people, underfoot, they have likewise, blasphemed against him, when we think about, the Assyrian threat, and we see, how they attacked, the Israelites, if we look at the end, of 2nd Kings 19, we remember that occasion, when the Assyrians, came against Jerusalem, and Hezekiah, was pleading with the Lord, to deliver, he spread the elect, and in front of him, the Assyrian king, had sent against him, and then we read, came to pass, and that night, the angel of the Lord, went out, and smote in the camp, of the Assyrians, and hundred, four score, and five thousand, and when they arose, early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses, so Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, and went, and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh, and it came to pass, as he was worshipping, in the house of Mizra, his God, that Adrammelech, and Sherezer, his sons, smote him with the sword, and he escaped, into the land of Armenia, and Esarhadam, his son, reigned in his stead, he was assassinated, by his own children, in the house, of his own gods, this is one of the things, that Nahum, is, you could almost see, predicting, and prophesying, and look ahead, to verse 14, you know, out of the house, of thy gods, will I cut off, the graven image, and the molten image,

I will make, thy grave, for thou art vile, the king of Assyria, who came against Jerusalem, he boasted, to the king of Judea, he said, look, don't you think, I come against you, with your God's permission, look at how, I've trodden under, all the other gods, of the different nations, they couldn't stand, against me, and your God, will be no different, so he blasphemed, against the true God, as well against, the Lord's people, so God is jealous, for his people, and he's jealous, for his name, and when he works, through, whether his angel, or his providence, he is in control, of all these things, and Carmel, Lebedon, language, the mountains, quake at him, the hills melt, the earth is burned, in his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell in it, who can stand, before his indignation, and who can abide, in the fierceness, of his anger, his fury is poured out, like fire, and the rocks are thrown down, by him, there's no standing, before God, this is one of the things, that Nahum, wants people to understand,

Nahum, of course, as we said, it means comfort, or strengthening, some people would take it to mean, either, encompassed with that, is repentance, or, alternatively, vengeance, by the Lord, against the impenitent, but ultimately, comfort, is what is meant by it, so well done, I'm bearing in mind, that our panel is going, we've really just done, the introduction here, to the prophecy of Nahum, and if we are finished here, this verse 7, which is, you say, what we might say, is the golden verse, in the whole, the whole prophecy, that comes quite early, the Lord is good, his desire, is to be good, his desire, is to be merciful, but if people, will not have him, then they won't be saved, you know, somebody drowning, in the water, saying, well, here's a life, here's a life jacket, no, no, I don't want a life jacket, well, here's some oxygen, to help you, no, I don't want oxygen, well, here's a life, well, climate life, no, I don't want that, if they refuse, every offer they have, ultimately, they will drown, and possibly freeze as well, but they will drown, because they refuse all help, now, if the Lord invites, and calls, and desires, and implores people, to turn to him, and be saved, look unto me, and be saved, all ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else, and if they won't, there is an alternative form, that the Lord is good, a stronghold, a stronghold, in the day of trouble, it's like being inside, a great big tower, with thick, thick walls, you know, sometimes you go visit, these old medieval castles, and you see the walls, they're like 11, 12 feet thick, some of them, you know, so if you're behind, these kind of walls, it doesn't matter, what battle is raging, outside, you're safe, you're protected, a stronghold, in the day of trouble, and he knows that, that's trust, in him, the Lord knows, who puts their trust, in him, he is not stupid, he knows that, whether you're a mobile guest, like Ruth, or whether you're like, the Syrian general, you know, they have the Syrian,

Nehemiah the Syrian, who was the leper, who was healed, who then became, a worshipper of the Lord, or whether you're, a complete total Gentile, like Cornelius the centurion, somebody from completely outside, you put your trust, in the Lord, and have come to trust, under the shadow of his wings, it doesn't matter, who you are, or where you're from, this is a God, who is ready to save, because we're all sinners, we have all sinned, and fallen short, of the glory of God, there is none righteous, no more one, and this prophet, whose name is comfort, yes, he desires, that those, who would be the Lord's people, return, and repent, and be saved, but ultimately, on all unrighteousness, amongst them, and particularly, amongst the oppressors, there is a judgment, that will fall, from which, we can only, be saved, by turning, to the Lord, himself, for protection, so you have, this situation, where the one, who inflicts, the judgment, who inflicts, the punishment, who inflicts, if you like, the eternal death, which is the ultimate, punishment, for, for blasphemous, divine sin, and that's it, sin against the divinity, and that's it, the one who's, inflicting it, is also the only, means, of salvation, he extends, that salvation, and he desires, us to have, that salvation, if we will not have it, it is only the ultimate, you think of Noah, and the flood, and the ark,

[28 : 25] God is the one, who told Noah, to build the ark, God is the one, who no doubt, would have welcomed in, anything else, would have come around, with him, but they didn't want to, and so they punished, God is the one, who extends to us, the mercy, that he himself, is ready to provide, in his son Jesus Christ, the Lord is good, a stronghold, in the day of trouble, and he knows, man that trusts, in him, he knows, every single one, that desires him, that wants him, that wants to be saved, by him, and he invites them, and he puts it, in their heart, to desire him, and if they are, residing him tonight, then you can be sure, he knows you, and he knows your heart too, so bless him.