

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets When the Day of Grace Is Over (The Book of Nahum)

Intro: Tonight in our continuing series called “Major Message from the Minor Prophets” we look at the book of Nahum. Nahum’s prophecy is dated between the destruction of Egyptian city of Thebes in 663 BC and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. It was possibly written during the reign of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.

For nearly two hundred years the Assyrians had been a menacing threat to the people of Israel.

Shalmaneser II (859-824 BC) made the city of Nineveh a base for military operations. During his reign Israel came into contact with Nineveh. He wrote that he fought a coalition of kings of Aram and others including “Ahab the Israelite” (in 853 BC). Later he wrote that he received tribute from “Jehu, son of Omri” who is pictured in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser.

In the reign of Ashur-dan III (772-754 BC) Jonah preached to the Ninevites.

Tiglath-Pileser III renewed Assyrian attacks on the west including Israel.

Azariah, king of Judah (7900-739) paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727).

Menahem king of Israel (752-742) did the same (2 Kg. 15:14-23).

In 731 BC Ahaz king of Judah (732-715) became a vassal of Tiglath-Pileser III, and Assyria invaded Damascus in the Syro-Ephraimite war.

Shalmaneser V (727-722) besieged Samaria and defeated it in 722 BC, thus defeating the Northern Kingdom (2 Kg. 17:3-6; 18:9-10).

Twenty-one years later (in 701) Sennacherib (705-681) invaded Judah and destroyed 46 Judean towns and cities. After encircling Jerusalem, 185,000 of Sennacherib’s soldiers were killed over-night and Sennacherib returned to Nineveh (2 Kg. 18:17-18; 19:32-36; Is. 37:36).

Esarhaddon (681-669) regarded Judah as a vassal kingdom, for he wrote in a building inscription, “I summoned the kings of the Hittite land (Aram) and those across the sea, Ba’lu, king of Tyre, and Manasseh, king of Judah..”

In 669 C Ashurbanipal succeeded his father Esarhaddon as king of Assyria. He may have been the king who released Manasseh king of Judah (2 Chron. 33:10-13). Ashurbanipal defeated Thebes in Egypt in 663 and brought treasures to Nineveh from Thebes, Babylon, and Susa. He established an extensive library at Nineveh. (source: Bible knowledge commentary).

God had used the Assyrians as a “rod of His wrath” on Israel; but now the time had come for Nineveh to receive the just recompense for her deeds. Even when God uses a nation for His own purposes of judgment, this does not excuse that nation from its own guilt before the Lord. God raised up Nahum to declare God’s judgment upon Nineveh and the Assyrians.

Nahum's Message

Nineveh's doom declared

Nahum begins with a general statement of the principles of God's dealings with men (Nah. 1:2-8).

God exercises a jealous and vengeful wrath against those who oppose Him and His people (1:2-6)

God is good to those who are faithful and knows those who take refuge in Him (1:7).

It is futile to imagine one can plot against God and win (1:9-13).

The Lord views with contempt those who worship idols (1:14)..

The Lord assures those who trust in Him that they will serve Him without fear (1:15).

Interestingly God does not yet mention Nineveh in the text (though it has appeared in the title.) Nahum skillfully builds drama by describing a day of destruction.

Nineveh's doom described

Using vivid word pictures God describes the invasion of a city. You can hear in the wording the passion and excitement of the prophet as he reveals the vision of Nineveh's destruction (2:1-10).

It is especially interesting that Nahum should use the metaphor of the lion hunt. The Assyrian kings like Ashurbanipal had prided themselves as great lion hunters. They filled the walls of their palaces with these scenes and often used the language of the lion seizing prey to describe their military exploits. But now Nahum reveals that they will be the lion who is hunted and the Lord is the hunter! (2:11-13)

Nineveh's doom deserved

Nineveh was the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the world. Nahum now gives reasons for Nineveh's destruction. The first is rapacious cruelty against other nations.

Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage; her prey never departs. (Nahum 3:1)

For example, writing of one of his conquests, Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) boasted, "I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool. . . . The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire" (Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, 1:148). Regarding one captured leader, he wrote, "I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city. . . ." (ibid., 1:146). He also wrote of mutilating the bodies of live captives and stacking their corpses in piles.

Shalmaneser II (859-824) boasted of his cruelties after one of his campaigns: "A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his

city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames“ (ibid., 1:213).

Sennacherib (705-681) wrote of his enemies, ”I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives [as one cuts] a string. Like the many waters of a storm I made [the contents of] their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth. . . . Their hands I cut off“ (ibid., 2:127).

Ashurbanipal (669-626) described his treatment of a captured leader in these words: ”I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw . . . I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy . . . a kennel“ (ibid., 2:319). In his campaign against Egypt, Ashurbanipal also boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses ”on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city wall(s) with them“ (ibid., 2:295).

Ashurbanipal was egotistic: ”I [am] Ashurbanipal, the great [king], the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria. . . . The great gods . . . magnified my name; they made my rule powerful“ (ibid., 2:323-4).

Esarhaddon was even more boastful. ”I am powerful, I am all powerful, I am a hero, I am gigantic, I am colossal, I am honored, I am magnified, I am without equal among all kings, the chosen one of Asshur, Nabu, and Marduk“ (ibid., 2:226).
(The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Nineveh was also destroyed for The vices of the city (3:4).

Lessons to be learned

God’s sovereignty & justice

It is interesting to notice that two of the minor prophets address their messages to the city of Nineveh—the book of Jonah and the book of Nahum. In my earlier lesson, we learned that the book of Jonah is not so much about Jonah and the great fish as it is about God and His attitudes toward the people of the world. In that book we learned that God is...

God’s gracious purpose for Nineveh

God’s gracious patience with Jonah

God’s gracious pardon of Nineveh

God’s gracious proclamation of Himself

But now 150 years later we see that Nineveh has not only returned to her former wickedness; she has even increased in vileness through the century. Nahum brings not a message of repentance but doom! The time is come for this city to pay the price for its transgressions. It’s destruction is also connected with the character of God.

God’s sovereignty over the nations

God’s justice and wrath toward sin

What they mean to mankind

Inevitable judgment for the wicked out of zeal for His people

If the story of Jonah indicates the graciousness of God toward sinners and anticipated the cross, the story of Nahum indicates the wrath of God toward sinners and anticipates the judgment. The nature of God, specifically His wrath, His holiness, His justice, and His power, makes it inevitable that His enemies will perish.

Comfort and hope for the oppressed that their enemies will come to a just end

*Even in the midst of God's wrath there is a word of comfort; but it is for those who remain faithful, for those who have been the victims of sin. Like Abel their blood cries from the ground for vengeance. Like the martyred souls under the altar in Revelation, they say, "How long before you will avenge our blood?" And the answer is found in Jesus' parable of Luke 18: And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:6-8)*

The divine warrior of Israel in the OT becomes the divine warrior of the church in the NT revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes on his white horse leading His armies against the enemies of the church, defeating them and throwing them into the lake of fire.

Conclusion: Nahum's message is just as important as that of Jonah. God is unchanging and these principles continue to be the basis of His dealings with the nations.