

13080-E September 25, 2013

Nahum

Intro: Well, who doesn't love a good sequel to a great book or movie? Recently, I was made aware that my favorite author, John Grisham, is releasing a sequel to his best work, *A Time to Kill*, and I can't wait to purchase it, read it and allow Grisham to bring the story to a conclusion.

- a. And that's the purpose of a sequel---to bring a certain story to its rightful conclusion; for the author to tell the complete story, whether that conclusion brings us comfort or causes us concern, whether it speaks of calamity or great celebration—it's the author's intent to tell the full story; to reorient us to a particular people, a particular place and a particular situation and to tell the story and then to bring it all to its final conclusion.
- b. Did you know that the Book of Jonah has a sequel to it? It does, and it's the book we're going to be looking at tonight, so go ahead and turn with me to the book of Nahum. The message of Nahum provides the counterpart to the book of Jonah in the Minor Prophets.
- c. As you're finding the little book of Nahum, think with me about the story of Jonah. God around 760BC-750BC sends a hard-hearted, reluctant prophet by the name of Jonah to the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians, a brutal, vicious people.
- d. And after running away from the Lord's directions, Jonah arrives in Nineveh and preaches that if they don't repent, the Lord would wipe out the city in forty days. The book of Jonah testified to the Lord's redemptive concern even for the hated Assyrians.
- e. So Jonah goes to Nineveh, warns them of God's impending judgment because of Nineveh's wickedness and to Jonah's dismay, the Ninevites from the King on down, heeded Jonah's message, repented and were spared God's judgment.
- f. Now that's the backstory to the book of Nahum. In between the time of their mass repentance in Jonah's day and the time of Nahum's day, the people of

Nineveh apparently repented of their repentance and started brutally treating Judah and the other surrounding nations in the Middle East.

- g. By 745BC, the Assyrians were the leading military power in the Near East. The vast Assyrian Empire was established by bloodshed and massacre, cruelty and torture, destruction, plundering, and exiling such as has seldom been seen in history---it was what Stalin could only aspire to.
- h. And in 722BC, it was the Assyrians who plundered and ravaged Israel and the ten tribes of Israel were lost to history and Judah, the two remaining tribes, were subjected to the Assyrian machine.
- i. Because of the size and strength of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh had become kinda the capital of the world. Fables were told of its size, of its population, of its buildings, of its power and wealth.
- j. It was a magnificent city, which was self-confident of its strength and security. It had two series of walls protecting its city. Miles and miles of walls. The inner walls, the highest walls were about 100 feet high and wide enough for three chariots to race upon the top of them.
- k. It had a moat that went around the entire city, 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep! It was a gigantic, well-protected city! And by 663BC their king had pushed their conquests all the way into Egypt—there seemed to be no stopping the cruelty, the viciousness, the wickedness of the Assyrian Empire.
- l. They had decimated the northern Kingdom of Israel, and also destroyed 46 cities within Judah, the southern Kingdom. They impaled men and women. They dismembered bodies, cut off their victims heads and stacked them in mounds resembling a huge pyramid to serve as a visual reminder to all nations of the power of Assyria and they would throw the bodies in a pile at the city gates to let everyone know that Assyria is not to be messed with.
- m. There was no United Nations Treaty, or Geneva Convention of War...the Assyrians were cruel.
- n. The emperor Ashurbanipal said, “I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me and draped their skins over the pile of corpses; some I spread out within the

pile, some I erected on statues upon the pile...I flayed many right through my land and draped their skins over the walls.”

- o. The Assyrians were essentially the people of God’s great enemy—they subjected them again and again. They humiliated them over and over again. They oppressed and afflicted them—there seemed no end in sight.
- p. If you were living in that day, you never would have imagined the powerful Assyrian Empire would slow down, let alone, cease to exist. And that’s where the sequel to Jonah, the book of Nahum begins.

II. **Background to Nahum.**

- a. We don’t know much about Nahum, except that his hometown was Elkosh, and we’re not even sure where it’s located. We know his name means “comfort” and we’ll see how this book, and Nahum’s message brought comfort to those living in his day, and for those of us living in our days.
- b. So we know where Nahum was from, we know what his name means, and we know what his message was. It was a simple message. A short message—and the message was, “Nineveh (and the Assyrian Empire by implication) will be destroyed.” That’s it. That’s all he had to say, but like a good preacher, he took three chapters to say it!
- c. Now the outline for the book of Nineveh is this
 - i. Chapter 1: Destruction of Nineveh Decreed
 - ii. Chapter 2: Destruction of Nineveh Described
 - iii. Chapter 3: Destruction of Nineveh Defended
- d. So we’ll work our way through these 47 verses, and then we’ll close up with some application. Let’s get going.

III. The Book of Nahum

- a. **Destruction of Nineveh Decreed: Read Verses 1-15:** Nahum begins his prophecy with a portrayal of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior...and look at the way Nahum describes the Lord and describes Nineveh.
- b. He says the LORD is...
 - i. Zealous—The Lord is committed to His own honor and to His people and their obedience (1:2a.)

- ii. Holy and Just (1:2).
 - iii. Extremely Patient (1:3a).
 - iv. Unparalleled in Power (1:3-6).
 - v. Infinitely Good (v.7a).
 - vi. Defender of His people (v.7b).
 - vii. Personal-(He *knows* those who take refuge in Him.) Knows implies relationship, so He's not an impersonal force, but rather a personal God (v.7c), who describes Himself elsewhere as a Father. Not an impersonal force, but a person, loving Father.
 - viii. Sovereign over time and nations (1:8-11; 14).
 - ix. Deliverer of His people (1:12-13).
 - x. Restorer of peace and joy (1:15).
- c. Nineveh is....
- i. ***An enemy of the Lord's***--they've repented of their earlier repentance (1:2; 8b; 11) and are now actively opposing Him and oppressing His people.
 - ii. ***"At full strength and many"*** (v. 12). They were the great military power of their day and they, like other nations believe that "might" makes right and yet given their size, their strength, their power and wealth they were about to be, as Nahum says....
 - iii. ***About to be deluged in God's wrath*** (v. 8).
 - iv. ***As Good as Dead (1:8b-14)***. **Read Verse 14:** Notice all the times the Lord says, "I will, I will, I will do this." This is personal, and the Lord is personally involving Himself and bringing an end to wickedness of Nineveh.
- d. The LORD's attributes combined absolute power with perfect righteousness so that He is both a refuge for those who humbly trust in Him and the destroyer of those who arrogantly oppose Him and oppress His people.
- e. You know Chapter 1 should bring us great comfort because it reminds us not to adopt an attitude of self-confidence in our own strength, power, or ability like the capital city of Nineveh---when things are going well for us, when we're in a good season, we should acknowledge that every good blessing comes from the Lord.

- f.* So this chapter reminds us not to adopt an attitude of self-confidence but at the same time not to adopt a self-despairing attitude if we're currently experiencing hard times, like the people of Judah, because the Lord is ultimately in charge of our lives and our times. He will judge nations in history, including ours, and will judge humans in eternity. Our confidence shouldn't be in ourselves, and our hope shouldn't be in the strength of our nation or military, but our confidence and hope should be in the Lord.
- g.* He's in charge and will right the wrongs, defend His people and deal justly with those who oppose Him. So chapter 1, the destruction of Nineveh is Decreed.
- h. Destruction of Nineveh Described (chapter 2):** Now chapter 2 Nahum describes the destruction of Nineveh in graphic detail. He portrays the chaos that would engulf the city of Nineveh in the present tense as if these events were occurring before his eyes, meaning that this prophecy was about to happen...it was imminent and Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire would utterly destroyed—the empire that had perfected the brutal techniques of siege warfare would now be sieged by an invading army led by the Lord Himself.
- i. Let's have a look: Read Verse 1:** I should tell you that there's a series of taunts in chapters 2 and 3. Nahum, who may have been from Judah, starts to sarcastically taunt Nineveh...and we see the first one here in verse 1 where Nahum says, "Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength, Nineveh...it doesn't matter, it's over."
- j.** Some time ago I was watching a high school basketball game and in the game was the number 1 team in the state of Oregon, they were loaded, and they were playing against a team with absolutely no chance of winning the game...and right before the tip-off, which signifies the start of the game, their fans started chanting, "It's all over...it's all over!" And it was...it didn't matter if the other team played their best game, it didn't matter if they marshaled all their strength—they were going to be swept away...and so the other team fans started taunting them...and that's what's taking place here, and in several other sections in Nahum.
- k. Read Verses 2-9:** Look at the chaos---the chariots dart through the city like torches and flashing lightning. The result of the attack is like the opening of the

floodgates. The inhabitants of Nineveh are seen being taken away into exile, and the treasures of the city are being plundered. And the fulfillment of this verse about the plundering of wealth is confirmed in history by the Babylonian Chronicles (which you can look up online) and it states that when the Medes and Babylonians conquered Nineveh that “they carried off much spoil from the city.”

- l. Read Verse 10:** Nineveh was pillaged, plundered and stripped and this is indeed what happened. So much so that this city that was one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities in the world, when excavations were finally done on it, they were expecting to find vast amounts of silver and gold and ivory, it was absolutely empty. There was nothing of value left. It was stripped bare or burned to ashes.
- m. And not only did the Lord send an army to attack them, but He also sent a great amount of rain, and the river that surrounded the city of Nineveh and protected the city of Nineveh flooded and the walls that we talked about earlier, eroded and gave way and the Medes and the Babylonians poured into the city.
- n. The King of Nineveh, knowing the end was near gathered his entire family together and burned them to ashes.
- o. This oracle from Nahum which describes the destruction of Nineveh is exactly what took place in the year 612 BC. It was utterly destroyed. In fact, Nineveh was so destroyed that people didn't know its location---they knew the name simply from the Bible and from Babylonian history but archeologists couldn't find it, they didn't know it's location until it was discovered in 1842.
- p. And when the archeologists did find it and started digging, they found an unusually deep strata of ashes, meaning Nineveh was completely burnt to the ground.
- q. Why did all this happen? Look at verse 13:** The Lord's patience had run its limit---Listen to me: There is a point for people, cities and nations after which there is no turning back; and Assyria had passed that point and the Lord was bringing forth His judgment.
- r. So chapter 2 of Nahum describes the destruction of Nineveh and then in chapter 3, the Destruction of Nineveh is Defended.**

- s. **Destruction of Nineveh Defended (chapter 3): Read Verses 1-4:** The Lord says Nineveh is like a prostitute who “had seduced other nations into alliances and then betrayed them because of her greed for wealth” and power (Hindson, Yates, pg. 414). Assyria, through the charm of beauty, strength and wealth corrupted and enslaved the other nations throughout the Near East.
- t. And the Lord says in essence, ‘You’ve rejected Me and harmed My people’, **therefore, verse 5, read verses 5-7:** Nineveh will be utterly humiliated and shamed to such a degree that it’ll be internationally known.
- u. And the rhetorical questions the Lord asks, “Who will mourn for Nineveh, and who will give comfort to Nineveh?” The implied answer is no one will mourn for Assyria, no one will give comfort to Nineveh for they have dealt treacherously with other nations, and devoured its people.
- v. And what Nahum does next is once again taunt Nineveh by looking back at how they treated Thebes, which has been described as the world’s “first great monumental city.” Thebes, which is four hundred miles south of Cairo was the most impressive city of its day, until 663BC when Assyria invaded it and dashed it and its people to pieces...
- w. And now Nahum is taunting Nineveh by saying, ‘what happened to Thebes is going to happen to Nineveh.’ **Read verses 8-11:** As you’ve done to Thebes 51 years ago, so the Lord will do to you.
- x. And Nahum continues to mock Nineveh, **Read Verses 12-17:** Nahum says Nineveh’s fortresses would collapse like early figs easily shaken from the tree! The mighty Assyrian warriors would become like frightened women!
- y. Then he sarcastically ordered the people of Nineveh to, **read verse 14:** Do whatever you want to do to try and prepare yourselves, but it won’t matter. Disaster will consume you like a sweeping fire and a swarm of locusts. Your day has come. Destruction is at hand.
- z. And the book closes with these words—**Read Verses 18-19:** Notice the book closes with a rhetorical question—you know what the only other book in the Bible that closes with a question is? The book of Jonah—so let’s close by asking some questions

IV. Closing Questions

a.