Comfort for God’s People

A pair of gigantic lions once stood at the entrance of an Assyrian temple dedicated to Ishtar, the goddess of fertility and warfare. The lions were carved in Alabaster stone and each weighed 15 tons. The mouths of the lions were open as if they were roaring, and their expressions depicted fierceness and power. One lion was covered with a dedication in cuneiform, consisting of a prayer to Ishtar, followed by a record of King Ashurnasirpal’s achievements. The temple was excavated in 1849.

Knowing the importance of lions to the Assyrian Empire, the question of Nahum 2:11 – “Where is the den of the lions” – could be understood as a taunt. Nahum’s prophecy is a reversal of fortunes; the fearless were stricken with fear (v. 10) and the hunter became the hunted (v. 13). Culturally, such language was appropriate for emphasizing the significance of Nineveh’s defeat. In terms of the ultimate message of Scripture, the supreme lion is “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah,” the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 5:5).

The fall of Nineveh meant that God’s words were true. The Nineveh of Jonah’s time was an absolute contrast with the Assyria of Nahum’s prophecy. The former were humble in view of God’s mercy, while the latter persisted in defiance against the Lord. The devastators would be devastated (Nah 2:2) because God was against them (v. 13).

To oppose God is disastrous. James 4:4 asks, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?” Why would anyone be more dependent upon human knowledge than the wisdom of God? How could anyone think human power is greater than the Lord’s sovereignty? The only answer would be foolishness and pride, which were sins that not only characterized Nineveh but also were evident for a time in the life of Jonah.

THE OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH

(Nahum 2:1-7) Nahum’s oracle is one of deliverance and hope. His message is one of peace from external oppression, in addition to proclaiming a new kind of refreshing tranquility with God who is the giver of all life. God loves his people, which is reason why He sent “one who scatters” (an attacker) against the oppressive Nineveh.

Nineveh fell because God is “jealous” (1:2) for his people and watches over them. Nahum spoke sarcastically to the Ninevites; they were to “man the fortress, watch the road,” and “strengthen” themselves (2:1). However, none of those actions would succeed because God would overthrow the Assyrian Empire. Empires and nations based upon wickedness and tyranny will fall, thus God’s people would be delivered.

Nahum’s message was declared in Jerusalem as opposed to Nineveh because the intended recipients were those oppressed by Assyrian domination. God’s people would be encouraged by news of coming deliverance. For more than one hundred years, Assyria had oppressed multiple nations. Now, the Lord announced an invader coming against them.

Capitol Commission (interim) Bible Study
Tuesday (6th of April) from 12 Noon – 12:45pm, 328 CLOB (& Zoom)
(ministry “friend” sponsorship by Centerpoint Community Church, Springfield)

Capitol Commission Bible Study
Tuesday, 6 April 2021
Nahum 2 – “Comfort for God’s People”

Lions were prevalent in many aspects of Assyrian culture. Hunting lions was a favorite pastime of leaders, even considered a royal sport. By law, only the king was permitted to kill lions. The lion hunt was an important symbol of royalty. Lions were symbols of violence in nature, and killing them was considered to be an indication of power over nature. Killing a lion was also regarded as symbolic because it was thought to demonstrate the king’s ability to protect and fight for his people.
Under their king Cyaxares, the Medes gained control of Assyria’s ancient capital, Assur. Nabopolassar brought his Babylonian army and joined the Medes once Assur fell. In 612 BC, the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians defeated Nineveh. Ultimately, the “one who scatters” was God, who sent these attackers. Scatterer is a common figure for a victorious king (cf. Ps 68:1; Isa 24:1; Jer 52:8). The declaration of divine judgment was stated with certainty in chapter 1 and those threats were fulfilled by a military coalition of the Babylonians and the Medes.

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**GOD’S WORD OFFERS ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE LORD’S CARE FOR HIS OWN.**

God made a comforting promise to his people. Nineveh enjoyed superb glory at the moment yet would suffer devastation, whereas God’s people, who had experienced destruction, would know “splendor” (Nah 2:2). Perhaps you have been devastated by oppressive circumstances or as a result of poor (even sinful) choices, and have been praying earnestly for some kind of remedy. God’s Word offers encouragement of the Lord’s care for his own.

The remainder of Nahum’s prophecy gives depictions of Nineveh’s fall. Ancient Nineveh was approximately 1,800 acres with an estimated population of 300,000 people. Nevertheless, invaders came to the gates of the proud city with “chariots . . . flashing” with “steel” (v. 3). The invading “chariots” raced “madly” through Nineveh’s “streets” and “squares.” They gleamed with red and steel like “torches” and “lightning” that dashed “to and fro” (v. 4).

The Assyrian king would call to “his nobles” yet they would “stumble” in their haste to defend the city. Although they would “hurry” to protect the city “wall,” their efforts would prove to be unsuccessful (v. 5). Verse 6 describes the breach of the enemy into the city and how they reached the royal palace. The Tigris River flowed close to the walls of Nineveh, and two of its tributaries, the Khosor and Tebliut, passed through the city. The “gates of the rivers” controlled the flow of the rivers into the city, and control of them could result in the dams being opened to flood the city.

Assyria took countless cities into exile, yet now God decreed the judgment of Nineveh. The city would be “stripped” of its treasures, and they and their possessors would be “carried away.” Even the “handmaids” would beat “on their breasts” in distress (v. 7). The graphic language describes Nineveh’s defeat and plunder.

In addition to announcing the destruction of the Assyrian empire, Nahum intended to comfort God’s people who endured the nation’s evil. The purpose for divine judgment was to demonstrate how God’s justice would repay great evil. God’s action is the reaction within his own holy nature against sin. The justice of God is the predominant theme of Nahum’s prophecy. Nineveh sowed, and thus she would reap (cf. Gal 6:7).

**THE DEFEAT OF NINEVEH**

*Nahum 2:8-13* Verse 10 describes the effect of God’s judgment upon the city and the people. The condition of the city is described graphically: “emptied,” “desolate and waste.” The proud city, which had “wealth from every kind of desirable object,” is regarded as a despoiled, lifeless desolation. The literal fulfillment of Nahum’s prophecy is a matter of history.

The condition of the people is also portrayed explicitly: “hearts are melting and knees knocking” (Nah 2:10). “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). God is “slow to anger” (Nah 1:3) yet when nations or people persist in wickedness in spite of the Lord’s patience, then “with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end” (v. 8). The one who trusts in the Lord is given comfort and courage; however, the proud are doomed.

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**THE LITERAL FULFILLMENT OF NAHUM’S PROPHECY IS A MATTER OF HISTORY.**

Nineveh’s riches came from looting nations they conquered. Now the invading Median and Babylonian soldiers would “plunder” Nineveh of its “silver,” “gold,” and accumulated wealth (v. 9). Nineveh is compared to a ferocious lion that slaughtered its victims and “filled his lairs with prey” (vv. 11-12). The Assyrians “killed” countless enemies, not only to satisfy their needs but also for the mere pleasure of conquest. The question, “Where is the den of lions” (v. 11) alludes to the fact that Nineveh would be destroyed.

Nahum verbalized a terrible fate for Nineveh since the “LORD of hosts” declared, “I am against you” (v. 13). Although human opponents may be overcome, the same is not true when God is against a nation for then there is no escape. God is love yet his holy nature means He must judge sin. God’s love can never allow what his righteousness condemns! God is merciful and willing to forgive, as He relented in his judgment against Nineveh through Jonah’s preaching. The only means to escape divine judgment is repentance and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For those who feel oppressed, rejoice that God cares for his people and know that He will provide deliverance some day and judge their tormentors.

*Thank you for the privilege in providing you with the Capitol Commission Bible study. If we can serve you in any manner, please talk with us, or contact by email or phone.*

**What is the Ministry of Capitol Commission?**

Capitol Commission is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ and promoting the mandate to pray for those in the capital communities throughout the United States and the world. Romans 10-14-15 affirms, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent...?” Please notice the reverse progression. If we desire anyone, including our government leaders, to (5) call upon the Lord and to seek Him and his Word for life decisions, they must prior to that (4) believe in Him, which means they must previously have (3) heard the Word of God, which means prior to that someone needs to (2) preach to them, which requires that others have first (1) sent someone.

Capitol Commission is committed to the second part: preaching (proclaiming) the good news of salvation, yet this cannot occur without someone doing the first part: sending. All funding and prayer for this work comes from people who want the light of the gospel of God’s grace brought into our State Capitol. As you do #1 and we do #2, we can rejoice together as the Lord accomplishes in the Capitol what only He can produce in someone: #3, #4, and #5. What an exciting co-adventure! Please join us in this ministry!

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*For more information about Capitol Commission Bible study: Tuesday, 4th of May @ 12 Noon in 328 CLOB (& Zoom)*