

Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, VII

Nahum on Wrath

July 20, 2003

OL' WHAT'S-HIS-NAHUM

We've studied: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah.

Today we add Nahum to the list. But unlike his counterparts, the book of Nahum is 99% wrath and damnation; which earns Nahum the title of "Least Popular Minor Prophet!"

An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. –
Nahum 1:1 NIV

We don't really know who Nahum was, what his official role was, or where his hometown of Elkosh was. But, we can assume that life wasn't easy for Nahum.

Someone would ask, "Who's that Minor Prophet?" "Oh, he's Nahum." "That's what I want to find out - his name." "And that's why I just said, he's Nahum." "When did you say his name?!" "Just this moment when we were talking; I told you he's Nahum!" "You did not tell me his name!" (That was Habakkuk and Costello!)

So, we don't know exactly who he was, but we do know that:

- He refers to the conquest of Thebes - in 664 B.C.
- He prophesied Nineveh's destruction - in 612 B.C.
- Therefore his message came between 664 – 612 B.C.

This is important, because it puts it about 150 years after Jonah warned Nineveh of God's judgment. But, their repentance was short-lived ... in fact, they invaded Israel shortly after.

God gets ticked off when we return to rebellious behavior; and Nahum brings us face to face with this flip side of God:

- He is a God of love and forgiveness
- But, He is also a God of justice and wrath

Nahum's words of damnation against Nineveh - describing their impending doom - were actually quite poetic:

Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses — all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft. “I am against you,” declares the LORD Almighty. “I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame. I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. – *Nahum 3:1-6 NIV*

Nahum’s book forces us to realize that God gets three things:

1. God gets jealous

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God ... - *Nahum 1:2a NIV*

2. God gets angry

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. – *Nahum 1:3 NIV*

3. God gets even

The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. – *Nahum 1:2b NIV*

Q: Why does God seem so ... bi-polar; all “wrathy” in the OT and then all lovey-dovey in the NT?

Q: How can we reconcile a God of wrath with a God of love?

A: Simple; God alone is capable of righteous wrath

RIGHTEOUS WRATH

Our experience with jealousy, anger, and vengeance is so contaminated with selfishness, stupidity, and sinfulness that we can hardly conceive of them as healthy expressions.

We lack the sensitivity, wisdom, purity, and self-control that’s needed to execute wrath effectively and redemptively, which is why the Apostle Paul said to the Romans:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. – *Romans 12:19 NIV*

This isn’t because God wants to keep all the fun to Himself!

- God's jealousy is unmixed with envy or selfishness.

It's jealousy in the sense of being earnestly protective: like a mother hen jealously guarding her chicks. His anger is measured out to those who deserve it, with no thirst for revenge: like that hen angrily fending off a hungry fox.

RANSOM

In "Ransom" - *Rated R for language and graphic violence* - Mel Gibson plays a father whose son has been kidnapped.

- He believes if he pays the ransom his son will be killed.
- And they've threatened to kill his son if he doesn't pay.

What would you do? In this scene, Mel Gibson's character is filled with protective jealousy and anger.

[Video clip of Ransom; 2:00 minutes]

Q: Why do we respond so emotionally to this scene?

A: Because his anger is an expression of love and justice.

- Righteous anger requires action.
- The opposite of love is not anger; it's indifference

Q: How would this scene play if Mel said, "I'd really like you to bring my son back; but if you don't ... you know, whatever."

- If God tolerated sin He wouldn't be worthy of worship

And yet, Nahum tells us that "The LORD is slow to anger."

Q: Why is he slow? If righteous anger requires action, why doesn't He just punish evil immediately? I would!

A: For one thing, if He did, none of us would be here! And for another, His wrath against unbelievers is intended for redemption, which often requires time for response.

"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" declares the Sovereign LORD. "Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" - Ezekiel 18:23 NIV

- God always gives people time and opportunity to turn

NINEVEH'S FALL

- He gave Nineveh 150 years after Jonah led them to repentance.

But God alone knows when love must no longer wait, and righteous anger must act. And in 612 B.C. the Babylonians and the Medes extinguished Nineveh and the entire Assyrian empire.

- And their reign of terror came to an end.

It was all documented by Nabopolassar (NAB-uh-puh-LASS-uhr) - a Babylonian king and father of Nebuchadnezzar - on this tablet.

Nineveh was protected by a 100' tall outer wall and a 50' tall inner wall. Its overthrow was inconceivable in Nahum's day; like predicting America would cease to exist in twenty years.

Q: Do you know how they did it? How they got past those walls?

No one's sure, but the Khosr river wound through the city. And Archaeologists have found dam-gates up river. They theorize that the enemy used a man-made flood to wash away those walls. If that's true, it makes Nahum 2:6-8 especially remarkable:

The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. It is decreed that the city be exiled and carried away. ... Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away. - *Nahum 2:6-8 NIV*

Vengeance is a legitimate thing. It's simply the infliction of punishment in return for a wrong committed.

But it's reserved for God and for those who have been given the Biblical authority in society to carry it out on His behalf.

There comes a point when His jealousy, anger, and vengeance are wholly appropriate and loving and righteous. To give it a simple and finale definition:

- God's wrath is the force of His goodness as experienced by evil

According to Nahum, and like the father Mel Gibson plays in Ransom:

God's wrath consists of passion, harnessed into calculated actions against that which would destroy His children.