

I Go To Prepare A Grave For You

Nahum 1:9-15 March 20, 2024

In 1969, Bill True and Bruce Brubaker boarded a plane flying north from Ottawa to a remote fishing camp. Their heavily loaded Cessna shuddered as it headed into a storm. As they dodged fearsome clouds, the pilot said he had good news and bad news. "What's the bad news?" Brubaker asked. "We're lost." "Then what's the good news?" Asked the other man. "We're making great time!"¹

Nineveh was headed into a storm of wrath. Their days of their wealth, arrogance, and dominance were numbered. What was bad news for Nineveh was good news for God's people, who had been beaten down and subjugated by the Assyrian empire for over a hundred years.

In this text, God speaks to both His enemies and His friends, going back and forth between them, promising destruction for the non-believing Assyrians and deliverance for the faithful in Judah.

Nahum 1:9 - ⁹Whatever you plot against the Lord, he will bring it to complete destruction; oppression will not rise up a second time.

This message is principally directed at Nineveh and the Assyrian empire by extension. But it's important that we realize Nahum hasn't specifically name-dropped Nineveh yet. It's cited in the title, up in verse 1, but so far in Nahum's actual message, he has spoken generally about God's enemies and God's people.

This isn't just about God's dealings with *one* city or *one* generation or *one* situation. Nineveh in 654 BC is just one example of an enduring truth about God: That He judges wickedness, He rescues His people, and one day He is going to *totally* overcome evil in all its forms in every place.

Who is the "you" in verse 9? Many scholars suggest Nahum is referencing King Sennacherib in these verses. The problem is, Nahum was *definitely* writing *after* Sennacherib died.²

Of course, the current king of Assyria (we think it was Ashurbanipal) was also plotting evil schemes. He was no better than his granddaddy. But in these verses, Nahum speaks generally. In verse 8, he talked about the *enemies* of God and here he expands on what that means. People who are plotting against the Lord. People who are devising their own schemes in rebellion against God.

So, yes, it's Sennacherib. *And* it's Ashurbanipal. *And* it's Assyria at large. *And* it's those people in Judah, like King Manasseh, who had bought into Assyrian religion and culture. *Everyone* who stands in opposition to the Lord is going to face His wrath.

¹ Jerry Chiappetta *Even The Pros Have Problems*

² Sennacherib died in 681 BC. Based on the fall of Thebes, Nahum's writings must have come after 663 BC.

It says that oppression will not rise up a second time. There would be no *new* second chance for Assyria. They had a second chance a century before when Jonah came and - wonderfully - they believed God and received His mercy.

God even gave Sennacherib a second chance after he came against Judah in King Hezekiah's day, but instead of humbling himself and repenting, he stayed in his sin and his pride and he died for it. Now, the time of second chances was over. Assyria would not live to fight another day.

Movie franchises love to do this, right? The bad guy who keeps coming back no matter how many times he's defeated. How many times do we have to see Emperor Palpatine? But the Lord here says, "Once My judgment falls, you're done."

An interesting historical note - Assyrian political literature of the time would often justify their brutal foreign policy by saying the nations around Assyria were scheming or plotting evil.³ But the Lord cut through the propaganda and said, "No, it's *you* who are plotting evil and doing evil."

The Lord knows our thoughts and our plots. He sees into our hearts, deeper than we've ever explored ourselves. What are we planning? Have we deposed the tyrant of self from the throne of our hearts and given that place to Jesus Christ? Or are our hearts still in rebellion against Him?

Nahum 1:10 - ¹⁰ For they will be consumed like entangled thorns, like the drink of a drunkard and like straw that is fully dry.

Assyria was the richest grain-bearing country in the world. Their fields routinely produced crops two-hundredfold.⁴ But their material wealth couldn't fix their spiritual poverty. From heaven's perspective, this empire was a dried up thorn bush, about to be set alight. In that region, thorns were a popular fuel,⁵ good for little else.⁶ Nahum foreshadows the fact that a literal fire would consume the city. We'll learn that drunkenness also played a role in their destruction.

The Assyrians *thought* things like wealth and wine made them strong. In reality, wealth fueled their greed, which fueled their violence. Their love of wine gave way to drunkenness. The Lord wants us to evaluate our lives and say, "Ok, what does God say makes a person strong? What does God say makes a person weak or foolish? Am I walking in His ways or have I drifted onto other paths."

Nahum 1:11 - ¹¹ One has gone out from you, who plots evil against the Lord, and is a wicked counselor.

Now who is Nahum talking to? First, he's talking to Assyria. But he's also talking to everyone else. He's talking to Manasseh. He's talking to Baal-worshipping Jews. He's talk to all who, like sheep, have gone astray. Humans have a propensity to ignore the counsel of God and listen to other advice.

³ Edward Dalgish *The Broadman Bible Commentary, Volume 7*

⁴ *The Horizon Book Of Lost Worlds*

⁵ Walter Kaiser *The Preachers Commentary, Volume 23*

⁶ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 7: Daniel And The Minor Prophets*

There's a warning here about this wicked counselor who is the source of all that evil plotting. The Hebrew uses a proper name for this wicked counselor - the name is Belial.⁷ The New Testament uses that name as a title for Satan.

So, Nahum is warning *anyone* who goes Assyria's way - which is actually the Devil's way. Anyone who acts in heart or deed *against* the Lord God. Anyone who believes the counsel of Belial. And that's *not* just the pagan kings of Assyria. Eve believed Satan's counsel in Genesis 3. Simon Peter was being counseled by Belial when he rebuked the Lord for talking about His crucifixion. What did Jesus say in response? "*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns.*"⁸

Even God's people need to be on guard against the bad ideas of the wicked counselor. And then we remember that Christ is here to be our *Wonderful* Counselor! If you're saved, you don't need to be *afraid* of the Devil, but don't forget he's still on the prowl for you. He's still going to try to influence you or deceive you or beguile you. If we fall into his trap, we can't say "the Devil made me do it," but we should remember that the Devil really *wants* us to do it. Let's get wonderful counsel.

Nahum 1:12a - ¹²This is what the Lord says:

So far in chapter 1, we've seen Who God is and what He does. Now we are told what He says. His spoken message is first to Judah.

Nahum 1:12b - Though they are strong and numerous, they will still be mowed down, and he will pass away. Though I have punished you, I will punish you no longer.

Right now China has the largest military in the world. India is number 2. We're in third place, with Russia and North Korea close behind.⁹

Assyria was at full strength, but God was not at all worried about the strongest army in the world. Yeah, they were big. Yeah, they were fierce. Yeah, they were strong. The Lord said, "I'm going to shear them like sheep."¹⁰ It wouldn't be hard for Him. In fact, as one commentary points out, God *delights* in overcoming vast armies who stand against Him and His people.¹¹

God is not bothered by swords and shields. He *is* bothered by disobedience. He says to Judah here, "Assyria was sent by Me as punishment." What were they being punished for?

⁷ Kaiser

⁸ Matthew 16:23

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264443/the-worlds-largest-armies-based-on-active-force-level/>

¹⁰ *EBC*

¹¹ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

It was because *they* had abandoned the Lord. They worshiped the Assyrian gods. They violated God's covenant and instead made a "covenant of death" with God's enemies.¹² They turned their backs on their Shepherd. As a Shepherd, the Lord would not only fight against the wolves, but He would also stop the sheep from wandering into the death they were so enamored with.

Do shepherds break the legs of their sheep? Maybe you've heard that when a sheep continually wanders, a shepherd will have to break one of its legs and then carry it on his shoulders. Here's what the editor of *Sheep! Magazine* said in 2006:

"It is not true that any shepherds break a lamb's leg on purpose. What they sometimes do in certain sheep-raising nations is to 'brake' a leg. This means they attach a clog or weight to the animal's leg, which keeps certain 'rogue' sheep from getting too far from the shepherd until they learn their names, and not to be afraid of the shepherd."¹³

Judah was in a time of punishment because of their unwillingness to stay near the Lord. Just because they were God's people didn't mean they could sin without consequence.

Nahum 1:13 - ¹³For I will now break off his yoke from you and tear off your shackles.

This is great news! One problem: The fulfillment of this promise was still *40 years* away. Four more decades of shackles and heavy yoke. How many of us are going to be alive 40 years from now?

A faithful believer might say to the Lord, "Lord, the Assyrians have ravaged and ruined us.¹⁴ Why do we need to wait another *generation* for deliverance?"

The Bible shows us again and again that God sees your suffering. He knows your hurts. He intends deliverance and fullness and restoration for you. But it also reveals that the Lord has an enduring, sweeping plan that touches every corner of the cosmos. Every generation. Every nation. Every situation. His plan is fundamentally one of grace and mercy and *that* requires long-suffering on His part and, by extension, long-suffering on our part.

So the bad news is that we're going to suffer in this life. The *good* news is that one day every shackle will be loosed, every yoke will be broken. We will be totally free in perfect glory and rest.

Nahum 1:14 - ¹⁴The Lord has issued an order concerning you: There will be no offspring to carry on your name. I will eliminate the carved idol and cast image from the house of your gods; I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible.

The Lord now speaks to the Assyrian king and his empire. Ashurbanipal was *very* concerned with the perpetuation of his name and legacy. In his annals he put a curse on anyone who removed his

¹² Some scholars believe Judah's 'Covenant of Death' in Isaiah 28 was with Egypt, others like Nathan Mastnjak believe it was with Assyria. See *Judah's Covenant with Assyria in Isaiah 28 Vetus Testamentum, Vol. 64, Fasc. 3 (2014)*

¹³ <https://greenege.wordpress.com/2011/12/03/myth-busting-8-breaking-a-lambs-leg/>

¹⁴ Nahum 2:2

name from things like building inscriptions.¹⁵ But not only would his dynasty end, Assyria would fade from history.

It's remarkable how quickly they were forgotten. The historian Xenophon records that just 200 years after Nineveh's fall, a group of Greek mercenaries called The Ten Thousand marched over the mounds that had been Nineveh and had no idea that this had been the city that ruled the world.¹⁶

The Assyrians were godnappers. When they conquered a city, they'd break into the temple, steal all the gods and then bring them back as "captives."¹⁷ The Lord confronts them and says, "Those are all just little pieces of carved wood and stone. I'm the *real* God, and all your temples are going to be laid waste because *your* gods have no power."

Archaeologists discovered the statue of Ishtar prostrate and headless amid the ruins of her temple in Nineveh.¹⁸ God keeps His promises.

Verse 14 closes with an absolutely chilling phrase: "I will prepare your grave." Do you think of God digging graves? Obviously, this is a poetic image, but God is not joking around when it comes to judgment and righteousness and putting down rebellion. We're told in John 14 that Jesus has gone to *prepare* a place for us in heaven. But we're told in Matthew 25 that hell is *prepared* for the Devil and his angels and, sadly, anyone who rejects Christ's offer of salvation.

The question every human being needs to answer is: Are you *prepared* to meet your Maker? He's preparing a place for you in the next life. Where will you be spending eternity?

Nahum 1:15 - ¹⁵ Look to the mountains—the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace. Celebrate your festivals, Judah; fulfill your vows. For the wicked one will never again march through you; he will be entirely wiped out.

God's wrath leads to peace. And not just peace in the sense that Judah would have freer travel or a better economy or a ceasefire with an enemy army. God's peace is much more than that. The term is *shalom*, one we've all heard before. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says this word speaks of completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, unimpaired relationships. These are the result of God's activity in covenant with His people. This is God's plan - to give us His peace. It won't be fully realized until we're in heaven, but this is the work God is accomplishing.

He is going to wipe out sin. He is going to destroy death. He is going to remove all wickedness from the universe.

Because of this, we can and should make a plan of action. There's a great contrast between our first verse and the last verse. In the first verse we see God's enemies making a plan of action that leads

¹⁵ Kaiser

¹⁶ Will Durant *The Story Of Civilization*

¹⁷ *The New American Commentary Volume 20: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, And Zephaniah*

¹⁸ EBC

to their destruction. In the last verse, we see God's friends making a plan of action that leads to celebration and communion and enjoyment of God's presence.

He told Judah, "fulfill your vows, celebrate your festivals." They were still 40 years from deliverance, but they could live in the reality of God's plan now, even as they suffered, even as they waited, even as their circumstances weren't ideal. A present celebration of the future reality.

When Nahum wrote, what was Judah doing? Generally, they were getting on board the Assyrian train. That was a very bad place to be. Instead, they could lock into a relationship with the Lord, Who was still loving them, still fighting for them, still making plans for them, still inviting them into His goodness and grace, still preparing life everlasting, life more abundantly for His people, because that's what He loves to do. That's what He's *still* doing for those who will take refuge in Him.