

V. ***“Your Injury Has No Healing”***

30-Mar-03 Nahum 3:1-19

Theme: *The time will come in which the Lord’s offer of mercy must be superseded by divine judgment.*

Key Verse: Nahum 3:19 “Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?”

Review

The last two weeks we have covered Nahum 1&2. We’ve seen Nahum’s single-minded purpose of declaring judgment upon Nineveh. We’ve seen that **the nature of God demands judgment for sin**. He reserves vengeance and wrath upon His enemies (1:3). No one can stand before His indignation (1:6). Beware when He says, “I am against you!” (2:13), for His judgments are sure. Just ask Nineveh. Nahum paints a picture of Nineveh’s destruction in chapter 2, and it was fulfilled. Completely.

At the same time, we’ve seen **the goodness of God and the mercy He shows towards His people**. God is good, and a refuge for those who seek shelter in Him (1:7). God declares good news of peace for His people (1:15). God will restore the eminence of His people (2:2). Judgment and mercy – two sides of the same coin. **When God comes in judgment against His enemies, He saves and blesses His people.**

Introduction

Later in the Bible, the city of Babylon symbolically takes on the picture of the enemy of God. Fundamentally, the city of Nineveh is no different. **The city of Nineveh is an archetype of the sinful city of man.** So as we read the Scriptures, both Nineveh and Babylon take on characteristics that speak way beyond their historical context.

For example, Revelation 18 describes the fall of “Babylon the Great.” In this chapter, Babylon’s fall is marked by three mournful dirges, each beginning with the words “Woe! Woe!” The kings of earth (Rev. 18:10), the merchants (Rev. 18:16-17), and sea travelers (Rev. 18:19) all proclaim the woe on Babylon. Then something tremendous happens. These sounds die away, and the scene shifts to heaven, where the people of God are singing God’s praises. Their words are not words of woe, though the fall of Babylon is still on their minds. Instead, the word that comes to their lips is “Hallelujah!” (Rev. 19:1-4, 6-7). **What is mourned on earth is applauded in heaven.** On earth the fall of Babylon is judged an unmitigated tragedy. In heaven it is a cause for rejoicing before God.

The third chapter of Nahum reminds us of this heavenly perspective as it describes the fate of Nineveh. Like Revelation 18, it begins with a cry of woe for the city. But no one will mourn for such a city. In fact, the end of the chapter suggests that the opposite will occur: those who hear will actually applaud Nineveh’s destruction (3:19).

Today, we will look at the surety of Nineveh’s judgment, again under three headings. It is sure: 1) because of their sin; 2) just as No-Amon; and 3) despite their strength. The surety of judgment rests upon the unchanging character and word of God.

Exposition

III. The Surety of Nineveh's Judgment (3:1-19)

A. Sure Because of Their Sin (3:1-7)

1. The Sins of the City (3:1, 4)

1 Ahh! Bloodthirsty city!

a The whole thing

b (lives) a lie;

b profiteering

a is incessant.

Victimizing will never be eliminated.

4 Because of the repeated acts
of the whoredoms of the whore-

“Charming madame-“

Mistress of witchcrafts!

a who barter

b over nations

c by her whoredoms

b over families

c by her witchcrafts.

At the beginning of chapter 3 the prophet cites Nineveh's crimes of violence, deception, plunder, and witchcraft. In the case of each of these sins, repeated persistence in the violation is emphasized. It is not merely that the city has slipped occasionally into these abuses. Instead, the poisonous vapors diffusing from every heart pollute the total atmosphere of the community.

1. Nineveh was a city of blood. The Assyrians who went out from that city shed very much innocent blood. In these verses we have a very awful picture of their evil work as they conquered city after city. The *bloodthirsty* city aptly describes the lifestyle of **a metropolitan community devoted to the glory of man** rather than to the glory of God. However, the awful product of man's machinations is redeemable. Ultimately Jerusalem the holy city stands in contrast with the *bloodthirsty city* of a depraved humanity.

This bloodthirsty mind-set displays itself by never-ending *lying*, *profiteering*, and *victimizing*. The city of Nineveh promises prosperity and every advantage to those who will barter with it. But beware! “All of it is a lie,” as the text reads literally. *Profiteering* and *victimizing* suggest a forced ripping of person or possessions. Like a wild beast shredding its prey, so the Assyrian devours his defenseless victim.

4. The cause of Assyria's downfall is given in the form of **another metaphor, that of a prostitute** (cf. Is. 23:16; Ez. 16; 23; Rev. 17-18). Just as Nineveh's successor in evil work was called “Babylon ... the mother of prostitutes” (Rev. 17:5), so Nineveh herself is likened by God to a harlot. With the poisoned dart of satire, Nahum mocks this *charming madame* who actually is a devilish *mistress of witchcrafts*. By coarse, insulting language the Holy Spirit through the prophet tears away the pretenses and **lays bare the moral degradation of the inner recesses of the heart**. “Look at the soul of this harlot,” says Nahum. Dressed in the finery of love, this

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common street-whore gratifies her own lust for manipulation, then wipes her mouth and says, “I have done nothing wrong.” The admirers of Nineveh were enchanted by the shapely beauty and endless charm of the city’s treasure store of pleasures. But behind all the external charm, she is a *mistress of witchcrafts*, casting an evil spell over each of her successive victims. She uses her bodily endowments to allure her victims, and then destroys them. Like Esau, the sinner sells his soul for a bowl of porridge that stimulates the senses. **It is the sensual pleasures of the moment that people worship in the place of God.** The victims of these acts of whoredom and witchcraft are *nations* and *families*. The most basic God-ordained societal unit—the family—is decimated.

It is because of the sins of the city that Nineveh’s devastation is sure. The iniquity of the people is full.

2. The Assault on the City (3:2-3)

- 2 a *Crack*
 - b *of whip*
 - a *and rumble*
 - b *of wheel;*
 - a *stead*
 - b *rearing*
 - a *and chariot*
 - b *lurching;*
- 3 a *horseman*
 - b *charging*
 - c *with flash*
 - d *of sword*
 - c *and glitter*
 - d *of spear;*

- a *countless*
- b *casualties*
- a *heaps*
- b *of carcasses*
- a *endless*
- b *corpses*
- a *so they stumble*
- b *over their corpses.*

2. The curt language spurs the reader’s imagination so that sight and sound join in electrifying the moment of the charge against the city. When the word of God comes with such preciseness of detail in describing the destruction of the enemies of God’s people, then the Holy Spirit can use that description to rekindle the faith of the most discouraged of His people. Doubting saints need only turn their enlivened imaginations to the descriptions of Nahum and apply them to their own struggles with Satan’s forces. With *crack of whip* and *rumble of wheel*, with *stead rearing* and *chariot lurching*, the God-appointed avenger shall soon and suddenly appear. **The contemporary enemy of truth and righteousness shall not stand any more than did ancient Nineveh.**

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3. Without excessiveness of detail, the prophet Nahum underscores the extensiveness of the divine devastation: *countless casualties, heaps of carcasses, endless corpses, so that they stumble over their corpses*. Although human sentimentality might wish to deny it, the word of God is consistent in its picture of the destruction of the wicked (cp. Ps. 110:5-6).

3. The Lord Against the City (3:5-7)

- 5 *Note it well!*
I am against you,
declares Yahweh of hosts,
a *and I will uncover*
b *your skirts*
c *before your face;*
a *and I will let stare*
b *nations*
c *at your nakedness,*
b *and kingdoms*
c *at your shame.*
- 6 *So I will pelt you*
with detestable things;
and I will mock you like a fool,
and I will display you
as a spectacle.
- 7 *So be it!*
Everyone who sees you
will flee from you,
and will say:
- “Devastated*
is Ninevah.
Who will grieve
for her?”
Where can I find comforters
for you?

God declares that He Himself personally will bring devastation on Nineveh. Seven times over in these three verses the Lord speaks in the first person. **The Lord declares in five different ways His determination to make an open exposure of all the gross depravity of this sinful city. By His own immediate involvement, the Lord shall humble Nineveh before all the nations of the earth, and before all the ages of time.**

5. First, God will uncover Nineveh's skirts before her own face. God will expose the harlot for what she really is. Before the public eye, but also *before her own face* so that she cannot hide from the disgrace of it all, her lewd conduct shall be exposed. Second, God will let nations and kingdoms stare at Nineveh's nakedness and shame. Nineveh will forever be remembered as the city shamed by the Lord.

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6a. Third, God will pelt Nineveh with detestable things. Marked outwardly with the inner filth of the heart! The LXX term for *detestable things* is also used to describe the “abomination of desolation” in the temple of God which marks the consummate defilement of the ages (Mt. 24:15).

6b. Fourth, God will mock Nineveh like a fool. He shall treat them contemptuously, lightly esteeming their worth. The fool shall be answered according to his folly (Pr. 26:4-5).

6c. Fifth, God shall present Nineveh as a spectacle. Everyone shall come and stare at Nineveh the gazingstock. International shame and disgrace shall replace pomp and pride.

7. Although all nations are stunned at the sight, they cannot find one among themselves to grieve over Nineveh’s calamity. Nineveh must languish alone in its doleful state of devastation. So shall it be in every age. Part of the judgment of hell shall be the isolation of people altogether from one another in a darkness that separates from all possible comforters.

B. Sure Just As No-Amon (Thebes) (3:8-13)

Now the prophet offers a second ground for the certainty of Nineveh’s coming judgment. Let the city consider what happened to their major rival, the metropolis of No-Amon (Thebes, the capital of Egypt). Nahum’s decision to compare the capital of Assyria with the capital of Egypt appears to be based on **Nineveh’s personal knowledge of Thebes’ natural advantages. In 663 BC, Ashurbanipal had led his army on a conquest of the Egyptian capital.** Even though Thebes had fallen to the superior powers of Nineveh, the Assyrian invaders could not but have been impressed by the formidable bulwarks that surrounded its Egyptian rival. Four hundred miles down from the Nile Delta an invading army from the north had to march. To the right and to the left they had to expose their flank to retaliatory assault from kindred nations friendly to Thebes. Having finally arrived before the massive city, twenty-seven miles in circumference, the heated glare of a horizontal wall of water blinded them everywhere they looked. Surrounded by rivers, streams, canals, and lakes formed by the Nile as it distributed over the broadened delta, any invader would have to be overwhelmed by the sight that greeted their eyes. A field of massive statues, memorials, temples, and great halls with no equal in the world stood before them. On both sides of the Nile they observed structures made of stones almost 300 tons in weight, and colossi weighing up to 900 tons apiece. If they had been fully informed, they would have known of the tunneled “valley of the kings and queens” beyond the many carvings in the western cliffs. The tomb of Tutankhaman was located nearby. For at least a thousand years, pharaohs of Egypt had ruled their part of the world here in the city of their sun god, Amon. Renown today as the ruins of Luxor and Karnak, the city was identified as the town with one hundred gates. **This famed metropolis of the world was the first of the great monument-cities of mankind.**

The precedent of another capital whose strength did not save her from destruction is presented as a goad to prick the already demoralized Assyrian capital. In comparison to Thebes, Nineveh is feeble. This mounting case against the sinful city is intended to **spur on the faith of true believers** concerning the certainty of the coming judgment of God which shall deliver them from years of oppression.

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1. Thebes Devastated Despite Her Many Advantages (3:8-10)

- 8 Are you better
than No-Ammon
the one dwelling
in the midst of the rivers
(with) the sea surrounding her;
a whose rampart
b (was) the sea;
b from the sea
a (was) her wall?
- 9 Cush
her strength,
—and Egypt;
and there was no end . . .
Put and Lubim
were your helpers.
- 10 a Even she (ended)
b in exile;
a she went
b into captivity.
a Even her young children
b were dashed into pieces
c at the head of all the streets.
a For her honored men
b they cast the lot,
a and all her great men
b were bound in chains.

8. Having ended the previous section with a **rhetorical question** addressed to Nineveh itself, the prophet now begins this section with the identical form. In both cases, the answer which the question intends to elicit is quite obvious. Where are comforters for Nineveh to be found? *Nowhere*. Is Nineveh better with respect to its situation than devastated Thebes? *By no means*. Although the Euphrates was there, it did not supply the natural defense that the Nile gave to Thebes. **When the Nile floods, it is two or more miles wide at Thebes.** This unique setting of the city provided a natural wall of defense, like a *rampart* and a *wall* to protect the populace. Of all people, Nineveh should not forget that the rampart and the wall of water surrounding No-Amon could protect them only so long as God had ordered it so.

9. And as for neighboring supporters, what could Nineveh boast that would compare to Cush, Egypt, Put, and Lubim? *Cush* was the nation located in the southern Nile valley. The nation of *Put* is generally included in lists with other African nations (Jer. 46:9; Ez. 30:5), and apparently refers to Libya. The *Lubim* are the Libyans of North Africa, located west of Egypt (cf. 2 Chr. 12:3; 16:8). **The four names seem to denote the major land blocks south, north, west, and (possibly) east of Thebes. The point is that Thebes was surrounded by allies and blood-relatives** who would be willing to intervene if ever the capital city of Egypt should be threatened. No neighbors loved and supported Nineveh out of a natural bond such as these

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nations felt towards Thebes. In comparing these resources among the arena of nations, Thebes obviously had every advantage over Nineveh. The army that dared march 400 miles into the interior of Africa between the pinchers of the allies of Thebes was exposing itself to awesome possibilities of retaliation.

10. Despite her own strength, Thebes fell. But it was more than that. She did not merely experience defeat. Occupation by foreign troops would have been bad enough. But most awesome was the exile and captivity that Egypt experienced. They had been uprooted and driven across two continents where they must live as strangers in a strange land. Defeated, humiliated, bound, and dragged away, they hardly looked like the ancient proud people that had ruled the world.

So the fate of Thebes is recalled with vividness. Since Assyria itself had been the conqueror, it could hardly deny the truthfulness of the terrible picture the prophet presented. With relentless determination, Ashurbanipal (ca. 668-627) had marched into the south of Egypt. On the way, he had forced the enlistment of 22 kings in his support, including Manasseh of Judah (ca. 687-642). Thirteen hundred miles on foot away from home, Ashurbanipal had overrun Thebes. The mightiest of cities had fallen to him. And that was just the point. **The mightiest of cities had fallen to him, and Nineveh should expect the same.**

2. Nineveh May Expect the Same (3:11-13)

- 11 *Even you (Ninevah)
shall (stagger like a) drunk;
You shall be
hidden away,
Even you
shall seek shelter from the enemy.*
- 12 *All your strongholds
(are like) fig trees with firstripe figs;
If they are shaken,
Then they fall into the mouth of the eater.*
- 13 *Behold!
Your people
are women in your midst!
to your enemies
the gates of your land
shall be flung open;
fire shall devour
your bars.*

The prophet uses **five different images** to vivify the helplessness of the city that by unrighteousness and brutality has made itself God's enemy. Nineveh is described as a nation that has become: like a staggering drunk; like a panicked fugitive; like a trembling fig tree; like a feeble woman; and like a city with gates thrown open. Consider the boldness of this prophet. **Each one ridicules the proud people of Assyria.**

11. First, Nineveh *shall stagger like a drunk*. Nahum means that Nineveh would **drink from the cup of God's wrath**. As a consequence, it shall be hidden away like a drunk who has collapsed

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under the table. In a way the fate of Thebes was not quite as bad as that of Nineveh. At least the ruins of Thebes still stand as witness to its greatness in the distant past. But for centuries even the site of Nineveh was “hidden” in obscurity.

Second, **Nineveh shall flee like a panicked refugee** (v. 11b). In reality, the disintegration of the kingdom of Assyria shows the nation cowering and cringing as one blow after another destroys its shrinking remnant. First the ancient capital of Asshur fell in 614 B.C. Then the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians assaulted Nineveh in 612 B.C. The city collapsed and was burned after a three-month siege. Retreating toward the west, a remnant of loyal Assyrians established a new king and capital in Haran, approximately 250 miles toward the west. Two years later in 610 B.C., the remaining Assyrian forces were defeated again by Babylon. Although a combined Egyptian and Assyrian force retained some presence in the area for a while, the decisive battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. eliminated the last vestiges of Assyrian presence in the Fertile Crescent. **Just as Nahum had predicted, they sought refuge like a retreating fugitive. But they found none.**

12. Third, Nineveh’s strongest fortifications are compared to fig trees with ripened figs. The metaphor of fruit so ripe for plucking that it falls into the open mouths of those who shake the tree could be another echo of the picture of the voracious Assyrian lion. **The fortresses of Nineveh would offer no more resistance to the Lord than a fig-tree waiting to be harvested.** This imagery of falling fruit has such vividness about it that it naturally was picked up in the book of Revelation to describe the **cataclysms associated with the end of the present age.** The Apostle John sees the day in which the stars of the sky shall fall to the earth “as a fig tree casts its unripe figs” (**Rev. 6:13**). The readiness for judgment which ripened for Nineveh in Nahum’s day soon shall characterize the whole of the earth. The same Lamb of God that showed compassion for sinners by exposing himself to the consuming wrath of God shall appear in wrath to bring judgment on all who have denied him.

13. Fourth, Nineveh’s inhabitants are compared to feeble women. Generally speaking women are weaker physically than men. Fifth, Nineveh shall be like a besieged city whose gates have been flung wide open (v. 13b). Total exposure to the ravages of alien forces shall characterize the entire nation.

So Nineveh may have gloated earlier when Thebes fell before their own relentless assaults. Yet having sown the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind. Because Thebes fell, they too may expect to fall.

C. Sure Despite Their Strength (3:14-19)

1. The Utter Futility of Human Resources (3:14-18)

- 14 *Waters for the siege*
 - draw for yourself.*
 - a *Strengthen*
 - b *your fortifications*
 - a *immerse yourself*
 - b *in the clay, and*
 - a *tread out*
 - b *the mortar;*
 - a *hold firmly*
 - b *the brick-mold.*

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- 15 *Just at that point*
 a fire
 b shall devour you,
 a sword
 b shall cut you down.
 It shall consume you
 like the young locust.
- a Multiply yourself*
 b like the young locust,
 a multiply yourself
 b like the aged locust.
- 16 *You shall have made your merchants more numerous*
 than the stars of heaven;
 (but) the young locust
 strips
 and flies away.
- 17 *a Your crowned ones*
 b are as the aged locust;
 a and your captains
 b as the hordes of grasshoppers
 that encamp in the hedges on a cold day.
 The sun rises
 and they flee away;
 and their place is not known.
 Where are they?
- 18 *a Your shepherds*
 b slumber,
 O king of Assyria;
 a your nobles
 b lie down;
 a your people
 b are scattered on the mountains
 b and no one gathers them.

The coming devastation is sure despite the strength of Nineveh. Nahum says that preparations will do no good (v. 14). Their numbers will do no good (v. 15b). Their wealth will do no good (v. 16). Their leadership will do no good (vv. 17-18). None of their strength will avail, because they are arrayed against the Lord.

14. Preparations will do no good. In rapid-fire succession, five distinct commands are given to activate a program of preparation, yet to no avail. First, *waters for the siege draw for yourself.* *Waters of the siege* ring an ominous note. They speak of rationing, of deprivation, of a dreaded struggle for the most basic elements of life. Sennacherib earlier had built an aqueduct system and dug eighteen canals to bring water to the city and alleviate the problems of aridness. Yet in the day of God's judgment, this elaborate system would be of no avail. All too easily an aggressive adversary would cut off those sources, leaving the city desperate for water. Second, *strengthen your fortifications.* Nineveh already possessed fortresses that had given it a

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sense of security for a hundred years. But now this strength must be increased, because it is insufficient.

Third, *immerse yourself in the clay*. The literal meaning of the phrase suggests total absorption in a project or circumstance. Nahum's admonition to Nineveh is "Go into the clay." Immerse yourself in this particular project. Get up to your elbows in mud. Make a superhuman effort in your defense preparations. And all of it will be to no avail. By this mockery Nahum is saying that all human effort to avoid or escape the coming judgment of God is futile. Let the Ninevites immerse themselves in raising their fortifications to the highest heavens. Apart from God's blessing, they will be to no avail. Fourth, *tread out the mortar*. Trampling involves extensive exertion. Fifth, *hold firmly the brick-mold*. The brick-mold must be held firmly to enforce its shape on the heavy moist clay mixture. Hours of tedious exertion would be necessary to produce adequate brick for reinforcing, enlarging, or heightening a wall the size of Nineveh's.

15. Devour, cut down, consume. The whole of the city is the object of each of these three verbs, as indicated by the feminine singular pronouns. **Fire shall devour, the sword cut down, and the locust consume the entirety of the city.** History tells us that the city was completely destroyed and the Assyrian king died in the flames of his own palace. The devouring of an entire metropolitan area by a small creature like the locust underscores the futility of man's grandiose plans. **Numbers will do no good. The imagery of the innumerable locust horde** is used to describe both the inhabitants of Nineveh and the enemy devouring Nineveh. The natural reaction of a self-sufficient military machine to a threat by hordes just might be: "Well, we shall multiply ourselves so that we shall be just as numerous as you." So the prophet proposes: "Go ahead. Multiply yourself like a locust swarm. It will do you absolutely no good" (v. 15b).

16. Located just at the point where East and West met, Nineveh was ideally situated to **multiply its wealth**. But although the number of Nineveh's merchants was *like the stars*, it **would do them no good**. In a day in which "church growth" has become the passing fad, Nahum's prophecy has something directly to say. The Lord is not impressed by numbers. The action of *stripping* and *flying away* underscores the thoroughness of the destruction by the locust and the emptiness of what is left when God's instruments of judgment are done. Left bare and exposed to the elements, nothing remains of the long labors of the merchants of Nineveh.

17. Because the number of the Assyrian populace is so great, the leadership is also virtually without number. But this **multiplicity of leadership will do them no good**. The prophet appeals to a phenomenon common to the Near East. Huddled en masse, grasshoppers coat leaves and branches along a hedge on a cloudy, cold day. But the moment the sun warms their cold-blooded shells, *they flee away; and their place is not known!* So it is with human leadership.

18. In a climactic word about Nineveh's leadership, the prophet addresses the king himself. The king of Assyria may be oblivious to what is happening across his kingdom, but he shall learn of the effects of negligence and dissipation on the part of his leadership soon enough. The imagery of a disseminated people scattered like sheep without a shepherd is found repeatedly in Scripture (Num. 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17). Scattered across the mountains, the remnant of a once great nation cowers in caves without hope of restoration apart from a caring leadership. Of course, the king of Assyria himself must bear the brunt of the responsibility for this dissolution of his people.

Standing in historic contrast with the unfeeling king of Assyria is the Son of David, the true shepherd-king. Observing the state of the multitudes, Jesus was moved with compassion

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“because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36). He had no place in his kingdom for the sluggards, the indolent, the drones, the polishers of the brass. Jesus then took decisive action. He commissioned the twelve and commanded them to “go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” announcing that the kingdom of heaven had come (Mt. 10:1, 6-7). The people of the king of Assyria had been scattered on the mountains and not one of his appointees had an inclination to gather them. Much less had the king himself any inclination to gather the sheep. What a contrast with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Son of God who as the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

2. The Final Tragedy of Persistent Sin (3:19)

19 *There can be no lessening
of your blow;
your plague
is fatal.*

*All who hear your story
will clap their hands over you.
For upon whom
has not your cruelty been inflicted
continually?*

19. The masculine singular of v. 19 appears to refer to the king of Nineveh, following as it does the specific word addressed to him in v. 18. So the *blow* and the *plague* describe the striking of the mighty monarch, the king of Assyria. Historically, the king on the throne in Nahum’s day probably was Ashurbanipal, one of the cruelest and most despotic of the Assyrian rulers. **Why can there be no lessening of his punishment?** Because although the wheels of God’s justice may grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine. **The time comes when the longsuffering of God will endure no more.** Then he shall bring swift vengeance on his enemies. Such a message applies to every oppressor. For a while he may suffer the tyrant to live in luxury bought by the blood of his martyrs. But a complete reckoning shall be required. This final word of judgment came true: Nineveh was utterly destroyed. Even the site of the city was lost for many centuries until it was uncovered as recently as the middle of the 19th century.

When an oppressive monarch like Ashurbanipal falls, the reverberations are heard to the ends of the earth. To the mighty monarch he says, “What can you expect? No person and no nation has been spared your brutality.” Continually and continuously the king has brought havoc on the nations. In radical contrast, the God of Israel has shown Himself to be *continually* patient and longsuffering. **The continuous patience of the Lord with the king of Assyria should have led him to repentance.** His experience of the goodness of God ought to have turned his head toward mercy and grace in his dealing with others. The ultimate tragedy of persistent sin is vividly displayed in the final word about the king of Assyria. God will destroy him along with his nation, and people universally will break out in shouts of jubilation, clapping their hands at the destruction of their tormentor.

Conclusion

The uniform testimony of the Scriptures is that **a time comes in which the offer of mercy must be superseded by divine judgment.** The reality of retribution on the wicked does not appear

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suddenly at the end of Nahum's prophecy in the form of a final rhetorical question. Instead, the entire substance of the prophecy guarantees that the right answer shall be given to Nahum's question.

In the 8th century B.C., Jonah was commissioned to proclaim a message that would eventuate in the salvation of the city of Nineveh, including its king, despite their great sin. Coming approximately one hundred years after Jonah, the message of Nahum in the mid-seventh century provides a framework of integrity for God's offer of mercy. The unrepentant ultimately shall be judged. The utter destruction of the city of Nineveh in 612 confirms the validity of Nahum's words. The truthfulness of his prophecy means that in principle each successive world kingdom, its king, its officials, and its citizens must take heed. For **the message of judgment applies to all the kingdoms of the world which have risen up against God since the destruction of Nineveh**, and which will still continue to do so to the end of the world. One's response as an individual or as a nation to God and His will, whether in acceptance or rejection, thus has major implications for blessing or judgment.

One further point of comparison between Jonah and Nahum is worthy of note. A question ends only two books of the Bible's sixty-six: Jonah and Nahum. Jonah's question proclaims mercy. "Should not I have compassion on Nineveh. . .?" (Jon. 4:11) explains why the longsuffering of God means salvation even for those who have done great wickedness. Nahum's question proclaims justice. *For upon whom has not your cruelty been inflicted continually?* explains why God's vengeance at last must fall on the unrepentant city.

When we are being sorely tried we come to the point where we think of crying out, "I can't put up with this any longer." That is exactly how the people of Jerusalem probably felt in the days when Nahum ministered to them. Elijah was a prophet who experienced similar pressures (1 Kgs 19:4). **We need to remember that Satan is a defeated foe. Believers should constantly keep before them this fact: Christ has won the victory.** That is what this last chapter of Nahum is all about.

Despite this prophecy being so full of the punishment of evil-doers, there is much here in which the believer can take consolation. God's people can take great comfort from knowing that God is a just God who rules in righteousness. When Abraham pleaded for Sodom he concluded, "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). God is good, and He provides a refuge for His people when times of trouble come upon them. He cares for them (1:7).

This prophecy of Nahum was fulfilled to the very letter. Just as the sentence of vengeance upon the ungodly was carried out to the last bitter dregs, so **the blessings of the one who is the good news, and who is peace, are already being experienced even now by the redeemed people of God** but they will be known and enjoyed in all their fullness in the glory days of eternity when every enemy shall be destroyed.

Next week: Substitute. Two weeks: Lesson 6 – Habakkuk 1 – "O LORD, How Long?"

Close in Prayer.