

## Introduction and contents of

### NAHUM

#### Introduction

1. The opening verse of Nahum informs us that the object of the book is to reveal God's wrath against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria: "*An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies*" (Na 1:1-2). Given that Nineveh fell in 612BC it is probable that this prophecy was given just before that date. Ashurbanipal was king of Assyria 664-663 when the worst of Assyria's atrocities took place which would rightfully earn the wrath of Yahweh.

In one of Ashurbanipal's inscriptions found in the ruins of Kuyunjik in 1878, the king tells how he captured Thebes. Urdamane was the son of the sister of Pharaoh Tirhakah who died in 664 B.C. Ashurbanipal said,

*In my second campaign I marched directly against Egypt (Musur) and Nubia. Urdamane heard of the approach of my expedition (only when) I had (already) set foot on Egyptian territory. He left Memphis and fled into Thebes to save his life. The kings, governors, and regents whom I had installed in Egypt came to meet me and kissed my feet. I followed Urdamane (and) went as far as Thebes, his fortress. He saw my mighty battle array approaching, left Thebes and fled to Kipkipi. Upon a trust (inspiring) oracle of Ashur and Ishtar I, myself, conquered this town completely. From Thebes I carried away booty, heavy and beyond counting: silver, gold, precious stones, his entire personal possessions, linen garments with multicoloured trimmings, fine horses, (certain) inhabitants, male and female. I pulled two high obelisks, cast of shining zahalu-bronze, the weight of which was 2,500 talents, standing at the door of the temple, out of their bases and took (them) to Assyria. (Thus) I carried off from Thebes heavy booty, beyond counting. I made Egypt (Musur) and Nubia feel my weapons bitterly and celebrated my triumph. With full hands and safely, I returned to Nineveh, the city (where I exercise) my rule. (Word Bible Commentary)*

Nahum was well aware of the fall of Thebes. In 3:8 he reminds Nineveh that what she did to Thebes, others will do to her; "*Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall?*"

Nineveh fell to a combined attack by the Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians in 612 B.C. A record of that event has been preserved in one of the Babylonian Chronicles (some parts of the script are corrupted):

*(In the fourteenth year, 613/12 BC) the king of Babylonia called out his army and marched to ..., the king of the Umman-manda and the king of Babylonia met each other in ... Kyaxares made ... the king of Babylonia to cross and they marched along the Tigris river bank and pitched camp by Nineveh. From the month of Sivan to the month of Ab they (advanced?) only three.... They made a strong attack on the citadel and in the month of Ab, (on*

*the ... the day the city was taken and) a great defeat inflicted on the people and (their) chiefs. On that same day Sin-shar-ishkun, the Assyrian king, (perished in the flames). They carried off much spoil from the city and temple-area and turned the city into a ruin-mound and heap of debris ... of Assyria moved off before (the final attack?) and the forces of the Babylonian king (followed them). On the twentieth of Elul Kyaxares and his army returned to his land; the Babylonian king and his army marched as far as Nisibin. Booty and prisoners ... and of the land of Rusapu were brought before the Babylonian king at Nineveh. In the month of (... Ashuruballit) sat on the throne in Harran as king of Assyria..*

With the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C., coalitions of Medes, Babylonians, and Sythians sought revenge for the ravages of Assyria. By 612 B.C., these armies could lay siege to Nineveh and destroy her. The rise and fall of the Assyrian Empire took less than a century-and-a-half. Unbelievably, the great city of Nineveh lay in fiery ruins, hardly to rise again. In these years Nahum, the prophet, spoke for God.

2. Nahum is called an Elkoshite, which means that his home was Elkosh. The location of Elkosh is not known. Various traditions have arisen, however, as to its location. However, was Capernaum, the “*village of Nahum*,” which is situated on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee? No one can be sure of its exact location.

3. The Message of Nahum. Throughout the Old Testament Yahweh is always depicted as the God who is sovereign over the nations. He is the God who interferes with the politics and activities of other nations besides Israel. Although He may use Assyria as His tool for the punishment of Israel He will by no means allow a nation to go unpunished for its own sins; “*The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty*” ( 1:3).

Nineveh was a large and ancient city in Nahum’s day (*IDB* k-q 551–3). It was probably founded about 5000 B.C. on the east side of the Tigris River just opposite the modern city of Mosul (northern Iraq). It had a chequered history until Sennacherib made it his capital city at the end of the eighth century. Sennacherib spent twenty-five years restoring, enlarging and beautifying the old city. He built temples, ramparts, palaces, aqueducts, and gardens. He was followed on the throne by two other strong kings and builders, Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (669–626 B.C.). This was Assyria’s golden age. The empire covered the entire Fertile Crescent from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. Its palaces were filled with the wealth of the subject nations. Behind its double line of ramparts Nineveh seemed invulnerable. She was the undisputed master of the world.

The Assyrians were a “*bad lot*” and under the reign of Ashurbanipal their cruelty knew no bounds. Nineveh was one of the capital cities of the Assyrians, who were renowned in the ancient world for their cruelty. They ruled by terror, extracting huge tributes from conquered nations, and threatening terrible consequences for non-payment or resistance. The following is an extract from the Assyrian records: Ashurbanipal boasted:

*“I built a pillar over against his city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar ... And I cut*

*the limbs off the officers, of the royal officers, who had rebelled ... Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their noses, their ears and their fingers, of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks round about the city. Their young men and maidens burned with fire. Twenty men I captured alive and I immured them in the wall of the palace ... The rest of their warriors I consumed with thirst in the desert of the Euphrates."*

It was to Nineveh that Jonah went as Yahweh's missionary evangelist! His preaching clearly took place prior to Nahum's message of doom. He probably preached during a date late in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is interesting to note the comment in Jonah 3:8 where the King advises that all "violence" be ended; "Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands"

## The Contents

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### 2. Contents

#### Chapter 1:1-14 An expression of Yahweh's wrath

**Vs 1** The use of the term "burden" ( **מִשָּׁא** ) can mean either "burden" (Jer 23:33), or "oracle," or "utterance" in the sense of "lifting up the voice" (Isa 3:7; 42:11). The term is often used in the OT in a technical sense to introduce an oracle of a prophet (Isa 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; Ezek 12:10; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1). In this sense it indicates the message that the prophet has to deliver. It does not necessarily mean that the message was a trial to the prophet or that he felt under pressure – a western use of the term.

**Vs 2-3a** Spells out the wrath of Yahweh (vs 1 "avenging God...wrathful...takes vengeance.. keeps wrath") in no uncertain terms. This establishes the character of the book for the reader. Yet, in contrast to Yahweh's vengeance is the fact that He is "slow to anger..." (vs 3). In other words, it takes a great deal of sin and disobedience to arouse the wrath of Yahweh. If, as the book depicts, Yahweh's wrath is poured out on a nation it must be because the sin of the nation has reached an all time height. Yahweh can no longer be patient or tolerate the sin.

The Hebrew **אַרְךָ אֲפִים** literally means, "long of nose". By the act of breathing, emotions can be expressed. Perhaps it was observed that the nose dilates in anger. God is said to be **אַרְךָ אֲפִים** (lit. "long of anger," i.e. long before getting angry). The

thought is that God takes a long, deep breath as he holds his anger in abeyance, A ruler is said to be persuaded by a display of forbearance, patience, i.e. "*the long of breath*" (Prov 25:15).

In case anyone should imagine that Yahweh, because He is "*slow to anger*", will be easy-going on His enemies a contrasting part of the sentence is added, "*the LORD will by no means clear the guilty*". The Hebrew נִקְיָהּ *to be empty, be clear, be pure, be free, be innocent, be exempt from punishment* ". The Hebrew is written in the infinite absolute meaning "*He will absolutely, definitely not clear the guilty*".

**Vs 3b-5** Depict Yahweh's great sovereign power over the creation. At the beginning of verse 3 the writer reminds the reader that Yahweh is "*great in power*". This concept is expanded with bold references to His control of the weather; the sea; the hills and mountains. Finally, Yahweh is portrayed as being in total control of the very world itself , "*the world and all who dwell in it*". He is sovereign not merely over the creation but all peoples. In this case He has the right to exact judgement.

**Vs 6** In view of His mighty power and sovereignty over the whole world a question is raised in relation to those who disobey and reject Him as Assyria had done, "*Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?*" Prophets are known to present these rhetorical questions (Is 40) when the answer is well known.

**Vs 7** Is like a welcome break in the clouds! There is another, more positive side to Yahweh's character, "*The Lord is good*" and the reader must realise this. His goodness is described in the care and protection He offers to those who take refuge in Him, "*a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him*". It is as if the reader is now transported back to the heart warming tones of Psalm 91, "*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say<sup>1</sup> to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

**Vs 8** You cannot serve God and mammon. One can almost hear the words of Jesus. There is no middle ground in respect to Yahweh – one cannot be indifferent. Either one takes refuge in Him or becomes the object of His poured out wrath and indignation. Either He is loved or He is hated.

Thus in complete contrast to the foregoing verse and in conformity with the harsh words of verse 7 the writer reminds his hearers or readers that Yahweh, whilst being "*good*" is no soft touch. He will judge and punish His enemies – they will know of His anger like an "*overflowing flood*" (one is reminded of Genesis where there was a *Flood* of water and Yahweh's wrath). No one will escape for He will "*pursue His enemies*" even "*into darkness*", they cannot hide from Him.

**Vs 9 – 11** Assyria, once the tool of God's wrath against Israel, is now depicted as plotting evil against Yahweh (vs 9, 11). There is portrayed here, not mere indifference to Yahweh, but actual opposition with a view to seeking to destroy the God of Israel. Verse 11 may refer to Sennacherib as the one who came out of Nineveh plotting evil against Yahweh and counselling wickedness (cf. 2 Kgs 18–19) in an attempt to encourage Israel to abandon its trust in Yahweh.

**Vs 12-13** Commentators believe that verse 13 is addressed to Judah particularly as the verbs in the last part of verse 12 are feminine. The NIV inserts the word “*Judah*” although it is not present in the Hebrew text; “*Although I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more*”.

Indeed, although Assyria was a powerful nation “*at full strength and many*”, yet the nation will be “*cut down*”.

Assyria’s oppression of Judah had been great. Although Judah had been allowed to keep her own king and temple, she did not enjoy political or religious freedom. For more than a hundred years Judah had been forced to pay tribute to Assyria and bow to her gods. When she asserted her independence she was beaten into submission. In 3:8 Nahum calls Nineveh “*the bloody city*”. In 2:12 he describes Nineveh’s treatment of her captives as a lion strangling its prey and tearing its flesh. Now God will put an end to all of that.

**Vs 14** The prophet now turns back to the king of Assyria (reference to the singular “*you*” עֲלֶיךָ may refer to Ashurbanipal or any reigning king of Assyria) and reminds him that it is Yahweh who has “*given commandment about you*” regarding destruction. Yahweh will make a complete and utter end to this king, “*No more shall your name be perpetuated*”. There will be no more descendants; the nation will come to a complete end. This is final. It was regarded as a great curse for a line to be cut off (cf. Ps. 37:22; 28–38; Is. 48:19).

Indeed, Yahweh Himself will prepare Ashurbanipal’s grave; “*I will make your grave*”. And then, to add insult to injury, He adds, “*for you are vile*”. Whilst this rendering clearly fits Ashurbanipal and most Assyrian kings, there is another translation of this Hebrew word קָלִל meaning, “*to be slight, to be trifling, be of little account*”. Ashurbanipal may think that he is a great and powerful king, but before Yahweh he is nothing, of no account.

Moreover, Assyria’s own gods in which they trusted will be destroyed, “*the house of your gods I will cut off*”. All their gods – carved images; metal images – will be destroyed.

## Chapter 1:15-2:13 Judah’s restoration & Nineveh’s destruction

**Chapter 1 Vs 15 (& 2:2)** In the Hebrew text this verse is part of the next chapter and is chapter 2:1 as it marks the beginning of a new oracle.

The term מְבַשֵּׂר usually means “*one bringing good news*” (2 Sam 18:31; 1 Kgs 1:42; Isa 40:9). The LXX has εὐαγγελιζομένου meaning, “*preaching good news*”; i.e. the Gospel. The Hebrew word can refer to the bearer of bad tidings (1 Sam 4:17). Here the message is good news for Judah. The plunderers have been destroyed.

The NT alludes to it in Rom. 10:15 “*As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*. It expresses in poetic form the fact that victory

has been achieved. The feet belong to the herald who brings *good news*: the battle is won, oppression is ended and *peace* can now be established.

**2:2** Perhaps to this verse should be added the words of 2:2 “*For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel, for plunderers have plundered them and ruined their branches*”. This is the “*good news*” of “*peace*” that is being preached. In particular there is “*restoration*” for Judah.

Indeed, Yahweh will restore their splendour. The Hebrew **יָרִיבָהּ** means, “*exaltation, majesty, pride, excellence*”. It seems as if the splendour that will be restored will be equivalent to that of the Davidic Kingdom when the whole country was united and prospered, “*as the majesty of Israel*”.

**Vs 1, 4-10** Constitute a dramatic, video picture of the coming destruction of Nineveh. This is a passage that must be read as a whole in order to capture the vivid description of the Babylonian invasion of 612 BC.

Here is a picture of sudden panic in the city with the noise of chariots is heard in the streets (vs 3-4) and the soldiers, ill prepared for battle – probably drunk – “*stumble as they go*” (vs 5), to face the siege towers of the enemy. According to a Greek story it was the sudden rise of this river, causing a stretch of the wall to collapse, that brought disaster to the city (cf vs 6 “*the river gates are opened*”). The inhabitants of the city flee before the enemy and “*none turns back*” (vs 8). This is the first actual reference to “*Nineveh*”. All her wealth is taken from her by the enemy (vs 9). A graphic description of the psychological effect that this invasion has had upon the people, “*Hearts melt and knees tremble; anguish is in all loins; all faces grow pale!*” (vs 10).

**Vs 11-12** The passage presents a mocking taunt against Nineveh with two rhetorical questions asking where the lions’ dens are, now that Nineveh has been destroyed. It recalls how Assyria as a lion had plundered other peoples, strangling, tearing flesh, and carrying off prey to her cubs in their safe places in Nineveh. The terrors of this nation are no more.

**Vs 13** But now the tables have been turned. Behold, Yahweh is against Nineveh. This has sealed her fate (cf. 3:5). Her military power will certainly be broken. Her soldiers will die by the sword, and her messengers (tax collectors) will no longer threaten other people.

### **Chapter 3: 1-19 The shame that will fall on Nineveh**

**Vs 1-4** Using vivid and chilling language, the prophet depicts Assyria’s evil as they slaughtered many nations not sparing their victims. This graphic portrayal of Assyria’s ruthless violence is not dissimilar to that recorded in Ashurbanipal’s own records (see above page 3). The phrase, “*heaps of corpses dead bodies without end*” might be regarded as unexpected language for a “*Bible*”, but the Word of God seeks to portray the truth as it really is. This was the age in which Israel and Judah existed – red in tooth and claw; survival of the fittest; kill and be killed.

**Vs 5a** At this point the reader can agree with Yahweh's judgments and His reaction of wrath and anger. Such a nation must deserve the wrath of God. Thus the words, "*I am against you declares the Lord of hosts*", are considered to be most appropriate.

**Vs 5b-7** The prophet's language in vs 5b "*and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame*", is typical of the Ancient Near East demonstrating the holding up of a nation to open shame and embarrassment.

Moreover, Yahweh "*treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle*". All that Yahweh will do to Assyria will be done openly with all other nations as witnesses. Indeed, there will be found no nation or person left to show any comfort for Assyria, "*And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?*"

**Vs 8-10** Assyria is made to reflect back on Egypt and Yahweh's treatment of that nation. "*Are you any better than Thebes...Egypt too?*"

The Hebrew for "*Thebes*" is אֲמוֹן (no amon) which stands for the god Amon worshipped in Thebes; thus "*the city of Amon*", i.e. Thebes. The KJV rendering of "*populous no*" (which does not make much sense!) follows Jerome's translation of the Vulgate (Alexandria populorum) where he incorrectly identified the city with Alexandria. This is a difficult text to translate and so the NKV has compromised with the lengthy "*No Amon That was situated by the River*".

Thebes was the most famous city in Egypt from 1580–1205 BC. It was adorned with magnificent . On the eastern part of the Nile was the city of the living; over on the west was a huge necropolis, or city of tombs and monuments to the dead. There was also a large artificial harbour. The Nile apparently divides into four channels at low water at this point, which would explain the literal meaning of the next part of the verse: 'Thebes that sat among the streams/channels, water round about her'. Thebes had been the centre of a great empire stretching from N. Syria to Nubia, but it perished (10) with terrible outcomes for its inhabitants – even its young.

Thebes was captured and partially destroyed by Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C. The greatness of Thebes was legendary in Nahum's time. So was her fall. Nahum reminded Nineveh and in turn his own people that even the greatest kingdoms can fall. (see above page 1 for Assyria's invasion of Thebes).

**Vs 11-13** In a similar fashion so will Nineveh and the whole of Assyria perish – let the king take note of history! In spite of Thebes' greatness and that of her allies, she became an exiled nation. Her infants were dashed in pieces. Her honored and great men were put in chains. Nineveh too will be treated shamefully. Her fortification will be like first ripe figs—they will fall into the mouth of the eater. Her soldiers are weak and unprepared for battle. The gates of the city will be opened to the invader and the bars on the city gates will be burned with fire.

**Vs 14-17** The coming battle for the end is drawing near – preparations are in hand for the final great war that will inevitably end in defeat for Assyria. They must prepare for the "*siege*" (vs 14) that will be set against them. The enemy will be to them like a

swarm of locusts devouring the inhabitants (vs 15). Even if the Assyrian army could be likened to “grasshoppers” and “locusts” (vs17) no success will be achieved.

**Vs 18-19** As the message draws to a close it is to the “King of Assyria” (vs 18) personally that the prophet speaks. He will find no support from his “nobles” or from his “people” for they are all scattered out of control.

Finally, there will be rejoicing and joy among the nations at Assyria’s downfall; “*All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you*”. The prophet observes that instead of sympathy or mourning for Nineveh; “*There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous*”. The whole world had borne the brunt of Nineveh’s cruel treatment; “*For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?*”

### **3. The significance of the message of Nahum for today**

At first sight it may appear, from the language and descriptions of Yahweh’s judgments upon Assyria, that the emphasis upon God’s wrath and anger is too strong. Those who want to suggest that the God of the OT is full of anger whilst the God of the NT is one of love, could have a field day with the book of Nahum! Yet such a dichotomy between the OT and NT is somewhat old fashioned, as much of the OT (see Deuteronomy and Hosea as examples) will not support such a view.

Yet, we must agree that the God of Nahum seems to be one of vengeance, anger and wrath, although there are the occasional insights into Yahweh’s compassion (such as 1:7, 2:2,) but these are very few. Whilst this book does major upon Yahweh as the warrior God as its major theme (it has been said that Nahum presents the most graphic account of warfare in the whole of the Hebrew Bible) it must not be thought that every single book of the Bible should present a fully balanced picture of God’s nature. Nahum is dealing with a specific issue, namely the deserved divine judgement on Assyria. If any of us had lived during the troubled times when Assyria was the conquer we would have been pleased with such a message believing it to be timely. It is a matter of putting the book into its own historical context rather than trying to view it from a western twenty first century perspective.

What, then is the book seeking to say to us in our own era? How do we relate the contents of Nahum to our century and the lives of ordinary Christians living today?

As an answer to this question one could merely ignore the majority of the book whilst pulling out chapter 1:7 and repeating what one would say about Psalm 91. Or, on the other hand, make some political application of the book to any nation that seeks to oppress weaker nations and exercise such cruelty as Assyria did on its victims. To do this, however, would necessitate indicting almost every nation under the sun, for all nations have taken advantage of smaller and more vulnerable countries and thus would deserve the same form of punishments as delivered upon Assyria.

Whilst the above methods could not be criticised, I suggest that we should seek to make a more personal and relevant application of the message of Nahum. We need to be made acutely aware of the fact that God does not and will not tolerate evil and sin either in a nation or a person. Whilst Assyria, and especially its capital Nineveh, is the main objective, the contents of the book are aimed at Ashurbanipal (or a

contemporary reigning king), the King of Assyria (cf 1:14 where the Hebrew second personal singular “you” is used and 3:18 “O King of Assyria”).

We are reminded that Yahweh is “*slow to anger*”, meaning that He is incredibly patient and long-suffering, but even He has His limits. There comes a time when Yahweh’s tolerance runs out and He has to act. When He does react to sin He does so in the most appalling and terrible ways. Someone once said, “*No one can love as God can love; and no one can hate as God can hate*”. As His love is unfathomable so is His wrath.

The concept of Yahweh’s wrath has not been a popular topic for any generation. It has always been difficult for us to equate His wrath with His love. But just as we may find it difficult to fully appreciate His love, so it is difficult to understand His wrath. Because of this intrinsic difficulty we are apt to negate His wrath in favour of His love. We might still not fully grasp the meaning of the latter but it is more favourable than the former.

Yet, the Bible will not allow us to ignore the wrath of God. Almost every book of the Bible portrays something of the divine wrath. Indeed, it is not possible to fully grasp the meaning of the cross of Christ without a serious consideration of the meaning of God’s wrath. Paul in Romans comments on the wrath of God on several occasions. Jesus, using more descriptive terms than any NT writer, talked more about the horrors of hell than any other. The use of the term “*salvation*” can only be understood in the light of God’s eternal judgements otherwise we are at a lost to know that from which we are said to be “*saved*”.

The prophet Nahum may have been aware of this difficulty when he wrote this somewhat strange book and was, therefore, careful to explain the meaning of the divine wrath. He does so by equating it with the divine “*jealousy*” stated at the very beginning of this message; “*The Lord is a jealous God*” (1:2). It is necessary for us, therefore, to assess the significance of this term if we are to come to grips with the meaning of wrath. Jealousy and anger are very closely linked in the Hebrew Bible as expressions of God’s utter holiness.

This verb “*jealous*” (קַנָּא) expresses a very strong emotion whereby some quality or possession of the object is desired by the subject. This root occurs eighty-seven times. The term may be used in a derogatory sense to denote hostile and disruptive passions (Prov 27:4) or in a favorable sense to denote consuming zeal focused on one that is loved (Ps 69:9 recall Jesus using this verse as grounds for his cleansing of the Temple Mark 11:15-17). It may prove helpful to think of “*zeal*” as the original sense from which derived the notions “*zeal for another’s property*” = “*envy*” and “*zeal for one’s own property*”. The central meaning of our word, however, relates to “*jealousy*” especially in the marriage relationship.

In Hosea Yahweh is depicted as being very jealous for the relationship that He has with Israel which provokes him to chastise and judge the nation when it sins and commits spiritual adultery, but such a relationship with Assyria, of course, did not exist. However, Yahweh is very jealous (zealous) for His own holiness. This latter concept abounds within the writings of Ezekiel “*I will be jealous for my holy name*” (Ezekiel 39:25).

Yahweh’s major concern is for His own holy name. When Yahweh was dishonoured even His own people would feel the heat of His anger, “*But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they*

came" (Ezekiel 36:21). Yahweh's ultimate purpose both within Israel and the nations is for Him to be glorified. When His Name is dishonoured by rejection and evil there has to be a reaction within the Godhead. He cannot "*clear the guilty*" (Nahum 1:3b). Divine judgement becomes the natural response of a holy and just God. Yahweh recoils in the sight of sin and it is then that "*His wrath is poured out like fire*" (1:6). Yahweh's "*jealousy*" provokes His wrath.

The lesson to be learned from the book of Nahum, therefore, is that of the wrath of God is something real and must be accepted. It means that one cannot play fast and lose with God; that there is a limit to His patience, and His wrath is something terrible and to be feared.

It might be thought that as Nahum describes how the wrath of God fell upon a pagan nation and not Israel that all Christians are exempt. But a careful reading of the OT will show that when Israel chose to become disobedient and ignore the warnings Yahweh poured out His wrath on several occasions. First Israel, the ten northern tribes were exiled by Assyria and then later Judah was defeated and carried into exile by Babylon – the very same nation that invaded Assyria.

Somehow in today's Christian climate it does not seem politically correct to speak of the wrath of God. Yet, the NT will not permit us to ignore such a theme. Paul tells his readers (Christians, of course) to "*note then the kindness and the severity of God*" (Romans 11:22). Indeed, Hebrews reminds us not to disregard, or treat lightly, the "*discipline of the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:5) when they became wayward.

There are two words used in Hebrews 12:6, "*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives*", which are worthy of observation. In the first place "*discipline*" (Gk παιδεύει ) which in classical Greek means, "*to train children: to cause one to learn*". The emphasis here seems to be that of education, teaching. But the second word is more punitive; μαστυγοῖ "*to chastise; to chastise or castigate with words, to correct: to scourge*", properly used in Matt. 10:17; 20:19; 23:34; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33; John 19:1 "*flog*".

The lesson from Nahum is that we must take God seriously. Don't push God too far with disobedience and indifference. Beware of His discipline. We are warned; "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31). Nahum warns us against perpetuating a known sin; refusing to repent; treating God and His word with indifference.

The strange thing about this book is that it is in complete contrast to Jonah. In Jonah Yahweh provided forgiveness to Assyria in the light of its repentance and so His just judgements were averted. In His love and compassion Yahweh sent a somewhat reluctant prophet and did not pour out His wrath upon the nation of Assyria because they repented.

But did Yahweh offer any room for repentance to Ashurbanipal and his people? One must assume that the "*burden*" (oracle; message) of the prophet Nahum was delivered to Assyria before the wrath of Yahweh fell thus leaving room for repentance if they heeded the warnings of this book. It must be remembered that Jonah also did warn Nineveh of the coming judgement of Yahweh, "*Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*" (Jonah 3:4). One must assume that if Nineveh had not repented then the predicted judgements of Nahum would have fallen upon the nation at that time.

Nahum did offer a way of escape in the words of 1:7 "*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him*"; but it would appear that this invitation to repent and turn to Yahweh went unheeded. Here was the offer of peace and acceptance but it was rejected.

The Psalmist says, "*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness*" (Ps 130:3-4a). Before wrath comes the invitation to repent. Yahweh sends His warnings which, if heeded results in forgiveness. As in the days of Jonah, if Ashurbanipal and Nineveh had repented under the message and preaching of Nahum they would have been spared.

Whilst God is a disciplinarian with His people, there is always the open door of repentance that leads to full and free forgiveness. There is no need to experience the severity of God, or His chastening hand, for the invitation is to repent.

In the midst of the apparent gloom of Nahum's message shines the beauty of these words, "*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him*" (1:7). This is a message to flee from the wrath to come.

However, we must not lose sight of the message of Nahum. It is spoken to us for "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*", (2 Tim 3:16). God intended Nahum to be a message for today's evangelical Church. When we are tempted to think that sin does not matter, think on Nahum! When tempted to return to the practice of a common sin, think on Nahum where the words of Ps 103:4 "*But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared*" (Ps 130:4b) become particularly relevant. I suggest that the message of Nahum should cause us to fear Yahweh with a godly fear.

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