

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

Vol. 2 No. 29

April 8, 2007

The Way of God Nahum 1:3

The indomitable spirit of civilization raises the hopes of men and women to an unprecedented level that they believe they can never be destroyed. It takes centuries to bring a civilization to its knees – indeed to complete decay and destruction. The Bible teaches that God is the One who establishes kings and who tears down kings (Dan. 2:21). It is not having a superior foundation that enables a culture or civilization to remain stable or strong. It is not a superior democratic policy founded on principles of equality for all that ensures peace and stability. No – the only reason any civilization, any culture, any nation, any people, any tribe exists is simply because of the good pleasure of God.

This is not to say that man does not have responsibility. He does and he must wear it as a continual burden (that brings joy and sorrow) and thus fulfill obligations placed upon him by God. It is when a civilization, a culture, or a country seeks to do away with God that trouble begins to brew and bubble as a volcano does before it erupts and brings chaos and destruction. It is when a civilization ignores the voices of the prophets that collapse is not far away. Such was the case with ancient Assyria and especially with her capital, Nineveh. Nineveh is the subject of Nahum's prophecy (Nahum 1:1). The prophet says that the prophecy he received from the Lord concerning Nineveh was a burden (an oracle) that rested on the city. No doubt the prophet too, could feel its heavy awful weight. The destruction or collapse of the most powerful nation in the ancient world is well documented in Scripture (see Isa. 10:12 – 19; 14:24, 25; 30:31 – 33; 31:8, 9; Ezek. 32:22, 23; Zeph. 2:13 – 15; Zech. 10:11). Her doom was certain because God had determined it.

The ancient city of Nineveh is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:11, 12. It was built by that man of war, Nimrod, who also built other cities. During the reigns of the Assyrian monarchs, Nineveh continued to expand. The Assyrians were a ferocious people making war with unending regularity. In time, Israel and Judah began to feel the power of this angry nation. Her first king was Ashur-uballit I (1365 – 1330 BC). Shalmaneser III (859 – 824 BC) attacked Israel and received tribute from King Jehu as recorded on Shalmaneser's "Black Obelisk". The prophet Jonah preached in the city of Nineveh during the reign of Ashur-dan III (772 – 754), some fifty or so years before Assyria captured Israel, (the northern kingdom) and removed her into captivity. Other famous Assyria kings appear in Scripture such as Tiglath-Pileser III (known as Pul, 745 – 727), Shalmaneser V (727 – 722), Sargon II (722 – 705), Sennacherib (705-681), Esarhaddon (681-669) and during Nahum's time, Ashurbanipal (669-626). Assyria would eventually fall to the Babylonians in the years 612 - 609 BC, and these years reveal the crack in the seemingly indestructible kingdom.

Nahum's prophecy is about the fall of Nineveh which would be accomplished in 612 BC. 150 years previously, Jonah had preached to the Ninevites and they had repented in sackcloth and ashes, and God spared them at that time. Jonah lived in the reign of king Jeroboam II (793 – 753 BC). He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 and Jesus regarded Jonah as a historical person swallowed by a great fish (Matt. 12:39 – 41). Nahum begins his prophecy by pronouncing the absolute certainty of Nineveh's destruction. Nineveh has plotted against the Lord (vv. 9 – 11), and as a result God's wrath would be poured out upon the city (see vv. 2, 6 – 8). At the same time, God promises mercy to His people who take refuge in Him (vs. 7). This is always the way of God in Scripture. He is a just and holy God who takes vengeance on His enemies, and

who also is exceedingly merciful and gracious to those who repent and love Him. God is slow to anger (withholds His judgment) – see Ex. 34:6; Numb. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2.

God's ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). He is not only absolutely holy, but God is absolutely powerful (vs. 3). This great power of God is demonstrated by the fact that He will by no means pardon or clear the guilty. He is not partial nor is He unfair in His judgments. God makes perfect judgments. His judgments about us are perfectly right, fair and impartial. He does not need to learn anything about us for He knows us perfectly always. God may allow us to sin, but He will sooner or later require the offending of His person to be assuaged. This can only happen through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, Nineveh listened to God when Jonah preached, and they repented, and God had mercy on them, but they soon returned to their sinful rebellious ways and God will now punish them. This is Nahum's prophecy. God is right to seek justice and He will.

The ways of God are beyond our comprehension. Nahum describes God's way as being in the whirlwind and the storm. The awesome power of a desert sandstorm which obliterates anything and everything in its path is like God in His power. The staggering blazing lightning of a fearful raging thunderstorm is like God in His power. We hide from the sandstorm because we know its destructive might. We are afraid of the hard-driving rain with its merciless sound of incessant beating. We seek shelter from the storm for it may strike us if we venture out into it. These are visible manifestations of God in His glory. The power of creation is simply the revelation of the power of God. The clouds are the dust of His feet (2 Sam. 22:10 - 15; Ps. 18:9 - 14). When you see the magnificence of the clouds both in the storm and on a cloudy day, with their shifting forms, their fast moving pace with the wind, you know that God is astride them. He rides the wind and He rides the clouds. These are descriptions of God's unlimited power. If He rebukes the sea – it would dry up. If He rebukes the rivers – they dry up.

If God should speak a word against Nineveh, then this ancient proud city will fall. She cannot stand. God will prevail over her sinfulness. This is why Nahum speaks as he does in verse 6 – no-one and nothing can withstand the fierce wrath of God. In a future day, men will hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16; also Rev. 19:15). God's wrath is being revealed against all unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), and is coming (Eph. 5:6; Col.3:6). Who can hide from God and the Lamb in the day of His fierce anger? In this day of trouble, the Lord is a stronghold for those who trust Him (Nahum 1:7), but for those who reject Him, He will make an end of His adversaries with an overwhelming flood (vs. 8). Is there not a word here to all the nations of this world? I think there is. Western civilization is hastening in its decline. Europe has abandoned God and we are following hard on her heels. Sin is a reproach to any nation, but righteousness exalts a people. This is not a word for us to be pessimistic, but is a rallying call to the cause of Christ. Jesus would have us serve and labor with unremitting zeal for His cause. We must bear testimony to Christ. This is why we have in Nahum 1:15, the beautiful call to preach the good news. The bringer of good news is proclaiming peace (see Rom. 10:15). He or she wanders the mountains having his or her feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel (Eph. 6:15).

Nineveh's destruction was so complete that the Greek soldier-mercenary Xenophon passed by the ruined mound of the city 200 years after its fall, and thought it was some other place. Alexander the Great, who was fighting nearby, also did not know that he was near the ancient ruins of Nineveh. The ruin of sinful men will be so complete that in the eternal ages to come they will be remembered no more. God and our Lord Jesus Christ will be magnified and gloried by His people. He has come on the mountains preaching peace to us. He has delivered good news to our hearts. How beautiful this is, for we must confess that like great Nineveh, we deserve utter ruin and destruction. Thank God that His way for us has been the way of peace.

This material may be reproduced and distributed in any way providing the wording remains unchanged and Russ Atmore is the acknowledged author. No fee may be charged for distributing this material. Abiding Fruit is produced weekly for the congregation of Bethel Community Church.