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C1115 – May 4, 2011 – Nahum 1:15-2:2
Declaration Of Salvation For Israel

Let's take a few minutes tonight as we opened the book of Nahum to review so far what we've said about the problem of evil. One thing we said is simply that the nature of the discussion is termed theodicy. So if you do some reading you will find this area termed theodicy. That term means that an attempt is being made to justify the existence of God and evil, co-terminously. Men have felt the necessity or burden to give some kind of justification for God.ⁱ

One way to address this so called problem is to counter attack by challenging a non-Christian to account for evil within his own worldview, without borrowing the presuppositions of Christianity. As Dr Bahnsen points out, "It is crucial to the unbeliever's case against Christianity to be in a position to assert that there is evil in the world--to point to something and have the right to evaluate it as an instance of evil...What are the presuppositions in terms of which the unbeliever makes any moral judgments whatsoever?" So Bahnsen calls upon us to challenge the logical incoherence in the unbeliever's set of beliefs. "On the one hand, he believes and speaks as though some activity (e.g., child abuse) is wrong in itself, but on the other hand he believes and speaks as though that activity is wrong only if the individual (or culture) chooses some value which is inconsistent with it (e.g., pleasure, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, freedom). When the unbeliever professes that people determine ethical values for themselves, the unbeliever implicitly holds that those who commit evil are not really doing anything evil, given the values they have chosen for themselves. In this way, the unbeliever who is indignant over wickedness supplies the very premises which philosophically condone and permit such behavior, even though at the same time the unbeliever wishes to insist that such behavior is not permitted--it is "evil."

Because the unbeliever's worldview really cannot account for moral outrage, he "must secretly rely upon the Christian worldview in order to make sense of his argument from the existence of evil which is urged against the Christian worldview! Antitheism presupposes theism to make its case."

I gave the example of Star Wars. Star Wars has good and evil but the only reason Star Wars has good and evil is because there's a presupposed standard of justice coming from outside of Star Wars. Star Wars doesn't have a standard of justice. Star Wars is just the Force and the Force is both good and evil. So if the Force is both good and evil then good and evil are the same, there's no meaningful difference. The difference comes from the world the viewer of the movie lives in. Since we don't live in the universe of Star Wars but a universe of Christianity then we have an absolute standard of right and wrong.

So the first argument is based on the Creator-creature distinction and we're saying that in the Christian worldview where there are two levels of being, the Creator and the created, in that kind of a worldview there can be objective standards by which to distinguish good from evil. But if you reject the Christian worldview and adopt a pagan worldview of only one level of being, the creation, in that worldview there is no objective difference between good and evil. You may not like it but to make any kind of value judgment that has meaning you have to borrow from the Christian worldview.

A second thing you can do if you hear this objection, "How can a good and loving God allow all this suffering," is to deal with the issue of authority. Are we as creatures in any position to object to the existence of evil? And for this we want to turn to Job 38. "If you're really good God then why are you allowing this evil down here?" Job is devoted to this objection. Here is a classic approach to how God answers the problem of evil. First of all, He starts in vv 1-4 by cutting man down to size. If nothing else comes out of this, it's obvious that what comes out is that God is God and man is man. What we are faced with is that God insists on starting the discussion with the Creator-creature distinction. Verse 1, ¹Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, ²"Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? ³"Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! ⁴"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁵Who set its measurements? Since you know.

Or who stretched the line on it?" Go ahead smarty pants, if you know so much about the universe answer this. See, this is what cuts man down to size. In a way it's condescending and it's meant to be because He is the Creator and we are the creature. He does not sit down as AN EQUAL with Job and say, "Gee, Job, you've got some good points there, now let's sit down and you and I together we'll reason this through." That's not the approach; the approach is "You don't know what you're talking about so listen to Me." That's the starting point. Now, I warn you, if you use this approach it will stimulate an intellectual revolt immediately, the Creator-creature distinction is deeply offensive to the carnal heart. And it will rebel against the idea that you must listen to God's mind in this matter and your mind is not capable of making sense of it all apart from His starting point. So the discussion starts right out with a radical diminishing of the human mind. This is not ridiculing human reason, it's simply pointing out there's a proper starting point to the discussion.

It goes on to a barrage of questions and the point is to force us to salute to Him, say "Yes Sir." There's an authority of His being, and God is refusing to answer anyone on any other starting point than the one that respects the Creator-creature distinction. Don't you think that that is a model for how we need to deal with people's questions? The problem is we get trapped because we buy into a question that's thrown at us, we don't carefully analyze the question and we go 50 mph into answering a question that was the wrong question to start with. God does not accept at face value our questions. That's why in the Job passage, and many of these passages, God insists on a Creator-creature starting point.

Only with that as the origin of the discussion will He proceed. If you start anywhere else you'll wind up chasing your tail. I assure you you'll become exhausted trying to answer unbelievers and so I'm trying to preserve some energy for you and just cut straight to the chase; don't ever accept any other basis of discussion than the Creator-creature distinction. He is the authority and He is not going to discuss things with us on any other terms. Those are His rules and we have to insist upon His rules. Man is not able, in his autonomy, to start with his own rules and conclude with any meaningful answer.

So those are the two pieces of the puzzle so far. One, a person's worldview must be able to account for evil, otherwise they're just borrowing from yours, stealing from the Christian worldview, which is a tacit admission that it's true, and two, a person must submit the terms of the debate to the authority of the Creator. His terms are the starting point of the discussion. If you can't get a person to agree to those two things then the discussion can't go anywhere.

Alright, if you'd open your Bible to the Book of Nahum. Nahum was written between the fall of Thebes in 663BC and the rebuilding of Thebes in 654 (3:8-10). It was written for the purpose of prophesying judgment on the evil empire of Nineveh and consoling Judah who was terrorized by this evil empire (1:1) - a prophecy which was fulfilled in 612BC. The theme of the book is that the apparent paradox between the existence of God and evil is that the Lord is just and therefore judges evil by His great power but He is also gracious and His grace gives men a time to repent before He judges. So evil will persist in our world for a time but He will by no means leave justice unrecompensed. He finally judges evil. He surgically cuts it out and separates the good out from the evil. And so the destruction of Nineveh is a foretaste, on a local scale, of the final separation of good and evil on a cosmic scale. Finally, we can be assured, good and evil will not be allowed to co-exist side by side eternally, but God's grace will come to a close and His judgment will fall and at that point good and evil will be separated eternally and never shall the twain meet. And so we're dealing with truths concerning the doctrine of judgment/salvation.

We see in vv 2-3a the basis of the judgment which is God's character, **A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.** The LORD has enemies and ultimately the issue of justice is not between men and men but between God and men. Verse 3, **The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.** His character is the basis of judgment because His character is the standard for right and wrong in the universe.

Then in vv 3b-6 we see the nature of His judgment; His judgment is meted out through nature. **In a whirlwind storm is His way, And clouds are**

the dust beneath His feet. **4**He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither. **5**Mountains quake because of Him And the Hills dissolve; Indeed the Earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. **6**Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him. That's all judgment by means of atmospheric chaos, turbulence, meteorological interference, geological catastrophes, earthquakes, volcanoes and the like.

Then in verse 7 we have salvation. None can stand before His fierce judgment but to those who take refuge in Him there is salvation **7**The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him. That is, He perfectly discriminates based on His omniscience, He knows those who take refuge in Him and they will not be caught up in the wake of judgment.

But verse 8, for those who do not take refuge in Him, **with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of it's site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness.** Here he is shifting from the general nature of His judgment to the particular judgment on Nineveh. It will be a flood, an overflowing of the Tigris and Tebiltu Rivers that come next to and through the city of Nineveh in 612BC. That Nineveh was destroyed by a flood is confirmed in the archaeology. As for those who escape the flood, He **will pursue His enemies into darkness**, referring to His pursuit of the escapees to Haran where they were destroyed in 610BC.

So now we're in the thick of what are the general features of the destruction of Nineveh and its inhabitants, a flood in verse 8, a fire in verse 10; these are general features, the specifics will come in chapter 2 and 3.

But what it all goes back to is verse 9. One Assyrian ruler devised a plan **against the LORD** and that ruler was Sennacherib. Back in 714BC he destroyed the 46 fortress cities that protected Jerusalem and then he came up and surrounded Jerusalem itself. This was an attack **against the LORD** because the LORD had chosen Jerusalem as the city where He would put His name forever and since His name signifies His reputation He would protect His reputation by protecting the city. So the LORD made a **complete end of**

that plan when He sent the angel of the LORD, the pre-incarnate Christ and destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. **Distress will not rise up twice**, it rose up with Sennacherib and his arrogant dynasty had continued to rule down through Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, Ashur-etil-ilani and his brother Sin-shur-ishkun. The whole family was a briar of arrogance and God says if I don't cut out this briar it's going to come up against Jerusalem again and I'm not going to allow that to happen.

So verse 10 is describing the complex depravity of the arrogant Assyrians, a tangle of thorns, depravity can develop and get worse and worse in its manifestations of evil and when the Bible discusses thorns it's talking about the Fall of man and the fact that as it works its way out it produces all kinds of evil and it's an apt description of the Assyrians; they developed complex evil, highly developed grotesque things. I read some of the things they did to their captives and it's some of the nastiest memoirs of history. We see the same thing going on today the way Islam treats US POW's. We see it in our own country when you read about people staging murders. What's happened is here you have a person with a sinful heart and it works its way out step by step until it develops highly complex manifestations of evil. It's a marvel how dark our hearts can become.

Notice verse 11, **From you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the LORD, A *belial* counselor, a wicked counselor**, that's word used of Satan in the NT. The NT authors picked that up and applied it to Satan because they recognized that Satan was behind these evil rulers, he was the inspirer of these dark deeds. And so Assyria would be judged and Israel would be saved, let's come on down to our text tonight in verse 15.

Nahum 1:15, here we find one of the earliest references to the gospel. It's almost an exact quote of a passage found in your margin. Where does it come from? Isaiah 40, Isa 52. Isaiah was ministering just a few years before Nahum and Isaiah introduced us to the gospel. Now Nahum says I have a gospel to announce, let's look at it. **Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news**, the gospel, now comes the content of what Nahum visualizes the gospel as being, **Who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely**. What's the content of this gospel? **peace**. We have peace, no more war, no more Sennacherib's

passing through waging war but peace. And the reason there's peace is not because peaceful negotiations have taken place. The reason there's peace is because judgment has taken place. There can be no peaceful negotiation with these kinds of people. The Assyrians were totalitarian regimes that ruled by barbarism, terrorism and propaganda. And you can't negotiate with these people. It's like trying to negotiate with the Muslim world. They lie for a living; it's built in to their moral code. Lying to Jews and Christians, the infidels, is the standard of morality in their book. How can you negotiate with a liar, that's no basis for peace. There's only one way to deal with these people. Cut them off, destroy them. That's why God instituted human government and militaries. To protect, to cut off evil, to curb its appetite, that's the only way to get **peace**. And so here comes a messenger, he's crossing the mountains on foot, he's on his way from Nineveh and he brings the gospel. Nineveh is destroyed, the wicked Assyrians are cut off. We have peace not war. God's justice has been met. Evil has been cut off.

So understand, whenever God judges evil, it could be on a small scale as here, or it could be on a large scale, a last days cosmic thing, the final separation of good and evil, but notice it's a thing to be rejoicing in, **Celebrate your feasts, O Judah**. Go have a party, it's a great day when evil is defeated. Just like the other day when Osama bin Laden was shot by a Navy Seal, you know what they did at West Point? They had a big party, they celebrated out on the lawn, they rejoiced. Oh, we shouldn't do that? Why not? Evil was cut off. Do you like evil? You like keeping evil around so they can go around killing innocents? Osama bin Laden's death is a gospel. It's good news. And when Nineveh was defeated in 612BC that was a gospel. Evil was defeated and justice prevailed. Now this defeat of evil, whether it be Osama bin Laden, the Ninevites or all unbelievers who thumb their nose at God is increasingly becoming unpopular. We have to be tolerant of everyone and everybody. For example, when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ that's offensive, that's dirty talk because the gospel of Jesus Christ is heaven and hell talk. So some people in the church have come along and they're going to fix the gospel, we old fundies have got it all wrong. The gospel is not about hell. Here's Rob Bell, he's the new hit in Christianity, actually he's a heretic, but look at what he says about the gospel, "A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better...It's been

clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear." See, the gospel to Bell is religious pluralism, that we forgive one another and forgiveness of one another will heal our world, make it a better place by enacting radical environmental policies that actually make the poor poorer, forcing them to grovel in poverty, but through all that we create a newly renovated heaven and earth. That's heaven to Rob Bell, that's his gospel. But it's a far cry from the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a great promise of salvation consummated in a new heaven and new earth, not a simple renovation of the present one, and the gospel is equally a threat of judgment upon all who reject Christ. Hell to pay. There are two sides to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hell is a side of the gospel that people don't often look at, but if you really understand what the gospel is saying it's a fierce thing. It means that God is going to judge evil and cast it in hell. Well I thought the gospel was a lovey dovey thing, God saving people. That is true, God does save people but God also judges people.

So should we celebrate the judgment of evil? Well, do you think we were supposed to be sad when Herod the Great died? Are we supposed to be upset when Herod Antipas died of worms? Are we supposed to grieve when Judas Iscariot killed himself? I don't think so. I think we're supposed to rejoice because those are foretastes of the fact that God is just and God will finally judge evil and separate the evil from the good, and He created a special place, actually designed for Satan and the fallen angels, but men end up there too because they agree with Satan. That's part of the gospel. How do you get salvation from evil if you don't judge evil? How do you ever get separation? When you see the gospel, understand that there are two sides to the gospel, not one; salvation yes, but judgment also. You can't have one without the other. And the church in modern times is only presenting half the gospel, if they even preach that. It sounds like salvation on the surface but if we just preach one side of the gospel what happens? You distort the true gospel. It comes out sounding something like a plea, oh wouldn't you please believe, if you don't believe then God's going to be hurt. He's not going to be hurt, you're the one that's going to be hurt. That's the gospel. Believe or burn in hell. That's the fierceness of the gospel. And yeah, it discriminates. By definition the gospel discriminates; bow the knee to Jesus Christ or agree with Satan

and go live with him. And when this separation occurs and evil is separated out, praise God, rejoice, celebrate because that's a necessary corollary of our final salvation. Justice has been served.

So he tells them in verse 15 when the good news arrives that there is **peace**, Nineveh has been destroyed, **Celebrate your feasts, O Judah**. They nation had seven feasts on their annual calendar, three of them were national holidays and they were to gather and celebrate, they were big parties and they hadn't had the freedom to celebrate these feasts while Assyria dominated so now that they were defeated they could celebrate them.

Pay your vows. The vow was a serious thing if you made one. They're outlined in Num 6 and if you made a vow and didn't keep it that was a bad thing. It would have been better if you didn't make it at all. Vows were promises to God; and they were made, not legalistically but willfully. If someone wanted something from God then he would make a vow to God and say, Lord if you'll get me out of this jam I'll perform this service down at the Temple and once the Lord got him out of the jam then he'd go down and perform the service in the Temple and then he'd be released from the vow. So they were temporary things. Maybe it was a pressure situation, maybe business was bad, maybe the marriage was going sour, maybe they were being persecuted, but something was bad in life and so they'd make these vows to the Lord to get me out of this jam. And you obviously had a lot of Jews wanting to get out of the Assyria jam. Assyria was ruthless and they were struggling under their tyrannical rule and so you had all kinds of Jews making vows to the Lord. Lord, if you'll just take care of the Assyrians I'll perform this service and now that God has taken care of the Assyrians it's time for them to go down to the temple and pay up. So, the point is that the OT vows were voluntary, they weren't legalistic and they were serious, you better pay up and when you do you're released from the vow.

For never again, so here he's giving the reason to go celebrate and pay up to terminate the vow, **for never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely**, probably referring to Sennacherib's dynasty, that was the end of his dynasty, someone from outside that family came to rule on the throne of Assyria that moved over to Haran. So the **wicked one**, the wicked dynasty of Sennacherib **will never again pass through you**, pass through you means to come through and decimate militarily and carry

away into exile. He had come in and carried some of the Judean kingdom into exile and he's saying here, never again, I've taken care of the evil problem.

Before we go on to chapter 2 what do we know so far? One we know that Nineveh will be destroyed by a flood of the rivers and tributaries that run next to and through the city. Two we know that the Assyrian army will be drunk on the night of its final defeat. Three we know that fire will be involved, the invading soldiers will set fire to the city. Four we know that Sennacherib's dynasty will be defeated never to rise again. Five we know that there will be some who escape the destruction and they will head West to Haran where the armies will continue to pursue them and further defeat them. Six we know that this defeat of Assyria will destroy any chance of Assyria remaining the world's superpower. A new power is rising. Seven we know that this will set Israel free from Assyria's tyrannical rule so she can celebrate by keeping her feasts.

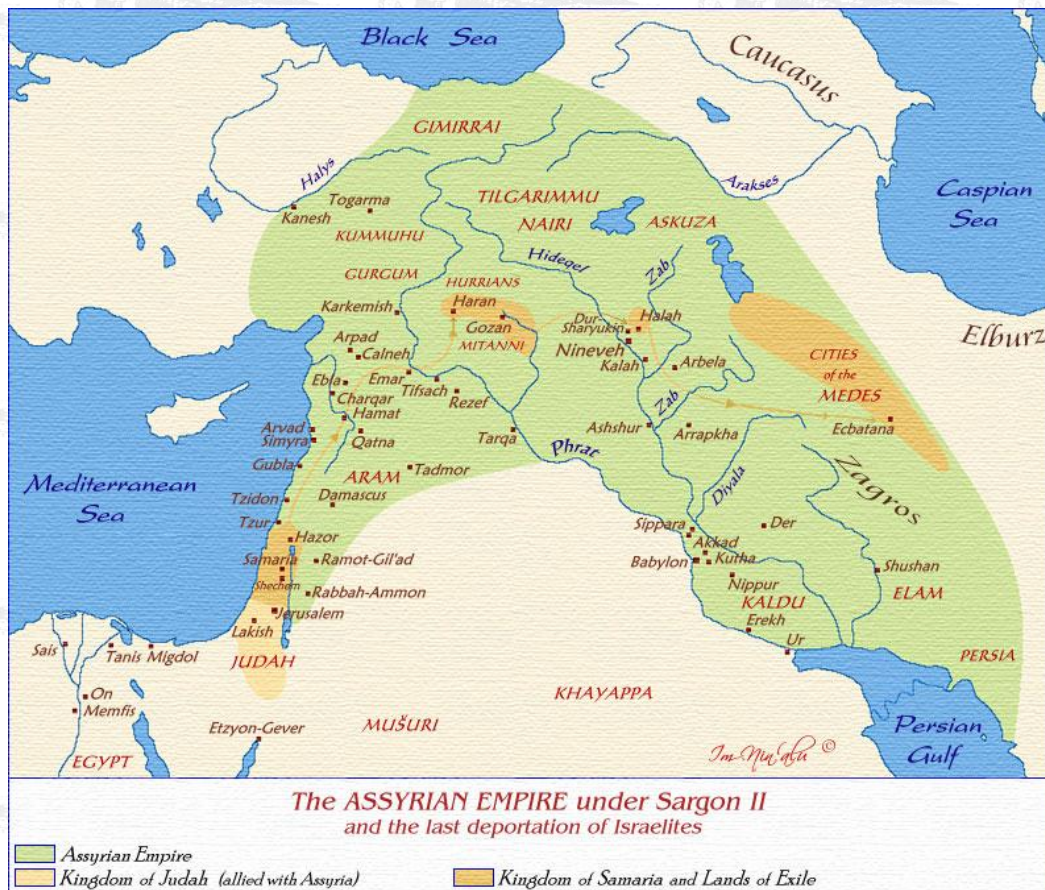
Now having described in generalities the destruction of Nineveh in 612BC we come to 2:1 and most commentators take it as a warning to the Ninevites to prepare for the final assault against her. There's nothing she can do so it's irony, but go ahead, make preparations for battle. So if we look at verse 1 we have a warning to the Ninevites to prepare for the final assault against her **The one who scatters has come up against you. Man the fortress, watch the road; Strengthen your back, summon all your strength.** Get your soldiers ready, get them up on the walls of Nineveh, send out scouts along the road to gather intelligence, strengthen your back means get all your military gear out; armor, shields, spears, bow and arrows, slings, it's a warning to prepare for battle.

Now **The one who scatters** we know in retrospect was Nabopolassar, king of the Babylonians. He had come to power in 626BC and by 623BC had freed the Babylonians from Assyrian control and so Babylon began their rise to power around 625BC and the royal records get kind of sketchy at this point. Things begin to pick back up around 614BC when the Assyrians felt Babylon to be a threat and so they called up Egypt, probably by threatening them, and they formed an alliance to try and stave off the Babylonians. So we have a series of battles as the surrounding nations try to usurp power in the region and take the supremacy. The Babylonians and the Assyrians fought several

battles in the Fertile Crescent, some ending in the favor of the Babylonians and others the Assyrians, but the Assyrians were facing heavy losses.

To the East the Assyrians also had to deal with the Medes who made incursions into Assyrian territory and conquered the city of Ashur, south of Nineveh. After the battle Nabopolassar of the Babylonians arrived to help the Medes but he was too late. However, the two leaders, Nabopolassar of the Babylonians and Cyaxerxes of the Medes, met and made an alliance. In 613 they joined forces along with the Scythians from the North around the Black Sea and this was the real turning point. "The Median army came down and linked up with the Babylonian Army. Together they marched to Nineveh where they conducted a three-month siege from the month of Sivan to the month of Ab. They achieved a great victory and Sin-sharra-ishkun met his death. After the Medes return to their homeland, the Babylonian army pursued the Assyrians as far as the city of Nasibin (Nisibin), a major city in the northern Jezirah. The kingship of Assyria was assumed by Ashur-uballit II in Harran, the great crossroads city on the upper reaches of the Balih River." "The following year was spent on the campaign of plunder and Assyria. Then in 610 B.C.E., the Babylonian and median armies converged on Harran..." took it and plundered it, driving "away the combined Syrian and Egyptian forces who apparently retreated westward to Carchemish." "Nabopolassar was now in virtual control of all of Mesopotamia." He is the **one that scatters** in verse 1.

Now verse 2, verse 2 deals with a restoration, you say, they're not even in exile yet. Well, ten of the tribes did go into exile to Assyria in 721BC. So the ten tribes have already been transported and colonized and here's a map that depicts the places they were taken.



You see some taken up around Haran and Gozan, others taken to Halah, north of Nineveh and the vast majority taken over to Ecbatana and the cities of the Medes. These were the deportations of Sargon II after the siege of Samaria that ended in 721BC. So they were in exile, the two tribes of Judah in the south were not in exile yet, but the verse presupposes that they would go into exile and that exile occurred at the hands of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. It occurred in three stages; 605BC, 597BC and the final siege of Jerusalem and exile from 588-586BC. Eventually all 12 tribes would be scattered among all the nations, what we call the Diaspora Jew and they have remained there essentially for 2500 years as the times of the Gentiles continues. So the times of the Gentiles began with the Exile and the first kingdom of the Gentiles in this scheme is Babylon, then you have Medo-Persia, then Greece and finally Rome and Rome has two phases, Rome phase one is past but Rome phase two is forming. After all this verse 2 predicts, **the LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob Like the splendor of Israel, Even though devastators have devastated them And destroyed their vine branches.** And he's saying all during this period of the times of the Gentiles Israel has been devastated by Gentiles, she's been under Gentile

tyranny. There's no nation that has ever been devastated like Israel. Everywhere they've gone, everywhere they've tried to amalgamate, everywhere they've tried to settle there have been Gentiles that rise up and persecute them and isolate them and execute them.

Finally Nahum says, when all the devastators have devastated them and destroyed their vine branches, then the **LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob Like the splendor of Israel.** That's all 12 tribes, all 12 tribes remain because God made covenant promises to them and Israel can't be exterminated. She's a pest, in the Gentiles eyes, that can't be squashed. She will remain, they will be destroyed. And the only reason is because God has laid His reputation on the line, God has made promises to them and so His name is at stake and He will do what He has sketched out He will do. He has planned, He will bring it to pass.

So we've seen that evil Nineveh will be judged and Israel will be saved, they celebrated at the destruction of evil but they finally all went into exile, but again they will all be saved, they will finally be restored after the times of the Gentiles has run its course and God intervenes directly into history to judge the nations and save His people once more.

¹ In light of that one of the things I would encourage you to do is consider the fact that God is His own theodicy. That He doesn't need any justification. He is His own justification. God has planned and allowed a certain degree of evil in the world for a purpose and He knows what is best.

[Back To The Top](#)

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