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C1121 – June 29, 2011 – Nahum 3:8-19
The Inevitability Of Judgment

Alright, if you'd open your Bible to Nahum 3 we're going to see if we can finish up the last verses of Nahum. The theme of Nahum is how God's nature resolves the problem of evil. This is often thought to be a problem for Christianity and given some of the responses Christians have given, if I were an atheist I would attack Christianity at this point. However, the irony is it's not a problem for Christianity; it's a problem for those who reject Christianity, because in rejecting Christianity they have erased any objective grounds for identifying evil. That is, they can't give a meaningful analysis of what is good or what is evil in their worldview. They may not like it that a man beats his wife or that a child is molested, but in their worldview that is just their subjective opinion. That's the problem for non-Christians, what is the ground upon which you are standing to spout off?

The way the Bible handles the persistence of evil in our world is by focusing our eyes on God's character. We argue that God is good and that God is loving and that God is all powerful and that evil does exist, and that there is no contradiction at all. Therefore God has a good and sufficient reason for the evil that exists in His plan whether or not we can see what that good and sufficient reason is. Now the opponent will argue back that well, once God tells me the good and sufficient reason then I will consider it and if I think it is a good and sufficient reason then I will sign off on it. But what is that stating? All it's stating is I don't believe, I don't accept God's word on His authority. I only accept things on my authority. So it's stating nothing more than what we already know, you don't believe. It's not stating a reason not to believe, it's simply reasserting that you don't believe. God insists, on His own authority, without your approval or mine that He has a good and sufficient reason for the evil that exists and that in the end He will destroy it. That's why Nahum is such a fantastic book. It gives us a foreview of the fact that

God will destroy evil, this is not an open ended question. This is a closed question. God has already demonstrated publically for everyone's eyeballs to see, that the evil is a temporary situation and not an eternal situation. Paganism has always had the real problem of evil, apart from being unable to objectively identify it, in paganism evil is an eternal phenomenon, it has no beginning and it has no end. It gets back to the bottom diagram (used in previous lessons), and in that picture evil has no end, it's just an eternal admixture of good and evil. So who has the real problem of evil now? Not Christianity.

Now one of the historical precedents for the destruction of evil is the destruction of Nineveh in 612BC. This assures us that evil will come to an end. What people don't like is the idea that for evil to come to an end it has to be destroyed. That is too judgmental in tone and people don't like judgment, let me revise that, people that aren't right with God don't like it. They like to judge those who judge but they don't like the idea of ultimate judgment because what is ultimate judgment saying? It's saying you are ultimately responsible. And men are ultimately fleeing from ultimate responsibility; they are fleeing from the one to whom they are ultimately responsible - God. If you want a picture of that just go back to page 3 in the Bible, Adam and Eve hiding in the bushes. Why are they hiding in the bushes? Because they have short accounts; because they don't measure up to the standard that, by the way, didn't suddenly get lost when they sinned. They still knew that God was the objective standard of good and evil and that they were at odds with Him, why else would they be hiding? So to come face to face with ultimate judgment before a holy God is the ultimate fear. That's not nice talk, that's politically incorrect talk; the gospel itself is politically incorrect because it implies ultimate judgment. But regardless of political incorrectness humans are still responsible for what has happened in history. And Nahum goes to great pains to show that it was God utilizing man and nature to destroy the evil of Nineveh. When I talk this way I'm opposite the world. The world is suppressing this idea that God has at His disposal human armies and nature as tools to carry out His destruction and so when we see wars, when we see destruction, that we say is the judgment of God. The world says no. But the OT insists that God is using men and nature to carry out His judgments on earth. And yet at the same time the men He uses to carry out the judgments are fully responsible. What man does, even when decreed by God, is man's responsibility. But you will argue if man could not do otherwise then how can

man be held responsible? It's the same argument Paul brings up as a hypothetical objection in Romans 9. And Paul's argument is that responsibility is not based on freedom of choice, responsibility is based on the authority of God. And it's right here that people get rubbed the wrong way. They want to be held responsible for what they freely choose, they want the basis of responsibility to be the power of contrary choice. However, God says no, that is not what I base responsibility on; I base human responsibility on My authority. How do we see this early in the Bible? Every one of us is held responsible for a choice we didn't consciously make. What is it? Eating the fruit in the garden. Rom 5:12 clearly states that when Adam ate the fruit of that tree we all sinned in him. And you say, well that wasn't my fault, I didn't consciously choose that. No, you did not consciously choose that, nevertheless, God says it is your fault and God holds you responsible for it. Why? Because He is the authority. And when people figure out that God is the authority and they accept it then they're 99% of the way there. Responsibility is based on God's say so, not man's free choice, so deal with it.

As an example: God decreed that the Babylonians would whack the Assyrians and then God held the Babylonians accountable for it. Why? Because God planned it. Did they do other than they wanted to do? No. The Babylonians wanted to whack the Assyrians. Every man always does what he wants to do. Given a set of circumstances a man will choose to do that which he most wants to do. He may not want to do either of two things but given that those are his circumstances he will choose that which he most wants to do. So, all this is to state that when we discuss human freedom we must discuss it in terms of what the Bible says and not what man thinks. And this impacts the problem of evil because obviously God planned evil and yet humans, not God, are held morally responsible for the evil that exists.

One last thing that we learn is the proper response to the destruction of evil. How should we respond when evil people, evil countries, evil regimes get whacked? People struggle with this. I remember watching a documentary on John Douglas of the FBI who was instrumental in founding a special unit designed to investigate serial killers. And you watch them track and learn how the mind of a serial killer works and how they catch them and when the end of the documentary comes they're discussing the different perspectives people have on executing serial killers in the electric chair. And so you have these psychologists coming in there, oh, they were temporarily insane and

they shouldn't be put in the electric chair. And then you have John Douglas and the day the serial killer is put in the electric chair is a good day, it means he can rest the next day, not that he liked watching the guy fry to death, it's just that John Douglas had to see crime scene after crime scene after crime scene of what these killers did and it was elaborate, complex, thematic cold blooded murder and so he knew what they had done to other people and so he didn't have a problem at all sentencing people to the electric chair. So people have different ways of responding to the destruction of evil and we want to see how the Bible says we should respond to it.

Now remember the Assyrians were arrogant, that was their chief quality, we are so great nobody can knock us down. They went into the other surrounding nations and they talked a lot of smack, propaganda was a degree you could get at the local university, and they used propaganda to scare people into submission. Then, if that didn't work they used brutal war tactics. They developed all kinds of inhumane techniques of killing people and so they had the whole region subdued. They were in solid control of the entire Mesopotamian region, all the way north into modern day Turkey and south into Egypt along the Nile. They had a number of things that contributed to their arrogance. First, their strategic location along the Tigris River protected their western flank from an invading army. Second, the wealth they had pillaged; a fortune of gold and silver from all the surrounding nations. And third, their military. They had a very large army and lots of weapons, you can see on the map of Nineveh the arms reservoir. It was huge. All this contributed to their arrogance.

And arrogance is the height of sin and when it goes unchecked it works its way out into complex depravity where you have multiple habitual sin patterns all interacting and producing complex evil. And you can see this in people groups today. It's not isolated to the Assyrians. It's reared its ugly head in Germany in the 1930's where some scholars have pointed out the metaphorical parallelisms between the brutality of Nazi Germany and the ancient Assyrians. Others people groups that have metaphorical parallels are the Muslims. Muslims have a very barbaric form of warfare and use a lot of propaganda. These sin patterns are patterns that rear their ugly head over and over and over in history. And the only way to deal with it is to destroy it. People don't like that but tonight we find out that that indeed is the answer; there's no peaceful negotiation with these people, you just have to obliterate

them because if you don't they will obliterate you and take over the whole world.

So in verse 8 we start in on the inevitability of the obliteration. God is going to obliterate them and in that situation God challenges the Ninevites to think, for five seconds would you just think, if you still can. Verse 8, **Are you better than No-amon, Which was situated by the waters of the Nile, With water surrounding her, Whose rampart *was* the sea, Whose wall *consisted* of the sea? ⁹Ethiopia was *her* might, And Egypt too, without limits. Put and Lubim were among her helpers. ¹⁰Yet she became an exile, She went into captivity; Also her small children were dashed to pieces At the head of every street; They cast lots for her honorable men, And all her great men were bound with fetters.** It's a comparison: would you, Nineveh, compare yourself with No-amon. What's No-amon? It's a city, and if you have a study Bible look in your margin, there should be a note there that No-Amon was the ancient Egyptian city known to the Greeks as what? Thebes. The Egyptians called it Amun, after the local patron deity who was chief of the Egyptian pantheon, Amun or sometimes Amun-Ra. They had a hierarchy of gods and goddesses like most ancient pagans and this god was at the top of the hierarchy. He was considered the Creator and interestingly, the creation was not an extension of him, it was distinct, and therefore Amun was viewed as transcendent, just like the God of the Bible. However, Amun was not immanent, that is, he did not work upon creation from the outside as the God of the Bible does. So he had similarities to YHWH but differences too. And he rose to prominence in Egypt after the Hebrews left Egypt under Moses' leadership. What happened was the plagues of Egypt were so devastating to the Egyptian economy and their military was destroyed in the Red Sea, that it made it very easy for the invading Hyksos people to take over and rule Egypt. We don't know much about the Hyksos but they ruled for a short time over Egypt and finally the Egyptians recovered and expelled them. That's when the god Amun rose to prominence because the Egyptian who expelled the Hyksos was from the city of Thebes and the patron deity of the city of Thebes was Amun so he rose to be the chief of the Egyptian pantheon and Greek travelers who went to Thebes recognized him as the Egyptian parallel to the Greek Zeus and so they also called the city "The Great City of God".

Now this city was similar to Nineveh as verse 8 tells us, it was strategically located, notice, **by the waters of the Nile With waters surrounding her, Whose rampart was the sea, Whose wall consisted of the sea.** Now the maps I've looked at don't agree exactly on the location, some place it on the West side of the Nile, some on the East side and some on both sides. The majority place it on the East side with the Valley of the Kings on the opposite side. From the description given by Nahum I suggest the majority of the city was located on the East side here, with portions on the West side, but the majority was along this bend in the river so that these two sides of the city were surrounded **by the waters of the Nile.** And when the text says **Whose rampart was the sea, Whose wall consisted of the sea** you have to understand that the Nile River at this location was 1500 feet wide, so it literally appears as a **sea**, this **sea** of waters formed wall of water around much of the city. From the text we also learn that there were canals that came off of the Nile **sea** that totally **surrounded** the city.



So Thebes or Amun, was a very well protected city, it's inhabitants dwelt in peace and security, and Nahum challenges the Ninevites to compare themselves to her in verse 8, **Are you better than No-Amon?** And obviously they were not. The Ninevites knew that they were far worse than

the inhabitants of **No-Amon**. And so how could they expect to escape judgment? That's the point God is aiming at.

No-Amon had been defeated probably about 10 years before in 663BC by the king of Assyria, Ashurbanipal, so they knew about the defeat of Amon. They probably heard lots of stories about this victory. What had happened was in 663BC Ashurbanipal and the Assyrian army had come down the Mediterranean coastline and gathered up several servile armies, including the armies of Judah under King Manasseh, and they marched down and took the city of Amun. So there were Jews from Judah who saw the destruction of this city too and they knew that if God could destroy Amun with its great fortification of the seas of the Nile on all sides, then clearly God could destroy Nineveh with its lesser fortifications of the Tigris.

And further, if we press on to verse 9, Amon had help, **Ethiopia was her might, And Egypt too, without limits. Put and Lubim were among her helpers**, these were allied armies. **Ethiopia was mighty, And Egypt too**, they had an innumerable army and they came to the aid of the city of Amun. And further they had **Put and Lubim** two auxiliary armies, **Lubim** refers to the Libyan's along the northern coast of Africa, just like it does today. Put we're not to sure of, but the point is clear, they had a large army and the help of auxiliary armies and yet verse 10, **she became an exile, She went into captivity**; And they are reminded of the terrors of the battle, **her small children were dashed to pieces At the head of every street; They cast lots for her honorable men, And all her great men were bound with fetters**. It was a terrible defeat for Amon and Nahum holds it up as a mirror to the Nineveh to describe her fate. The argument is clear, if Nineveh was no better than No-Amon and her fortifications by the Nile were no better than No-Amon's by the Nile and if Nineveh's armies were no better than No-Amon's then how did Nineveh think they would escape judgment since No-Amon had not?

Now I think you can draw from this warning to Nineveh, by implication, that God is saying you still have time to repent and change your ways. Why else would God challenge them by remembering this historic defeat of Amon? So just as in Jonah's day God sent Jonah to warn them of their destruction. The obvious implication was that if you repent and change your ways then you'll be spared. That's the whole reason Jonah didn't want to go, He didn't want

them to be spared but He knew God well enough to know that if he was being sent to preach to them then God wanted to spare them. So here again God is revealing in advance a warning that unless they change their ways they will be destroyed. So as always there is grace before judgment. God is very gracious, He is much more gracious than we are, God will put up with evil and put up with evil, He is very longsuffering and gives them grace to repent, grace to repent. And this is why humans get so frustrated and begin to ask, now if there is a God why is He allowing all this evil to go on and on and on? If He's really good why doesn't He judge these creeps and get rid of it? But it goes on and on and on and we get frustrated. And the point is that God is not like us, God is very patient, much more patient than any one of us and He doesn't take pleasure in judging, He's not itching to pour out wrath, but finally He does when He reaches the end of His rope.

Now verses 11-13, and here the shift is to the future tense, in verse 10 it is the past tense, No-Amon became an exile, it's a historic example of what's coming, and verse 11 is what's coming, it's future tense, Nineveh **too will become drunk**, when you're **drunk** you don't know what you're doing; you're an idiot, you can't perceive reality correctly. Amun was drunk, they thought nobody could take them down and so Nineveh will be drunk, she thinks nobody can take her down. She's an idiot, totally deceived. This is what arrogance and reliance on created fortifications results in. The whole point is arrogance is a blinder to reality. And when you're blinded you put your trust in kings, you put your trust in job security, you put your trust in the military, you put your trust in your borders or your fortifications, you put your trust in all sorts of things that can't save you. They are all gimmicks. Don't fool yourself; whatever happens in the 2012 presidential elections is not going to save you. The only thing that can save you is God. He is the only non-gimmick. He is the only one that can save you. I don't know what you're facing in life but I do know that unless you want to walk headlong into destruction He's your only hope. But arrogance blinds us from turning to Him because arrogance builds up the idea that we're so great and we've got all these resources and we can do it, we can solve our problems. And over and over and over the Bible teaches you are weak and He is strong and that the only way to solve your problems is by faith, by trusting in God's promises of deliverance. God is a savior, not man.

So he's saying you, Nineveh, will be drunk. You're so arrogant you won't be able to put your trust where it belongs, you'll keep trusting in gimmicks and Nahum says, **You will be hidden.** That is, the city of Nineveh, when it is defeated, the ruins will be totally covered. And this is exactly what happened - the whole site was covered in a mound of dirt. That's why the Babylonian Chronicles report, "The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap." It wasn't even discovered until the 1840's and when it was discovered it was covered by a 30-metre high, 100-acre mound of dirt. How do you like that for destruction? Imagine our whole city, the city of Fredericksburg, this entire valley filled with dirt. That's the picture of Nineveh here, **You will be hidden. You too will search for a refuge from the enemy.** Just like the inhabitants of Amun did, they ran in fear, so the Ninevites would flee when disaster came and they'd look for a place to hide but there wouldn't be any hiding places. It would be a total disaster and it was.

Verse 12, **All your fortifications are fig trees with ripe fruit— When shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth.** Hard for the Ninevites to believe but true. It's the way all gimmicks are, they work for awhile and so we think they're strong, hey, this is working and then bang, the whole thing crumbles and that's what he's saying about their fortifications; they're weak, as weak as ripe figs on a fig tree; all you have to do is shake it and they fall right off, so they fortifications of Nineveh, they will be breached and destroyed.

And once that happens, verse 13, **Behold, your people are women in your midst!** That is the men will become like women in the heat of battle, they won't be able to stop the attack, completely incapacitated. **The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies; Fire consumes your gate bars.** The gates of the land are the approach routes to the city, there were various passes leading to the city and you would build fortified castles along these approach routes and man them with soldiers and he's saying when the enemy comes these castles will be destroyed by fire and the land will be opened wide to the enemy soldiers.

Finally in verses 14-19 we have the conclusion, and this shows what you say to a person who is beyond the point of no return. If you have a person who is so blind to reality and they are suckers for the gimmick approach then you can warn them where the gimmick approach will end up, but in the end

they're going to use the gimmick approach anyway and the reason is because they've always used gimmicks. And you can say put your trust in the Lord and Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life but it won't make a hill of beans difference, this person can't believe the gospel. So at that point God keeps feeding them gimmicks. And here they are, verse 14, **Draw for yourself water for the siege!** Go ahead, if you think water will save you then go ahead, draw water! Everybody needs water, yes, but their thinking is that if we can get enough water we can hold out and eventually our gimmicks will save us. It's a whole lot of baloney. Then another gimmick; **Strengthen your fortifications!** They put their trust in this gimmick; fortifications were considered a top priority. So he explains how to strengthen them. **Go into the clay and tread the mortar! Take hold of the brick mold!** So go ahead, beef up your fortifications, if you think big walls can save you build some more. But it's a gimmick because verse 15 says, **There fire will consume you, The sword will cut you down; It will consume you as the locust does.** The whole thing is going to be decimated. That's what the locust does when it goes through a fertile region; it takes everything green and eats it all. And that's what the fire and the Babylonian armies are going to do to Nineveh and its inhabitants, totally destroy them.

Now there are a series of locusts here. The Hebrew has about five different words for locusts and we met them back in Joel and we don't have a lot of time to go into all the locusts here. The point is that you had gnawing locusts and creeping locusts and swarming locust and stripping locusts and they each had a particular diet, they each ate some different part of the foliage and by the time they all came through there was nothing left, it was total destruction and when they run out of food they leave, they don't stick around; they have to flee and it's that part of the locusts life that Nahum is capitalizing on. When the Babylonian armies come in they're going to be like an exterminator and the exterminators job is to get rid of the locusts. So the Ninevites are the locusts and Babylon is turned into the exterminator. For years and years the Ninevites have gone into societies and taken everything, burned, pillaged, raped, destroyed, exiled. Now God is raising up an exterminator to take care of the locust problem and that exterminator is Babylon.

So he says in verse 15, **Multiply yourself like the creeping locust, Multiply yourself like the swarming locust.** Go ahead Nineveh, hatch

yourselves, build up a bigger army, it's all another gimmick. **16You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven— The creeping locust strips and flies away.** Now he begins to show the analogy. **17Your guardsmen are like the swarming locust. Your marshals are like hordes of grasshoppers Settling in the stone walls on a cold day. The sun rises and they flee, And the place where they are is not known.** **18Your shepherds are sleeping, O king of Assyria; Your nobles are lying down. Your people are scattered on the mountains And there is no one to regather them.** The locusts are being scattered, the exterminator has come and he's spraying Nineveh and the locusts are fleeing in every direction. Verse 19, **There is no relief for your breakdown, Your wound is incurable.** They were past the point of no return, there was nothing God could do. He had been gracious, He had sent them the message from Jonah, He had sent them the message from Hezekiah, He had sent them Nahum. But the wound of arrogance had set in and it was incurable, they could not be cured of their complex depravity, evil had become a popular pastime. In that situation Nahum concludes, **All who hear about you Will clap their hands over you, For on whom has not your evil passed continually?** That is, when an evil empire like this is destroyed everybody else claps their hand, thank God, it's about time.

In light of verse 19 we want to briefly deal with this problem of how to respond to the destruction of evil. For example, when Osama bin Laden was killed by a member of Seal Team Six, Obama didn't kill him. Obama didn't even know it was going on, but anyway, when he was killed what was the proper response? Some people rejoiced and others wrote that they could not rejoice, they thought it was wrong to rejoice and they quoted Prov 24:17 in support. I think we can all understand where they're coming from but let's see if this verse supports the contention that it is wrong to rejoice when our enemy is destroyed by death. "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;" This is Hebrew parallelism, phrase 1 and phrase 2 are equivalent, this is a way of Hebrew expression, so phrase 1 "do not rejoice" is the equivalent of phrase 2 "do not let your heart be glad" and phrase 1 "when your enemy falls" is the equivalent of phrase 2 "when he stumbles." Since that is the case, this verse is not telling us not to rejoice when our enemy is destroyed by death but it is telling us not to rejoice when our enemy falls on hard times during his life.

To see the same distinction must be held turn to Matt 5. This from the Sermon on the Mount. People quote this, see, we shouldn't rejoice when our enemies are destroyed because Jesus said... Yeah, Jesus did say something, but let's make sure we understand what He said and not what we think He said. In Matt 5:43, Jesus is interpreting the Mosaic Law, He's telling the nation Israel what the Mosaic Law meant. he wrote it, He should know what it means, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'" That last part was a little addition the Pharisees made, "But," verse 44, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Question: is Jesus talking about loving and praying for people who are dead? Or loving and praying for them while they are alive? While they are alive. While He is sending His sun to rise on them and while He is sending rain on them. Nothing is said about how we should respond to people who went to the grave as our enemies.

And I would suggest that is a very stark difference. When our enemies are alive we should pray for them, this is a day of grace, we don't sit by and form a grudge. If you do that it will work out into some really nasty thing. The whole point in this life is to be reconciled, not to build a grudge and get nasty. Isn't that the message of Jonah? As long as the Ninevites were still alive God was saying Jonah I am extending My hand of grace to them through you. I want there to be reconciliation. That's what Jonah didn't like. Jonah hated the Ninevites, they were his enemies, but God wanted them to be reconciled to Him. Jonah's problem was he had allowed a grudge to form to the point he did not love his enemies while they were still alive; he wanted God to judge them before the time. That's why some people have a real problem with Jonah. And rightfully so. But when Nahum's prophecy came to pass and the Ninevites were destroyed that is God's final word on the Ninevites. Grace had come to an end and judgment had fallen. At that point since God had decided to judge them there was no reason for Israel and the surrounding nations not to rejoice, just as Nahum says. Evil had been destroyed and a foreview of future judgment had occurred in history, a lesson so to speak. It is natural and right to rejoice when our enemy is killed. We have relief and we are assured of God's final victory over evil. But until they are it is not proper to rejoice over our enemy's hardships and difficulties as we should be seeking reconciliation.



By application, when Hitler or Osama bin Laden were alive we should have prayed for them, and when they were alive we should understand that God controls history and God raised up men or armies to stalk and kill them, and until they were killed it was our responsibility to pray for them and love them with the truth, hoping they would repent and change their ways. But when they were dead it is a time of rejoicing, the world is cleansed of evil and we have assurance that one day all the evil will be eliminated. God is both loving and just.

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