

NAHUM

Scripture: Nahum 1:1-8

INTRODUCTION: Well, we had come to the halfway mark in these 12 minor prophets, we took a little intermission and now we are in book 7. And by this time we are becoming used to going to the very first verse of the book, where, in numerous books, we get very important introductory information. And although we do not get anything regarding the dates when this book was written, we do get some very important information. Nahum 1:1 says, "The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."

The information of this book was received as a vision by a man by name of Micah. The name *Micah* means 'consolation.' That may give us an important clue as to the purpose of this book as we will see later. I understand that Elkosh was a small town in the Galilee area. By the way, the Sea of Galilee for a good number of recent years was suffering for water. When we were there a few years ago I was amazed at how low it was. Well, it has received an abundance of water and is now at a safe level again. Elkosh was in the Galilee area.

Now it is not certain whom this book is intended for. It appears to be addressed to the city of Nineveh as a warning. But it has been suggested that it might have been intended as an encouragement for Israel. If that is so, Jonah would have wanted to be the bearer of the news this book brings. And perhaps, just here, the meaning of Micah's name may suggest that this book is intended to be an encouragement for Israel, as his name means *consolation*. But with regard to the man Micah, we do not know anything besides what is given in this verse. Like many prophets of old and many preachers of today, he came from a small town in an area not highly regarded. But God chose Micah to speak for Him regarding the city of Nineveh.

So, what we notice first of all, in the first verse, is that this book, like the book of Jonah, deals with the city of Nineveh. Jonah warned Nineveh, they repented, and then later turned back to their sinful ways. By the time Micah wrote maybe as many as 150 years have passed since Jonah preached to Nineveh and since their repentance, but by now they have forgotten all about Jehovah God. Jonah is not around to finally clap his hands at the news of

Nineveh's prophesied demise, but it finally has come to that. God's patience has run out. Jonah would have liked this message much better than the one he was to preach. And so, in this book, once again the voice of God is raised against this sinful city.

There is little information from which to determine when this book is written. It must have been written prior to 612 BC, since that is the date of Nineveh's destruction. Nahum 3:8 indicates that by the time of the writing of this book, the city of No had already fallen, which took place in 663 BC. So Bible scholars have concluded that this book is written somewhere in between 663 and 612 BC. So we have a fairly close idea of the time of writing.

If it is correct that Jonah wrote about 760 BC, and that Micah wrote somewhere between 663-612 BC, then Nineveh did not take long to fall back into its sinful ways after they repented at Jonah's preaching. Nahum's prophecy that Nineveh's destruction was coming was fulfilled in 612 BC. Now, if you want to picture this city for its day in comparison to cities of today, you must picture it something like the city of New York today. Furthermore, it was exceeded in magnificence only by ancient Babylon. And like New York and like Babylon, and possibly even more so, it was an exceedingly sinful city. And then, if you want a comparable picture of its rulers; picture Yassar Arafat, or Saddam Hussein, or Ahmadinjajad, and you have a little idea of the wickedness of Nineveh's leaders. And when you see all that, then you also understand why Jonah did not want to preach to this city in case they repented, knowing that God would forgive even this very wicked nation.

And no doubt, like Iraq some years ago, like Iran of today, and like the Palestinians of today, the leaders of that city breathed out death threats to Israel again and again. The man that is presently the leader of Egypt referred to Jews before he became leader as, and I quote, "the descendants of apes and pigs."

I. DESCRIPTIONS OF GOD (1:2-8)

I have titled main point I. which I give as from 1:2-8 as descriptions of God. It is said that these verses are a Psalm. It is so strange to begin a prophetic book with a Psalm that some feel it must have been added later by someone else. And before we read this

Psalm, to explain why I think it is here, I want to give you some background information about the psychological games the Assyrians played. When we understand that, I think we will learn the reason for this Psalm in this book.

Hill and Walton say in their survey of the OT, "Though the Babylonians were responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they cannot be compared with the Assyrians for brutality...The Assyrians cultivated their ability to intimidate the victims by developing propaganda intended to establish an image of invulnerability. The fear they generated is attested throughout the Near East....All this psychological warfare had the desired affect of reducing the need for actual military engagement" end quote (A Survey of the OT, 398). Well, when you read through the OT you will come across some of the Assyrians psychological warfare.

So I want you to write down four chapters of Scripture that you may wish to read that will give you a good insight into these Assyrians; 2 Kings 18-19, and Isaiah 36-37. Both deal with the same account. Sennacharib was the king of Assyria at the time. He had entered Israel and had already taken Samaria and numerous other places including Lachish, which was just southwest of Jerusalem. And when he was in Lachish, he sent to Jerusalem ahead of his army his psychological propaganda.

When Sennacharib had defeated Lachish, he sent word to Jerusalem. And Hezekiah responded something like this, "I've done nothing wrong. I will pay you to leave. Tell me what you want." And Sennacharib told him I want 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, and Hezekian stripped the temple of enough gold and silver to pay Sennacharib.

Well, as soon as Sennacharib had the gold and silver, he sent his generals to Jerusalem, and from a distance they communicated with Hezekiah. Because I do not have time to read this lengthy passage, I want to reduce 2 Kings 18:19-35 by putting it in my own words. Here we will see the psychological methods of the Assyrians. The speaker for the King of Assyria called out to Jerusalem and the King of Jerusalem, Hezekiah, sent

out his man to confer with him. And Assyria's message was this: "Tell Hezekiah, 'what confidence is this in which you trust?' You say you are strong and ready, but they are vain words. Furthermore, you trust Egypt will come and help you. If you accept their help, you will shoot yourself in the foot. But if you say you will trust in the Lord, is it not His high places you have destroyed and said you must worship in Jerusalem alone? So, let me counsel you. Do what the King of Assyria says and all will be well, I'll even give you 2,000 horses, IF you are able to put riders on so many. So, Jews, don't trust in Hezekiah, and don't let him talk you into trusting the Lord God. Do not listen to Hezekiah. Make peace with me by a present and come out to me and I will make sure every man has his own house and farm and whatever else he might need. Have any of the gods of any of the other nations been able to deliver them from me? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad. Where are the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Ivah. Even your own city of Samaria, was it delivered from me? Who of all the gods delivered anyone out of my hand, that you should think Jerusalem might also be delivered?"

That is a prime example of their psychological warfare. But now I want you to go back to Nahum and read his Psalm in 1:2-8 (read). The Lord did not use psychological warfare here, He told Nineveh what was going to happen. He did not have to threaten. He could just simply give factual information before it happened. God is saying, "Nineveh, your time has run out."

II. PREDICTIONS OF GOD (1:9-2:12)

A. Destruction of Nineveh foretold (1:9-14)

As I outline the book, from 1:9 to 2:12, we have a number of predictions, or prophecies regarding Nineveh. In 1:9-14, we have the destruction of Nineveh foretold (read).

According to Ryrie, verse 14 speaks of Sennacharib, the one we read of in 2 Kings earlier. Let me tell you a little of what happened in the earlier account. Sennacharib sent a letter to Hezekiah. Let us read it in 2 Kings 19:10-13 (read). Well, let me tell you what

Hezekiah did. He went and prayed about it. This is given to us in verses 14-19. He addressed the God who dwells between the Cherubim and said that the Assyrian king said the truth about all the people who were not delivered out of his hands, and he had destroyed the other gods. Then he said, "Save us Lord, that all the kingdoms may know that you alone are the true God."

Well, let us see what happened. Keep your finger at 2 Kings 19, and look now at Nahum 1:14 (read). Now go to 2 Kings again to see the fulfillment (read 35-37).

Now let me give you some more recent history of Nineveh. In 1845, Henry Austin Layard researched ancient Nineveh, which had been so destroyed that in time it was buried and gone and forgotten. It's ancient site was not discovered until 1842 (Ryrie pg 1425). And in excavating this city, they found that Sennacherib had a huge library and had recorded his exploits on the walls as well. All of this information has been uncovered and read. Written on those long high walls are his eight war campaigns and his campaign into Israel agrees with the Biblical accounts of 2 Kings 18-19 and Isaiah 36-37 except for one thing. He did not record in the records how he tried to scare Hezekiah and how he failed to take Jerusalem! (Thompson Chain 4400).

B. Destruction of Nineveh told (1:15)

Well, we go to Nahum 1:15 (read). Here we have the destruction of Nineveh told. God views the destruction of Nineveh as a completed fact before it happens. At this time, the cell phone was made up of human feet. The data was communicated to the runner, and then the runner ran home to bring news of the war. And there are no more beautiful feet than those that bring good news. And God says, "O Judah, keep your appointed feasts." That is appropriate. These feasts are prophetic as well. God says, "Keep your feasts and perform your vows, all will be well. Assyria will never bother you again. They are finished. You can count on it so go about your life and live right."

C. Destruction of Nineveh imminent (2:1-2)

That brings us to chapter 2. So let us read verses 1-2 (read). Here Nineveh's destruction is pictured as being imminent. The one who scatters and is come up before Nineveh's face is the combined army of the Medes and the Babylonians, who also destroyed Nineveh.

D. Destruction of Ninevah described (2:3-10)

In verses 3-10 we have the destruction of Nineveh prophetically described before it happens (read). Ryrie says the Babylonians and Medes made their shields red. He says their chariots had scythes sticking out of their axles.

E. Destruction of Ninevah completed (2:11-12)

Then in 2:11-12, the destruction of Nineveh is completed by the defeat of the king (read). This lion is the king of Assyria, and these kings were called robbers because they robbed everyone else and fed themselves, and our text says this lion would rob no more. The lioness would no longer bring the wealth of other nations to Nineveh.

III. PROCLAMATIONS OF GOD (2:13-3:19)

Now, it is difficult to tell whether 2:13 closes a section or begins a new section. It has the connection with the foregoing verses of the lion and his prey. It has the connection with the following section (3:5) of the opening words, "Behold, I am against you says the Lord of hosts." I favor the idea that it opens a new section and thus outline 2:13-3:19 under two main headings each beginning with the words, "Behold, I am against you says the Lord of hosts." These two sections are two proclamations and we will now look at those. The first proclamation is, as I view it, from 2:13-3:4.

A. The First Proclamation (2:13-3:4)

In 2:13 we have the content of the first proclamation (read). The proclamation is this: I am against you; I will burn your weapons; I will cut off your prey; the voice of your messengers will be heard no more. Not only would the lion and lioness be cut off, but their cubs as well. There would be no more rulers for

Assyria. And the voice of Assyrian psychological warfare would be heard no more. Today, we hear the words of the Arab world. Ahmadinjajad is a master at psychological warfare. But his words, like those of Sennacharib will soon not be heard any more. I know that from the Bible, which is written by the same God who predicted Nineveh's demise.

Now look at the reason for this proclamation of the demise of Nineveh and its leaders. Why will God destroy Nineveh? Well, let us read 3:1-4 (read). The reason in one word? Sin!

B. The Second Proclamation (3:5-19)

In 3:5-19, we have the second proclamation. We find its content in 3:5-7 (read). The second proclamation is this: Nineveh, I am against you; I will openly display your shame; I will cast abominable filth upon you and make you a spectacle.

The Lord instructs Nineveh to consider No Ammon of the past. No Ammon is Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt. It was destroyed by the Assyrians themselves in 663 BC. No Ammon was the capital of upper Egypt and its common name is Thebes. It was far-famed for its continual accruing of wealth, its military power, its 20,000 chariots, its vast size and 100 gates and it stood for a long time. Many of its Pharaohs were great conquerors and once the centre of a world empire.

No Ammon was once another Nineveh, if not more so, and yet the Lord says, "Are you better than they?" The answer is 'no', even though Assyria eventually defeated No Ammon. You see, if No Ammon could be carried away by Nineveh, Nineveh ought to take note, because they could also be carried away by another.

So, in 3:11, we have a key prophecy regarding Nineveh (read). In the word 'also', consideration is given to No Ammon. No Ammon was not invincible, and the message to Nineveh is that they also are not invincible either. The time will come when Nineveh will cry out and no help will come. They will be defeated.

And in 12-19, the destruction of Nineveh is given. God is not threatening. He is stating what it will be like (read).

In the end, no one would be sorry about Nineveh's destruction. She had not been nice to anyone, and no one would mourn for her.

CONCL: So, let us bring this message to a conclusion. And how shall we conclude? Let me conclude like this: I think this book is written by a man whose name means encouragement, to warn Nineveh of impending judgment, and to encourage Israel to simply live right because that is their best defense against such nations.

Let me also say, this book is a warning to all the cities of the world. Here is the warning: Be sure your sin will find you out! As Micah began the book, the Lord is slow to anger, but He will not at all acquit the wicked. Every mayor should read this book. Every head of state should read this book. Every politician should read this book.

But, it is a warning to every church. We learn from Revelation 2-3 that God keeps just as close track of the life of a church, if not closer, as He does of unbelieving cities and nations. He removes candlesticks of churches that go astray just as well as cities and nations and leaders.

And let me draw yet one more conclusion. God keeps track of individuals too. Every individual citizen of Nineveh had a warning in this book. When the city of Nineveh was re-discovered in the early 1800's they found its walled area to be 7 and a half miles long. And there were two mounds. The northern mound was 90 feet high and covered 100 acres. It was known to the locals as 'Kuyunjik', meaning, 'The Castle of Nineveh'. The southern mound was 100 feet high and covered forty acres. It was known, even in the 1800's by the locals as, 'Nebi Yunis.' Could you guess what that means? It means, 'The Prophet Jonah'! You see, from the time of Jonah, to this very day, the warning of the Prophet Jonah speaks. And behold, for us, a greater than Jonah has come!

And then, in case Egyptian president, Mohamed Morsi is listening on line this morning, let me give a bit of advice to him; "Read the book of Nahum." On the 4th of January of

this year, the Jerusalem Post spoke of the new Egyptian president according to newly translated interviews published this week by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), in which Morsi said in September of 2010 that Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are, and I quote, "a waste of time and opportunities". He said that because in his view Arabs and Muslims get nothing out of engagement with, and I quote, "the descendants of apes and pigs." And a message for this Egyptian president is the book of Nahum. He would do well to start with 1:2-8 and then read what happened to Thebes, or No Ammon in the past.

Then let me draw one more conclusion. Let no person, no people, no city, no nation, no conglomeration of nations think you can fool around with God's people or His land, and escape being noticed by Almighty God Himself.