

WHO CAN STAND BEFORE HIS INDIGNATION?

TEXT: NAHUM 1:1-15

INTRODUCTION:

1. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, located to the north-east of Israel. It was an immense city by the Tigris River.
2. The prophet Jonah reluctantly went to the city of Nineveh to preach, and under his preaching the entire city got right with God (c. 862 BC). This is undoubtedly the greatest revival recorded in the Bible (cf. Jonah 3:3-10).
3. But as is often the case, the Ninevites went back to their wicked pagan ways, and by the time the prophet Nahum arrived on the scene 100 years later, they were more wicked than ever (Nahum 1:1, 2).
4. Nahum the prophet prophesied during the reign of King Hezekiah, probably about 100 to 150 years after Jonah. "He has but one subject – the destruction of Nineveh" (Scofield introduction; 1:1).
5. Interestingly, Nahum's name means "Comforter." But his message certainly is not comforting to those who are not living right (cf. 1:2-6).
6. On the other hand, it is comforting to those who love God (cf. 1:7, 15a).
7. For decades, Judah had lived under Assyrian oppression. The Assyrians were a cruel, demon-possessed nation. Nahum's message of the impending doom of Nineveh must have brought immense relief and encouragement to God's people.
8. If you know your Bible you know that God gives up on people. Genesis 6:3 says, "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man."
9. Proverbs 29:1 says, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."
10. God gave up on the people in Noah's day and He gave up on the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Romans 1).
11. And all throughout the Bible we see that God gives up on nations as well as individuals. And according to the prophecy of Nahum, He gave up on the Assyrians. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by the Medes and Babylonians.

I. GOD GAVE UP ON ASSYRIA

1. God sent the prophet Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh and they did repent (cf. Jonah 3:4-10).
2. But when we get to the book of Nahum, 100 years or more had passed and the people had returned to their wicked ways. So, God was going to judge them – He “will not at all acquit the wicked” (1:3).
3. New York City experienced a wonderful revival back in 1857. Prior to the revival, America was in decline spiritually. The churches were losing people, and worldliness was creeping in.
4. A number of Christians were concerned about the materialism that pervaded the land, and they began to pray that God would once again send revival to America.
5. The first Great Awakening took place in the American colonies between 1720 and the 1740's. The prominent preachers were George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.
6. Evangelist Charles Finney was the most prominent preacher during the second Great Awakening. The second Great Awakening began around 1790, gained momentum by 1800, but it had died out by the 1850's.
7. After the revival fires went out, America was in decline spiritually. In lower Manhattan, a Dutch Reformed church had been steadily losing members, and they hired a layman named Jeremiah Lanphier to visit homes and pass out Gospel tracts.
8. Despite his efforts, not much was happening so he distributed a handbill and advertised a noonday prayer-meeting, to be held on Wednesdays once a week.
9. The handbill said: “A day Prayer Meeting is held every Wednesday, from 12 to 1 o'clock, in the Consistory building in the rear of the North Dutch Church, corner of Fulton and William Streets (entrance from Fulton and Ann Streets). This meeting is intended to give merchants, mechanics, clerks, strangers, and business men generally an opportunity to stop and call upon God amid the perplexities incident to their respective avocations. It will continue for one hour; but it is also designed for those who may find it inconvenient to remain more than five or ten minutes, as well as for those who can spare the whole hour.”
10. Accordingly, at twelve noon, on September 23, 1857 the door was opened and Mr. Lanphier took his seat to await the response to his invitation. Five minutes went by and no one appeared.
11. Fifteen minutes passed and still no one came.

12. Finally, after a half hour of waiting...at 12:30 PM, the first person appeared, then another, and another, and another, until six people were present and the prayer meeting began. On the following Wednesday, October 7th, there were forty people at the prayer meeting.
13. In the first week of October 1857, it was decided to hold a daily prayer meeting, instead of weekly.
14. Within six months, ten thousand business men were gathering daily for prayer in New York, and within two years, a million converts were saved and added to the American churches.
15. The greatest revival in New York's history was sweeping the city, and soon swept across the entire country, and even to other countries like England and Northern Ireland.
16. J. Edwin Orr said, "There was no fanaticism, no hysteria, simply an incredible movement of the people to pray" (*The Light of the Nations*).
17. The people of Nineveh responded to the preaching of Jonah. Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).
18. The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, but 100 years later they had gone back to their wicked ways.
19. New York City experienced a great revival, but soon went back to its wicked ways.
20. God sent Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh and they did repent, but now 100 years or more had passed and God was going to judge them – He "will not at all acquit the wicked" (1:3).
21. God gave up on Assyria. There is no Assyria today. God told them that it was too late – it was all over (cf. 3:19).
22. J. Vernon McGee wrote these words: "You will find that every great world power went down, and they went down at a time when they were given over to wine, women, and song."
23. He added that when a nation reaches that point it is on the skids and will soon pass off into oblivion. The United States of America has not yet reached that point, but only God knows how much time we have left.
24. America has become a country that only cares about money, sex, and worldly pleasures.
25. As we read Nahum's prophecy, we cannot help but notice the similarities between his day and ours (1:2).
26. The repetition of vengeance and the repetition of God's name in 1:2, 3 emphasize the solemnity of Nahum's prophecy – it was all over for Nineveh.

II. GOD IS SLOW TO ANGER BUT WHEN HE MOVES, “WHO CAN STAND BEFORE HIS INDIGNATION?”

1. Albert Barnes says that in Scripture, “The word rendered ‘indignation’ is reserved almost exclusively to denote the wrath of God.”
2. “His fury is poured out like fire” (1:6). The words “poured out” are used in two different ways in Scripture. God pours out His wrath in judgment or He pours out the Holy Spirit in blessing. It is man’s choice.
3. Isaiah 10:5 says, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.” God used the Assyrians to chasten Israel, and then God punished Assyria for their wickedness.
4. God is patient and long-suffering, but there is a limit to His patience and long-suffering. God gave the people in Noah’s day 120 years to repent, but they would not repent and so He sent the flood.
5. Genesis 6:3 says, “And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”
6. Over and over the Bible declares that God is “slow to anger” (1:3), i.e., He is long-suffering and forbearing. Jonah preached, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4).
7. The Ninevites repented, and although their repentance postponed the judgment of God for more than a century, God cannot “at all acquit the wicked” (Nahum 1:3), for God is just and righteous.
8. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”
9. However, the Bible also teaches that God is just “and will not at all acquit (to leave unpunished; to clear) the wicked” (1:3).
10. Psalm 103:8, 9 says, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever.”
11. The LORD told Moses that He was “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6, 7).
12. Nahum asks, “Who can stand before His indignation?” (1:6). And the obvious answer is no one.
13. Malachi 3:2 says, “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers’ soap.”

14. Revelation 6:17 says, “For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
15. God’s ineffable holiness, deeply offended and disgusted by man’s wickedness, makes His indignation and fierce anger utterly unendurable.
16. Nahum said, “His fury is poured out like fire” (1:6). How little of this is preached today. Yet this was the message of all the Old Testament prophets.
17. It was the message of John the Baptist, our Lord Himself, the apostle Paul, and just about every other preacher in the Bible!
18. God says, “and darkness shall pursue his enemies” (1:8b). Our Lord said the unsaved “shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12).
19. Do you recall what our Lord said about the man who came to the marriage feast without a wedding garment? “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13).
20. And what about the unprofitable servant? “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).
21. Jude refers to the wicked “to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 13). And Nahum says, “darkness shall pursue his enemies” (1:8).
22. I was visiting a family one night and they had the TV on and I noticed a commercial about an upcoming show on tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, etc. The title was “the wrath of nature.”
23. But that is not the wrath of nature; it is the wrath of God. It is God who controls nature, and the weather, and the tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, and rivers and seas and so on (cf. 1:3-6).
24. The ungodly are in a frenzy over this so-called “global warming,” which many scientists have exposed as a hoax. The real “global warming” is found in the Bible (1:5).
25. Second Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”
26. One of God’s divine attributes, along with His longsuffering and His righteousness, is His omnipotence (1:5, 6).
27. Another one of God’s attributes is His goodness – “The LORD is good” (1:7).
*The Lord is good–
Tell it wherever you go,
The Lord is good–
Tell it that others may know;*

*Tell of His blessings and tell of His love,
Tell how He's coming from heaven above:
The Lord is good—
Tell it wherever you go. – Al Smith*

28. Beloved, thank God the Bible says the LORD is good and that “He knoweth them that trust in Him” (1:7). Are you trusting in Him?
29. “And He knoweth them that trust in Him” (1:7) – what comfort these words were to King Hezekiah and his people shut up in Jerusalem, being taunted by the arrogant Assyrian Rab-shakeh. God delivered King Hezekiah and the people of Judah, and God will deliver you and me if we put our trust in Him.
30. “And He knoweth them that trust in Him” (1:7). Our Lord said in John 10:14, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”
31. Paul wrote in II Timothy 2:19, “The Lord knoweth them that are His.”
Are you one of His? What a tremendous blessing! He knows all about us, all about our burdens and our problems. The hymn-writer put it this way:
*Jesus knows all about our struggles,
He will guide till the day is done;
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,
No, not one! No, not one! – Johnson Oatman, Jr.*
32. He is our “strong hold” (1:7). The Lord was comforting Judah because they were about to be attacked by Sennacherib.

III. GOD WILL MAKE AN UTTER END OF THE WICKED

1. “What do ye imagine against the LORD?” (1:9). Psalm 2:1 says, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?”
2. Second Corinthians 10:5 says, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”
3. God gave man the ability to imagine good and wonderful things, but unfortunately man has used it “against the LORD” (Nahum 1:9).
4. God’s punishment upon the Assyrians was so severe (notice twice: “He will make an utter end” – 1:8, 9) that He would never need to repeat it.
5. “Affliction shall not rise up the second time” (1:9). Nineveh would not get a second chance. God gave Jonah a second chance, but not the Assyrians.
6. Let’s not trifle with God’s patience.
7. Sadly, in many ways the Assyrians were very much like modern-day Americans – “drunken as drunkards” (1:10) and oblivious to God’s impending judgment.

8. Secular history tells us that while the Assyrians were getting drunk, the flood-gates of the city were swept away by a sudden rise of the Tigris River. The Babylonian army then entered in and burned Nineveh to the ground while the drunken inhabitants tried vainly to escape (cf. 3:11-13).
9. I can imagine the same thing happening here today. For most Americans today, their religion is sports and TV. Their gods are professional ballplayers and Hollywood movie stars.
10. Instead of singing hymns and spiritual songs, they listen to loud rock music.
11. The “wicked counsellor” (1:11) is probably a reference to haughty Sennacherib, the king of Assyria at the time they captured Samaria.
12. God was getting ready to judge Nineveh, the capitol city of Assyria (1:13, 14). No more of their name would be sown (1:14), i.e. their name will no longer be perpetuated; the Assyrian dynasty was coming to an end.
13. This prophecy was literally fulfilled in the suicide of Saracus, the great-grandson of Sennacherib.
14. God was getting ready to make their grave and bury them (1:14). Think about it. Perhaps God is getting ready to make your grave and you do not even know it.
15. Why was God getting ready to make their grave? Because they were “vile” (1:14), i.e. detestable, contemptible. They were weighed in the balances and found lacking. The Assyrians have disappeared from the stage of history.
16. Sennacherib and his chief officer Rab-shakeh were haughty and vile. The LORD had allowed them to invade Judah as a chastisement for their sins.
17. Isaiah 10:5 says, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger...”
18. Good King Hezekiah responded to Sennacherib’s provocations by renting his clothes, and covering himself with sackcloth. He went into the house of the LORD to pray, and God heard his prayer and answered his prayer (cf. 1:15b; 3:19).
19. King Hezekiah and his princes were humbled before God, and so God would afflict them no more (1:12). The Assyrian hosts were wiped out by the angel of the LORD, and Sennacherib himself was basely murdered a short time afterward, as Nahum 1:14 said that he would be, by the hands of his own sons (cf. II Kings 19:35-37; Isaiah 37:36-38).

CONCLUSION:

1. Scofield says that the moral theme of the book of Nahum is “the holiness of Jehovah which must deal with sin in judgment” (Introduction).
2. Beloved, if God did not deal with sin in judgment than He would not be a just God.

3. If God did not deal with sin in judgment than heaven would not be heaven. Think about it: if God allowed wicked, impenitent sinners into heaven, they would quickly try to turn heaven into hell!
4. If God does not deal with sin in judgment, than the Bible cannot be trusted, and God is not real, and man has no hope in this life or in the life to come.
5. We know very little about the prophet Nahum. Elkosh, the place of his birth, is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.
6. Interestingly, Capernaum, our Lord's adopted hometown means "The Village of Nahum." We do not know if Capernaum was named after Nahum the prophet because Nahum was not an uncommon name in Israel.
7. But we do know that God gave up on Capernaum (Matthew 11:23, 24). Today there is no more Capernaum – there is nothing there but ruins, it is completely desolate.