

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

9-19-18

Overview Book of Nahum

THE SHRILL whistle pierces the air, and all the action on the court abruptly stops. Pointing to the offending player, the referee shouts, "Foul!" Rules, fouls, and penalties are part of any game and are regulated and enforced vigorously by referees, umpires, judges, and other officials. Every participant knows that boundaries must be set and behavior monitored, or the game will degenerate into chaos. The world also has laws—boundaries and rules for living established by God. But men and women regularly flaunt these regulations, hiding their infractions or overpowering others and declaring that might makes right. God calls this sin—willful disobedience, rebellion against his control, or apathy. And at times it seems as though the violators succeed—no whistles blow, no fouls are called, and individual dictators rule. The truth is, however, that ultimately justice will be served in the world. God will settle all accounts.

Assyria was the most powerful nation on earth. Proud in their self-sufficiency and military might, they plundered, oppressed, and slaughtered their victims. One hundred years earlier, Jonah had preached in the streets of the great city Nineveh; the people had heard God's message and had turned from their evil. But generations later, evil was again reigning, and the prophet Nahum pronounced judgment on this wicked nation. Nineveh is called a "city of blood" (3:1), a city of cruelty (3:19), and the Assyrians are judged for their pride (2:13), idolatry (1:14), murder, lies, treachery, and social injustice (3:1-19). Nahum predicted that this proud and powerful nation would be utterly destroyed because of its sins. The end came within 50 years.

In this judgment of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh, God is judging a sinful world. And the message is clear: Disobedience, rebellion, and injustice will not prevail but will be punished severely by a righteous and holy God, who rules over all the earth. As you read Nahum, sense God's wrath as he avenges sin and brings about justice. Then decide to live under his guidance and within his rules, commands, and guidelines for life.

VITAL STATISTICS

Author

The book contains the "vision of Nahum" (1:1), whose name means "comfort" and is related to the name Nehemiah, meaning "The Lord comforts" or "comfort of the Lord." (Nineveh's fall, which is Nahum's theme, would bring comfort to Judah.) Nothing is known about him except his hometown (Elkosh), and even its general location is uncertain.

Date

In 3:8-10 the author speaks of the fall of Thebes, which happened in 663 b.c., as already past. In all three chapters Nahum prophesied Nineveh's fall, which was fulfilled in 612. Nahum therefore uttered this oracle between 663 and 612, perhaps near the end of this period since he represents the fall of Nineveh as imminent (2:1; 3:14,19). This would place him during the reign of Josiah and make him a contemporary of Zephaniah and the young Jeremiah.

Background

Assyria (represented by Nineveh, 1:1) had already destroyed Samaria (722-721 b.c.), resulting in the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel, and posed a present threat to Judah. The Assyrians were brutally cruel, their kings often being depicted as gloating over the gruesome punishments inflicted on conquered peoples. They conducted their wars with shocking ferocity, uprooted whole populations as state policy and deported them to other parts of their empire. The leaders of conquered cities were tortured and horribly mutilated before being executed (see note on 3:3). No wonder the dread of Assyria fell on all her neighbors!

About 700 b.c. King Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of the Assyrian empire, and it remained the capital until it was destroyed in 612. Jonah had announced its destruction earlier (Jnh 3:4), but the people put on at least a show of repentance and the destruction was temporarily averted (see Jnh 3:10 and note). Not long after that, however, Nineveh reverted to its extreme wickedness, cruelty and pride. The brutality reached its peak under Ashurbanipal (669-627), the last great ruler of the Assyrian empire. After his death, Assyria's influence and power waned rapidly until 612, when Nineveh was overthrown (see notes on 1:14; 2:1). (Further historical information is given in notes throughout the book.)

Recipients

Some words are addressed to Judah (see 1:12-13,15), but most are addressed to Nineveh (see 1:11,14; 2:1,13; 3:5-17,19) or its king (3:18). The book, however, was meant for Israelite readers living in Judah.

Literary Style

The contents are primarily made up of judgment oracles, with appropriate descriptions and vocabulary, expressing intense moods, sights and sounds. The language is poetic, with frequent use of metaphors and similes, vivid word pictures, repetition and many short -- often staccato -- phrases (see, e.g., 3:1-3). Rhetorical questions punctuate the flow of thought, which has a marked stress on moral indignation toward injustice.

Theological Themes

The focal point of the entire book is the Lord's judgment on Nineveh for her oppression, cruelty, idolatry and wickedness. The book ends with the destruction of the city.

According to Ro 11:22, God is not only kind but also stern. In Nahum, God is not only "slow to anger" (1:3) and "a refuge . . . for those who trust in him" (1:7), but also one who "will not leave the guilty unpunished" (1:3). God's righteous and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, for kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall, as Assyria did.

In addition, Nahum declares the universal sovereignty of God. God is Lord of history and of all nations; as such, he controls their destinies.

MEGATHEMES

God Judges

EXPLANATION: God would judge the city of Nineveh for its idolatry, arrogance, and oppression. Although Assyria was the leading military power in the world, God would completely destroy this "invincible" nation. God allows no person or power to usurp or scoff at his authority.

IMPORTANCE: Anyone who remains arrogant and resists God's authority will face his anger. No ruler or nation will get away with rejecting him. No individual will be able to hide from his judgment. Yet those who keep trusting God will be kept safe forever.

God Rules

EXPLANATION: God rules over all the earth, even over those who don't acknowledge him. God is all-powerful, and no one can thwart his plans. God will overcome any who attempt to defy him. Human power is futile against God.

IMPORTANCE: If you are impressed by or afraid of any weapons, armies, or powerful people, remember that God alone can truly rescue you from fear or oppression. We must place our confidence in God because he alone rules all of history, all the earth, and our life.

OUTLINE

- I. Title (1:1)
- II. Nineveh's Judge (1:2-15)
 - A. The Lord's Kindness and Sternness (1:2-8)
 - B. Nineveh's Overthrow and Judah's Joy (1:9-15)
- III. Nineveh's Judgment (ch. 2)
 - A. Nineveh Besieged (2:1-10)
 - B. Nineveh's Desolation Contrasted with Her Former Glory (2:11-13)
- IV. Nineveh's Total Destruction (ch. 3)
 - A. Nineveh's Sins (3:1-4)
 - B. Nineveh's Doom (3:5-19)