

Comfort & Consolation (Vengeance)

[10.22.17]

The book of Nahum in the Old Testament was written by Nahum the Elkoshite. Without getting into the various explaining reasons, it appears the book was written sometime between 663 B.C. and 612 B.C. The name “Nahum” means comfort or consolation in the context of God’s vengeance. The immediate instance is destruction of Ninevah which was a message of consolation to those she had oppressed.

As an interesting side note, many writers suggest Nahum was related to Jonah who had prophesied many years earlier against Ninevah and experienced a great revival in the city. (Steve earlier did a sermon on the book of Jonah). As Matthew Henry notes, about a hundred years before Nahum’s book was penned, *“at Jonah’s preaching, the Ninevites repented, and were spared, yet, soon after, they became worse than ever.”* Luke 3:25 tells us that Nahum was an ancestor of Jesus; according to my calculation he was his great (x8) grandfather.

Nahum is written primarily to describe the upcoming destruction of the newly-backslidden Ninevah but, as is generally true with all the prophets, their writings have secondary meanings as well. In this instance, such secondary meanings would include God’s strong judgments on all people and nations that abandon his precepts, which judgments regularly bring comfort and consolation to the people of God.

To reiterate, Nahum conveys the idea of God’s vengeance being the vehicle through which comfort and consolation inures to the Lord’s

people. God's vengeance is a common theme throughout the Bible. I was surprised to see that word appears in 39 separate verses in the Bible, almost always in the context of God rendering vengeance on his opponents on behalf of his children. So, for example, we read that God will **render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.** (Deuteronomy 32:43). And this: **For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.** (Isaiah 34:8). As a final example, at Micah 5:15 we find this interesting but not often-cited verse: **And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.** That is to say, record-breaking vengeance. And, of course, as we know, vengeance belongs exclusively to the Lord. **Vengeance is mine.** (Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30).

Today we will read all of this three-chapter book, with commentary. The language of this work, though, is so clear, powerful and descriptive that, to a large degree, it speaks for itself.

1 The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

²God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

³The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

{This language suggests that the vengeance of God comes at last swiftly, vehemently, fearfully and irresistibly. **For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.** (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires and the like are samples. And God walks on clouds, large and larger, as a man walks on the small dust of this earth.}

⁴He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth.

⁵The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.

{Inanimate is pictured here as endowed with terror. Here we have an allegory, as suggested by Isaiah 2:11-17: **The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish , and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.**}

⁶Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

⁷The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

{God is good and is doing good all day long, every day, for his people. **And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God.** (Luke 18:18-19). **The Lord knows the ways and days of the righteous and upright. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous(.)** (Psalm 1:6). **The Lord knoweth the days of the upright(.)** (Psalm 37:18). In short, God knows everything there is to know about his sheep (John 10:14).}

⁸But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

⁹What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time.

{There is disagreement as to the meaning of “affliction shall not rise up the second time”, but I incline to this from Matthew Poole: “*when the storm which shall overthrow you is past, no other shall arise, because you shall be no more; as if the prophet had said, God will at once and forever destroy your empire and city.*”}

¹⁰For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.

¹¹There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor.

¹²Thus saith the LORD; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more.

13 For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder.

14 And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile.

15 Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

2:1 He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.

{What we have here is Ninevah – a standing symbol of all who proudly and stubbornly reject God’s directives – on the verge of sure destruction. He that is going to smash you to pieces is ready at the door, ready to spring into action. The thought here is of a maul as mentioned in Proverbs 25:18: **A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.** The word translated “maul” is a heavy wooden hammer or mallet or a club that will do the dashing and smashing. Consider also this from Jeremiah 51:20: **Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms.** Do what you will Ninevah; get your weapons on the ready, have your watchmen working full time and fortify all your powers. It will all be to no avail.}

2 For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.

³ The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken.

⁴ The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.

{The picture here is mass confusion that helps facilitate their destruction. Again, though primarily applicable to the fall of Ninevah, it has further application to the ultimate demise of all of God's enemies. There is a scene from an old *I Love Lucy* episode where Ricky, Ethel and Fred are all well-prepared and rehearsed on what to do when a pregnant Lucy announces she is ready to go to the hospital to have her baby. When the moment arrives, those three panic, begin running in all different directions, bumping into each other, falling over furniture, picking up the wrong luggage items, etc. While the scene was hysterical, it well represents what we have here though without any comedy. Ninevah's protectors seem to be more like madmen than well-ordered soldiers. The chariots of war (tanks, if you will) are running into each other and over each other instead of onward towards the enemy. That word "jostle" is our modern word "jostle" meaning to bump, push, shove, brush against, elbow rudely and roughly and hit one against another. Think today's chest bumps, except not being done on purpose. They are so confused their chariot wheels are rubbing up against each other, creating the "torches" and "lightnings." Such is the condition of those who vainly fight God.}

⁵ He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared.

⁶ The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved.

{One simply cannot read this verse without immediately recalling recent flooding at the evil city of Houston, Texas. One reporter commented in the middle of it all that if a certain dam were to give way, Houston's entire downtown would be no more. What a beautiful thought. Here, it happened. Ninevah stood on the Tigris. Matthew Poole writes of reputable historians reporting that *"when the Chaldeans besieged Ninevah, a mighty deluge of waters overthrew the walls of Ninevah, by the space of twenty furlongs, or two miles and a half, through which breach the besiegers made their entrance."* Floods - another very handy and oft-used weapon of Almighty God.}

⁷And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts.

⁸But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back.

{This is another powerful picture. Ninevah was 600 years old; three times the age of America. It was an ancient city of great renown and strength. The "pool of water" refers to many peoples gathered from all corners of the world, living in a calm, settled, full and untroubled spot. Water is often used to represent masses of people, like at Revelation 17:1: **I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.** And suddenly, abruptly, the sluices gave way, all hell broke loose, and these peace-loving citizens are each man for himself. They flee away, discomfited and terrified. The nation's civil and military leaders earnestly plead for order and discipline (**stand, stand shall they cry**) without success. "Stand" is doubled to show the earnestness of the pleas and "shall they cry" displays the intensity of those pleas.}

⁹Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.

10 She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness.

11 Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?

{Here we learn more of the nature of Ninevah's culture. The kings of Ninevah had long been terrible and cruel to their neighbors. (Sound familiar America that has scarcely gone a generation without being in some big war?) So bad was Ninevah (and her ilk) she is compared to a lions' den; home to bloody and violent tyrants. And not only that, but she nurtured and raised young bloody and violent tyrants, all of whom arrogantly strutted around fearless. (Again, I say, sound familiar America?)}

12 The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.

13 Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

{Oops! Messed with the wrong enemy this time. You had your chance back with Jonah; no second chance for you. Think Seinfeld's soup Nazi – "No soup for you!" It's Psalm 37:20 time: **But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.**}

3:1 Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not;

{Literally, “city of bloods”, that is as city of manifold bloodshedding, built and founded in blood. **Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!** (Habakkuk 2:12). Murder, oppression, wresting of judgment, lies, robbery, war springing out of covetousness, grinding or neglect of the poor and all such makes a city of bloods. And have I not just described every major city in America? But now Ninevah is to shed her own blood, as described in following verses.}

² The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the pransing horses, and of the jumping chariots.

{The entry of victorious besiegers is here described. Here we see the conquering enemy urged on with terrific speed. The chariot wheels quiver with the rapid onset. Swiftens and strength of the invaders is here poetically displayed.}

³ The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses:

⁴ Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

⁵ Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame.

⁶ And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock.

{Abominable things had God seen in Ninevah's doings so with abominable filth would she be punished. **I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields.** (Jeremiah 13:27). The "gazingstock" suggests Ninevah will be an example that others who gaze upon her will take warning. **Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.** (Ezekiel 28:17). Americans are always talking about remembering this and remembering that. Remember the Alamo (Mexican-American War). Remember the Maine (Spanish-American War). Remember the Lusitania (WWI). Remember Pearl Harbor (WWII). Remember 911. (Iraq; Afghanistan wars). We say, Remember Ninevah!

⁷And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

⁸Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea?

{Without getting too deep into the weeds here, No was a major city with many strong natural defenses, that proved fruitless in the face of God's judgment as described in verses 9 and 10 following. **The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that trust in him.** (Jeremiah 46:25). **And I will pour my fury upon Sin, the strength of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No.** (Ezekiel 30:15). Heavily-populated No took its rise from Ham by whose posterity it was peopled, referred to also in Psalm 106:21 and 22 – **They forgot God their savior, which**

had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. The overarching message here is that strongholds, even the strongest, are no defense against the judgments of God. They shall be unable to do anything for themselves. }

⁹ Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers.

¹⁰ Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.

¹¹ Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy.

¹² All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater.

{Here's what your defenses will be, just like the first ripe figs, which is to say: Eagerly sought after to be consumed; those first figs are delicious and much desired; when they're ripe, by just touching them they fall easily off the tree, literally into the mouth of the eater so the eater doesn't even have to bother to bend over and pick them up off the ground. So easy is their destruction on the part of God.}

¹³ Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars.

{At the risk of sounding like a sexist, here's what the writers say on this: The citizens and the soldiers alike are panic-stricken, fearful, weak, unable to fight, fleeing and hiding. As we see in Jeremiah 51:30 -**The mighty men of Babylon have forborn to fight, they have remained**

**in their holds: their might hath failed; they became as women:
they have burned her dwellingplaces; her bars are broken.}**

**14 Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into
clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln.**

**15 There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it
shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the
cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts.**

**16 Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven:
the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away.**

**17 Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great
grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but
when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known
where they are.**

**18 Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall
dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains,
and no man gathereth them.**

**19 There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that
hear the bruit {report/rumor} of thee shall clap the hands over thee:
for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?**