

July 22

Nahum

Today we read the Book of Nahum who prophesied in Judah during the lifetime of the great prophet Jeremiah. The message he spoke to Judah was about Assyria, that bitter enemy whose armies swept away the city of Samaria along with the rest of the Northern Kingdom and then shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage in the city of Jerusalem until God miraculously delivered them.

The first thing we need to remind ourselves today is that Nahum is the second prophet to write a book largely pertaining to the fate of Nineveh. The first was Jonah and I'm sure you remember the story of Jonah very well. But by the time Nahum arrived more than a century later, Nineveh along with its citizens and the king, had become just as wicked as it ever was. Knowing the story of Jonah as well as he must have, I am sure that Nahum would have been very anxious not to disobey the Lord and very glad that his message about Nineveh was going to be directed not to the Ninevites themselves, but to the people of Jerusalem instead. And that of course raises a most interesting question. If God had something to say about Nineveh, why say it in Jerusalem and not Nineveh?? The answers to that question are very important to us.

The sackcloth and ashes of Jonah's day had long since given way to new levels of violence, arrogance and degradation in Nineveh. Their cruelty had reached new levels making them the most feared people in the world. When they conquered a city, they would completely destroy it and then they would carefully construct a huge pyramid made of the skulls of their victims! Nineveh in Jonah's day, humbled itself but it forgot that humility and turned its back on God probably as soon as the danger of judgment was past. Repenting of repentance is the most dangerous thing that anyone can do because it mocks the grace of God and desensitizes our consciences so that it is far less likely that we will ever again turn toward God. Nineveh had presumed too much upon the grace of God. She has gone beyond the point of no return and was now fit only for judgment -- so this time God's prophet pronounces the verdict in Jerusalem, not in Nineveh. That explains why Nahum was not sent to Nineveh, but it does not tell us why God sent Him to Jerusalem.

The Book of Nahum starts with a series of simple theological statements about the Lord. Verse 2 says, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God." Verse 3 says, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power." Verse 7 says, "The Lord is good." It is interesting that those are the three things that Nahum chooses to tell us about God: God is holy, God is powerful and God is good. The existence of evil in our world has often led people to give up one of their beliefs about God. If God is really good then He will not want His children to suffer. Of course if He does not know what is happening, then we can understand why He has not acted. If He does not act against evil, perhaps it is because He cannot, He is not powerful enough. But Nahum starts out by affirming all three things -- God is powerful, He is good and He does know what is happening. I think Nahum was sent to prophesy about Nineveh's downfall in Jerusalem because the people of Jerusalem who were watching the Assyrian ascendancy were grappling

with the problem of evil. Since Assyria was devouring everything in its path, some of God's people were on the verge of solving the problem of evil by giving up belief in God's knowledge, His goodness or His power. Nahum wants to reassure them on all three points.

Well then, if God is good and just, He does know what's going on and He is powerful enough to achieve His purposes, then why have the cruel Assyrians prevailed without God acting? I think the fourth thing that Nahum said about God in the first few verses addressed that. "The Lord is slow to anger ..." The problem of evil is partly a function of God's long suffering mercy. Because He gives so many opportunities to repent and change, it can sometimes appear as though He isn't going to do anything. He isn't weak, He does care and He knows exactly what is happening -- and when His patience has finally been exhausted, He will act. Nahum, make sure My people understand that because unless they themselves repent, what is going to happen to Assyria will also befall them! So Nahum marched not to Nineveh, but to Jerusalem instead.

Take note of the linkage that exists in Nahum between what precedes it and what follows as well. God can constantly choose to speak through people, who were already saturated by what He had said to other writers of scripture. Nahum says, "The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." -- That is a direct quotation from Exodus 34:7. Then, a few verses later, I noticed these words: "Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news" -- that sounds a lot like Isaiah 52 and it also sounds like Romans chapter 10 where Paul quoted Isaiah and alluded to Nahum. There is linkage here then between Nahum and the Old Testament Books which precedes it and the New Testament Books which will follow it.

Nahum's prophetic abilities show through in this Book as well. The enemies of Assyria, the Babylonians and the Medes formed a confederacy and worked their way up to Nineveh. At a critical moment, the Tigris River on which the city was built, rose to flood level. So fast was the flood that it demolished the fortresses -- the walls. And this is not only a biblical fact -- it is historically confirmed as well. The whole city was destroyed. The day before, the people of Nineveh were enjoying a victory over those who were laying siege to their city. They had a party that night, an orgy. As they became drunk, the river flooded and the walls fell down. In the midst of their orgy, when the soldiers came in, their army was as defenseless. They were chewed right up. The city was completely overthrown and decimated. God had said this would happen -- and it did."

Thanks for joining us today for Project 4:4. God bless you!