

## **“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: NAHUM.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Sermon Texts: Nahum**

### **Introduction.**

I usually begin each week's Scripture reading with a sentence that includes words like, "This is the true and eternal, inspired, infallible, trustworthy word of the living God." In other words, it doesn't really matter who the human author is or what we know about him or even what his character was like.

Moses was a murderer and so was David along with being an adulterer. Solomon was a polygamist whose wives led him astray. Jonah tried to run away. Hosea married a prostitute. Matthew was an embezzler. Paul was a persecutor of the church. Peter betrayed Jesus. Not the most impressive resumes for the writers of Holy Scripture.

The 40 writers of the 66 books of the Bible weren't inspired the way an artist or musician or authors might talk about being inspired. Rather each book of the Bible was quite literally breathed out by God Himself. Each writer "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21).

If you say God has never spoken audibly to you, well you are mistaken. These are the very words of God. To hear Scripture read is to hear God's voice.

### **Nahum of Elkosh.**

When we turn to the prophecy of Nahum, we find ourselves reading words written down by another relatively unknown, small town prophet.

But it doesn't really matter because all we really want to do is get into the words of a man who heard directly the voice of the Lord and who spoke for God the very Words of God. We want to get to know the words of this man who heard God and had the power and authority of God to declare the things of God.

The first thing we have to acknowledge if we are going to be totally honest is that Nahum is pretty rough reading. You don't hear many sermons from the book of Nahum. You certainly don't see many verses from Nahum cross-stitched and hanging in people's homes.

I pulled out my Lectionary and discovered that Nahum is one of a few books completely left out of the formal three year schedule of Scripture readings used in more liturgical churches.

Nothing to see here folks, move along. Nothing really worth reading here, just skip on to Habakkuk. But let's be brave and see what this portion of God's holy and inspired Word says.

**An oracle concerning Nineveh, capital of Assyria.**

We know God called Nahum to prophecy against Nineveh. But wait a minute, didn't Jonah already prophecy against Nineveh and didn't Nineveh repent and God spared them? Yes, but that was over a hundred years ago and the revival of religion didn't last.

Since then Nineveh and the nation of Assyria had gotten back to their old ways only worse.

In my sermon on Jonah I said Assyria was a ruthless, bloodthirsty, empire that systematically beat into submission every nation around them. They were a violent, barbaric people. Their crimes against humanity were every bit as horrible as Hitler, Stalin and Hussein.

They skinned people alive and piled human heads in pyramids. The brutality in Mexico is a small glimpse of the brutality done by the Assyrians.

Here we are a century later reading in Nahum 3:1 that Nineveh was a city build on blood and plunder and on robbing the treasuries of numerous nations. And the last verse of Nahum tells us that Nineveh's unceasing evil has touched every nation.

In the eighth century BC Assyria was the most power nation in the world and the largest empire and the sworn enemy of Israel.

In 722BC Nineveh had attacked and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and scattered the ten tribes of Israel all over the Middle East, never to be fully restored.

This was a daring and bold and hard to believe prophecy. Who would ever have believed Nahum? It would be like saying that someday soon the United States will fall to Mexico. The empire of Assyria had ruled over the Middle East for 250 years. That's longer than the United States has been a sovereign nation.

Nineveh was a city without rival, it couldn't be defeated. Who could even begin to imagine that a powerful empire as rich and far-reaching and unstoppable as the Assyrian empire could ever fall? Who could ever believe it would one day be rubble? If you believe that you'll believe anything. Which is exactly the point.

Who in the 1980's would have ever believed the Berlin Wall would fall? But Nahum had a Berlin Wall story to back up his daring prophecy.

**Nahum 3:8-10** Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile,  
with water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall?

[9] Cush was her strength; Egypt too, and that without limit;

Put and the Libyans were her helpers.

[10] Yet she became an exile; she went into captivity;

her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street;

for her honored men lots were cast, and all her great men were bound in chains. (ESV)

Thebes was the great fortified capital city of Egypt on the Nile River. The Nile was about a half mile wide next to Thebes. Then with a series of channels and canals they surrounded Thebes with a water wall. Plus Thebes was surrounded by allies, nations she could count on to come to her defense. Yet Thebes for all her strengths fell to Assyria in 640BC.

So how can Nineveh be proud and boast, Nahum asks? If Thebes could fall to Assyria, why could Assyria not fall as well? Nineveh did not have this kind of defense, nor did Assyria have any allies, everyone was her enemy.

In one sense Nineveh could easily answer, “We are the world empire, we have defeated every enemy. We have even traveled 1500 miles to conquer Egypt and their great capital city of Thebes. We need no allies, for we are feared by all. There is none greater than us. When you are as great as we are it’s hard to be humble.”

Who could revival so mighty a city and so great an empire? Who would believe it?

The day of grace has run out and the night of judgment is about to fall. God sends Nahum to warn Nineveh once again that God’s judgment is coming.

Those who trust in horses and chariots and walls and allies will fall. In 612BC the nation of Babylon rose up against Nineveh and surrounded that great city and laid siege to it for two month until she fell. The city was so destroyed and laid to waste that for a 1,000 years no one could even find its location.

God is exceeding patient and long suffering, but there are limits to His divine forbearance and He has warned us of a coming day of judgment.

***The day of God’s grace has a sunset and when night falls so does His judgment.***

We are presently living in the day of Jonah, but the day of Nahum is coming.

What could make God so angry at a nation of people that He created in His image?

Wicked idolatry and brutal inhumanity. Assyria was guilty in spades. Idolatry actually leads to inhumanity. Idolatry always robs God of His glory and man of his value and worth. Idolatry devalues humanity. Worshipping other gods leads to evil and evil practices.

When we turn things into gods, people become things.

Worship of money makes one greedy, covetous, selfish, and willing to lie, cheat or steal to protect our wealth against people. As things become more important than people, things are treated better than people.

Worship power and it turns to abuse against others.

Worship sex and it turns to immorality and abuse and using others.

When we worship choice and convenience and selfish desires, children become things that can be disposed of.

When we worship the earth, creatures become gods, and people become dispensable.

Idolatry is putting something else in place of God. But all other gods make terrible gods.

When a nation follows an idol, her wars become holy wars.

Nazi Germany worshipped racial superiority and tried to make Europe bow to her god.  
Japan worshipped the Sun-god and tried to make the Pacific nations bow to her god.  
Arab nations worship Allah and wage holy war to make all bow to Allah.  
America worships materialism, so we must judge whether our wars are holy wars to protect our way of life and our standard of living.

A nation built on idolatry and inhumanity will not stand. Her judgment is deserved and inescapable.

**Proverbs 14:34** Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. (ESV)

Assyria considered herself the king of beasts, the king of the jungle (2:10-13). The rest of the world was her prey, to be consumed and devoured by her. But the lion of Assyria is no match for the lion of Judah, the king of Kings.

Who would ever believe that the forces of evil in our world will one day be wiped out?  
Who would ever believe that Satan's vast empire will one day be reduced to rubble and cast forever into hell?  
Who would ever believe that one day the final enemy death will be destroyed by one stronger than death?

The gates of hell will not prevail, they will not succeed, they will never overcome the church of Jesus Christ. It does not matter how bad things look or get, the stronger man has come into our world.

The cross is the most decisive defeat of the greatest powers standing against God. The cross is the public display of the defeat of Satan and all his legions.

The destruction of Nineveh is a foretaste of the defeat of all wickedness. All powers that oppose God and His righteousness and authority will be brought to shame and defeat. None can stand.

***The good news of the Gospel is threefold.***

It is Nahum's news that ***God's enemies will be defeated.***

**Nahum 1:2** The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. (ESV)

It is Nahum's news that ***God will bring salvation.***

**Nahum 1:15** Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off. (ESV)

**God alone is our refuge and strength.**

**Nahum 1:7** The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. (ESV)

***The Lord is good.***

The great goodness of God. God only does good for His children. He is good to those who wait on Him. Surely His goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

***The Lord is strong.***

**Psalm 18:1-2** I love you, O LORD, my strength.  
[2] The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,  
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (ESV)

**Psalm 46:1-3** God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.  
[2] Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
[3] though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah (ESV)

When Martin Luther was being taken to trial before the Catholic rulers he was told to flee, to not appear for he could be attacked and killed. But he said he would go and as he went he had Psalm 46 in mind and on the way wrote the words to *A Mighty Fortress is our God.*

For those feeling attacked, beset by evil or trouble, God is a sure defense, a secure fortress.

***The Lord knows those who take refuge in Him.***

He has known us from before the foundations of the earth. He knows us far back into eternity and far forward into eternity. He knows our origin and our destiny.

**Application and conclusion.**

I leave you with two thoughts.

You should know about the judgment you have been saved and delivered from so that you might know how great is the salvation given to you, how great is the love shown you and how great is the reward that awaits you. All of this is cause for worship.

Without a deep appreciation of sin we don't appreciate salvation.  
Without a deep appreciation of judgment we don't appreciate our justification.  
Who needs salvation if there is nothing to be saved from?  
Why do I need a Savior if my sin isn't bad enough to hurt me?

Books like Nahum remind us of what we once were and what would happen to us if we stayed in that condition and where we would go as a result.

And all of this is cause for sharing the good news with others. What can you and I do to turn more of God's enemies into God's friends.

**Romans 10:15** As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"