

Nahum 2

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Date: 21 August 2016

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[0 : 00] And if you'd like to turn back in your Bibles to Nahum, chapter 2. That would be really helpful.

The story goes of a chess champion who was fascinated with a painting. The message was clear. If you play with the devil, he will capture your soul forever.

But after studying the chessboard in the painting, the chess master discovered actually that the move the devil was about to make would still leave one move left for the young man.

And the young man in turn could checkmate the devil. And he shouted out in the Louvre art gallery, I wish you could hear me. The king still has one move left.

It's a great story. The painting was sold by Christie's. No one knows who owns it now. It's a true story. And in a way, it's a great illustration for the message of Nahum.

[1 : 30] It is a message of comfort. The word Nahum, it means comfort. When it feels like checkmate for God's people. It is that God, the king of Judah, always has another move against his enemies.

And when we can't believe that it isn't checkmate, Nahum shouts to God's people, no, no, the king has another move.

The history around about that time of Nahum writing was that the Assyrian Empire, it was one of the greatest empires the world had ever seen, and it stood against God and his people.

And a couple of weeks ago we saw, didn't we, the devil, the worthless counsellor in chapter 1 verse 11, he is there and he stands at the centre of the Assyrian spirit.

The Assyrian evil. He is the one who is kind of foundational to what they're doing in the world. To the war that they stand for.

[2 : 37] But God is going to rescue his people, even though they don't deserve it, by bringing a fierce justice upon Assyria.

But believing that is the problem, isn't it? How is Nahum going to persuade God's people that this is really going to happen? Just imagine their situation.

They live in Judah. It's a tiny little bit of land. It's about two-thirds the size of Wales. No offence to Wales. But Assyria is about the size of Western Europe.

And they're on the doorstep. There is nothing that is going to stop them. And this is the problem, isn't it? It seems too ridiculous. It seems incredible. That God is going to relieve them.

That he is going to rescue them. And some of us are like that, aren't we? We feel like we're stuck in that painting. And we think that it's checkmate. We think, I'm never going to be done with sin.

[3 : 39] Sin is never going to be done with me. Satan has got me. No, no. You don't know how bad I am. And as we look at the world, actually, on a whole scale, that is what it looks like, isn't it?

Evil will never be done with in the world. So this chapter is designed to help God's people believe that the checkmate is not true.

And how he does this, he slows things right down and he gives them a graphic, a full-bodied, bloody description of what is going to happen when God performs this rescue.

He gives a blow-by-blow commentary of God's future judgment on Assyria, on Nineveh, the city capital. So that we can visualize, so that we can grasp and picture how great this deliverance will be.

Not only is it not checkmate for God's people, but actually this victory will be decisive and devastating. So what we've got is a battle scene, we heard it earlier, didn't we, where a new army is going to rise up, a new empire is going to come and attack Nineveh.

[4 : 58] And we are put right in the action here. There are three sections in the battle, the approach, the invasion, and then the plundering. And we're right in the battle here. We're right in the

battle, and it's as if we're seeing two aspects going on here.

It's as if there are two camera angles. I don't know if you watched the football, if and when you watched the football earlier this year. Often you watch the game, don't you, and there are two teams, and you flip to the two cameras watching the two teams.

They're fans of the two different teams. And the contrast is great, isn't it? In the final, when Portugal, I think, scored against France in extra time. You had one camera in one city, and another camera in another city.

One camera in Paris, on the Chandelier, and it was absolute silence, wasn't it? It's just deadpan. The dejection. And then the contrast in another city.

You go to Lisbon in Portugal, and the camera shakes with the jubilation of the victory of the fans. And there's a contrast there, isn't there? And that is what we've got here. There are two cameras in two cities.

[6 : 11] You've got camera one. Let's call it battle cam one. And that is in Judah, in Jerusalem, at the heart of Judah. And the people of God are sitting behind the walls of Jerusalem, aren't they?

They're in verse 15. We saw this verse a couple of weeks ago. This messenger comes, and delivers a message to Judah, and he says, you know, it's good news.

The battle has been won. There is victory. There is rescue. That is camera one. But then there's camera two, which is in another city.

It's in the city of Nineveh. And the feeling there is utterly, utterly different. It is dejection, and silence, and regret.

So as we go through this battle scene, you've got to ask yourself, which city are you in? There are two ways of seeing God's rescue. There's the good news, and there's the bad news.

[7 : 13] And it depends where you are, when it happens. Which city are you in? Now there's a lot of detail here, isn't there? I just want to pick out a few points. And firstly, the approach.

The approach. The battle begins, and we're inside the city of Nineveh. We're on Nineveh camp. And Nineveh gets the news that war is upon them, doesn't it?

In verse 1, if you look there, the scatterer has come against you. Now that is a staggering statement. It is staggering, because that is exactly what Assyria has been doing to the rest of the world.

They were notorious for causing refugee crisis after refugee crisis. They scattered peoples. They displaced nations as they went on the war path.

But now, do you see, the tables are turned. Now, the scatterer is upon them. There is a new power on the world stage who will give them a taste of their own medicine.

[8 : 23] Historically, it was the great empire of Babylon. And this attack is retributive, isn't it? What goes around comes around. They will reap what they've sown.

They'll be treated as they have treated others. And so this cry goes out in verse 1. The great war cry, man the ramparts, watch the road, dress for battle, collect all your strength, guard, watch, strengthen, muster, but it's a vain cry to war.

Because just look at the glory of this approaching army in verse 3 and 4. There they are. The shield of his mighty men is red.

Maybe referring to the blood of previous victories. They have shields that are red. They're clothed in scarlet.

There's a sort of emboldened confidence about them, isn't there? This army that approaches.

They're extremely powerful. They've got chariots. It's the new equipment for modern warfare.

[9 : 28] Not only have they got chariots, though, they've got chariots covered in metal, flashing with metal. They are extremely powerful.

And these chariots, they race through the streets, don't they? It's a scene of panic. They cut off all of the exits and entrances around the city. This is a siege going on here.

And there is sheer panic. At verse 5, I think what is happening here is that we get a close-up of the king of Nineveh inside the city walls. And he sees that the battle is upon him and he remembers, I've got some guys who might be able to defend us here.

He remembers his officers. He sends them. They stumble as they go to get to the wall to defend the city. Verse 5, there should be the word but here in the English translation.

But it is too late. The siege tower is set up. They panic to get to the wall to defend themselves but it's too late.

[10:33] it's unexpected. It's futile to defend. It is this horrifying moment when Assyria realises that war is upon them and they are stunned.

They're shocked. How they have treated God and his people will suddenly be how they are going to be treated. and they're trapped.

There's no way out. This army comes, doesn't it, upon them. But the big message coming from the camera in Nineveh is at the end of this chapter in verse 13.

Just drop your eye down. Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts. You see, that is the real issue for Nineveh here, isn't it?

It isn't the army approaching, it's not the great tactics they use, it's not the great equipment they've got, but it's the God who sends them.

[11:39] Would you believe me if I said that I was going to be the next heavyweight champion of the world? I could believe that, couldn't I, if I was deluded. I've never been in a boxing match, I'm not sure I've ever even thrown a punch or taken a punch.

It would be very stupid of me to go around saying that, wouldn't it? But imagine I do, imagine I go around saying I'm going to be the next heavyweight champion of the world and suddenly the phone rings and a voice says, Mr. Roberts, yes?

I hear you've been going around saying you're going to be the next heavyweight champion of the world. I say, yeah, that's fine, what's it to you? Well, this is Tyson Fury speaking and he says, if you think you can be the next heavyweight champion of the world, let's do this.

Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough. Let's get into the ring, let's do this. Guard, watch, strengthen, muster. And it would be no contest with it.

And this is what God says, you've been fighting against me, Assyria, you've been fighting against my people and he says, come on then, let's do this. If you think you're hard enough.

[12:54] You get yourself ready. Guard, watch, strengthen and muster and let's see how it goes for you. this army is sent by God. And they will fight against God's enemies in the same way that they have fought against him.

So this battle is good news and it's bad news, isn't it? And the question is, which city are you in? Because if you're in Nineveh at this point, and you've been part of this nation that has lived a life in defiance against God and his people, Nahum does not allow us to be coy about this, does he, in this description.

It will be shocking. And God will treat you in the same way that you have treated him. If you've been going around saying, actually I'm the heavyweight champion of my life, he will say, well, come on then, let's do this.

He will besiege you and leave you with no place to run. Cutting off all of the exits and all of the entrances, it will be retribution.

A moment of sheer panic when suddenly you realise you've got nothing to defend yourself with. And it will be futile. But there is good news too, isn't there?

[14:14] The reason for this retribution in this chapter is verse 2, if you look there. Verse 2, for the Lord is not only giving retribution, he is restoring, in the same judgment, he is restoring the majesty of Jacob as the majesty of Israel.

He does this judgment for the restoration of his own people, for his weak little people in Judah, as they face this enemy.

And so if you don't believe that evil will be dealt with, and that your sin is dealt with, and you're thinking it is just checkmates, Nahum says, just picture this moment.

Just slow down and listen to this description and picture this future prospect where the devil will panic and stumble and try in vain to muster his strength and it will be futile.

Picture this moment when God will say to his enemies, let's do this and let's end it once for all. That is what is so good about trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and to go to him for refuge.

[15:34] When you're behind his walls, when you're in the city of Jerusalem, it is not on you to fight the battles. The Lord fights his people's battles.

He takes sin and defeats it. And he defeats our enemies and brings us into a land of peace. The battle belongs to the Lord.

So that's the approach. Secondly, the entry or the invasion, the entry. The history books tell us that Nahum's description of the battle of Nineveh where Babylon came and attacked it is extremely accurate.

You wonder what sort of person gives the tactics away to the enemy before the battle, don't you? That is what Nahum is doing here. He is telling them what is going to happen in the battle.

He is telling Ninevites how they are going to fall. This is how it will happen. There will be a siege, there will be chariots. And we get on to verse 6 when the invasion accelerates.

[16:43] Verse 6, the river gates are open, the palace melts away. historians tell us that Nineveh was built on a complex network of rivers.

It was how they defended themselves. They were surrounded by water and it gave them a great strategic advantage. But what the Babylonians did was they came and surrounded the city in a siege and they built dams further along the river away from the city.

And the water built up and it built up and it built up and eventually they opened the dams and the water flooded the city. You see, what was their greatest defence turned out to be their greatest point of weakness.

The water that had defended them turned out to be their downfall. It was ingenious strategy. And Nahum tells them this will happen. There is this sense, isn't there, that some enemies of God will never stop, they will never relent.

even when the news is out there. The book of Jonah, it's sort of Nahum part one, has God relenting from destroying Nineveh, doesn't it?

[17:57] It's a different story. They hear the message that Jonah gives them and they repent, they turn in faith. It's glorious. But this is a new generation and God can warn and warn and warn that there comes a point where the warning just falls on deaf ears and God can make it perfectly clear what is going to happen but they're not listening.

The invasion of the city is decisive and the strongest defence they have becomes their point of weakness. And you see what happens in verse 6, even the palace melts away, that's really crucial and the palace it's the eagle's nest isn't it?

It's the last stand, the last place for the Ninevite emperor to hide but he is left completely defenceless. His only place of residence on the earth is taken away.

He's got nowhere. He is homeless. So you've got a scene of devastation as the army gets into the city stripping verse 7 and is moaning.

Whoever's left there watches as the defence forces run away verse 8 they shout halt stop stay and defend the city but they keep running away.

[19:27] It's a scene of ruin and of regret. Verse 10 desolate desolation and ruin hearts melt knees tremble anguish is in all loins all faces growing pale.

That is a great play on words. It literally reads their faces were gathering aglow. It's the same way you describe to put on make-up or to put on painting face painting.

That was how the Assyrians showed off their great power and strength. They would have body paint and face paint but here they're putting on a different kind of face paint aren't they?

They're putting on the face paint of regret destruction. Their strength has been stripped away.

They realise that the only strength they had was given to them by God. There is no courage in man apart from what God supplies to man and here God is against them.

[20:36] If you don't believe it Nahum says just slow down for a minute people of God just picture this just picture that moment when the devil's greatest strength will be his greatest downfall.

That is what happened at the cross isn't it the Lord Jesus where the devil's great enemy the Lord Jesus was slain and it looked as if he had prevailed but actually it was his downfall.

The devil was utterly defeated and one day he will be utterly homeless. He will have no residence on earth. The earth will be rid of him forever. There will be no pockets of resistance.

Evil will be completely eradicated. It will be a world totally pure and peaceful and delightful. And that is the good news isn't it?

The good news behind the walls of God's city. But it can be bad news if you're in the city of Nineveh.

[21:43] Because the strength you thought you had will be stripped away and there is no courage in man apart from what God supplies to you. And the warnings will eventually stop because you've stopped listening to them anyway.

The approach, the entry, lastly and really briefly the plundering. Just have a look at verse nine. Plunder the silver, plunder the gold.

There is no end of the treasure or of the wealth of precious things. And after the battle is over we've got a scene, haven't we, where the victors plunder all that the Ninevites have amassed in their great campaigns.

And it is taken. The one who got wealthy by impoverishing others is impoverished. every victory has great plunder, doesn't it?

And it's the good news that comes to God's city that their God has won the plunder. Jesus Christ has won the plunder of his victory.

[22 : 51] He has won the whole earth. He's been given the whole universe. A great inheritance to share with his people. all. But in the city that defies God, everything they had will be stripped away.

The little they did have will be taken away. So which city are you in? I don't know how you feel about this talk of retributive justice.

It's quite strong in this passage, isn't it? We prefer the term rehabilitation. don't we? In our justice system. We don't like it, maybe.

But I wonder if there is a point where the crime is so bad that only retribution is the right thing. And there are evils in this world that are so great, aren't there, that that is the right thing, that they must be removed and punished forever.

We may feel as if this battle scene is disproportionate to what is going on. It's unfair what God is going to do here. But I've got to say, to think like that is to have a sentimental blindness to the realities of history.

[24 : 15] Let me just read to you from the annals of Ashurnazipal, who was one of the emperors of Assyria from the 9th century BC.

Let me warn you, it's not easy listening. this was recorded after one of his conquests. words, I built the pillar over against this city, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins.

I impaled some, and others I fixed to stakes around about the pillar, many within the borders of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls, and cut off the limbs of the high officers. many captives I burned with fire, some I captured alive. I cut off their hands and their fingers and their ears. The eyes of many of them I put out, and I made a heap of the living and another of the dead.

Their young man and maidens I burned with fire. Do you know, that is the kind of ruthlessness that the world saw then, in the path of Assyria. And really, that is not far from the reality of many of our brothers and sisters, is it, tonight.

[25 : 32] And so there comes a point where retribution is right, and for some of our brothers and sisters, that is gloriously good news. And if that is true for human beings, it is certainly true for the devil, where all of us can rejoice to know that even though it may look like checkmate, the king always has one more move against him, and one day the devil will be permanently removed from this earth.

And we can rejoice in that, can't we? But the question that I want you to think about tonight is, which city are you in? Because one day the warnings will stop, and God will say to all of his enemies, I am against you.

let's place in prayer. place in prayer. place in prayer.