

Title: **NAHUM**
 “The LORD is good.”
Text: Nahum 1:1-7
Subject: *God’s Goodness in Wrath and in Mercy*
Date: Tuesday Evening—December 16, 2003
Tape # X-93b
Readings: *Lindsay Campbell & Larry Criss*
Introduction:

The mercy, love, grace, and goodness of God cannot be proclaimed too fully, believed too firmly, or extolled too highly. I rejoice to declare to men and women everywhere that *“The LORD is good.”* — *“The goodness of God endureth continually”* (Ps. 52:1). — *“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living”* (Ps. 27:13). — *“The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD”* (Ps. 33:5). — *“The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance”* (Rom. 2:4). — *“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!”* (Ps. 31:19).

We rejoice in the knowledge of God’s infinite, matchless, goodness. But, the church of this age has a terribly perverted sense of God’s goodness. There is a sense of God’s goodness in the church, and in the world, today that is totally unbiblical. In fact, it borders upon idolatry. It is a sense of goodness that robs the Almighty of majesty. It is a concept of divine love that denies God’s veracity. It is an idea of mercy that totally denies

the justice of God. The modern notion of God's goodness totally denies his holiness.

Those who have the idea that God is so loving, gracious, and good that he will not punish sin have no real idea of who God is. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "He who does not believe that God will punish sin will not believe that he will pardon it through the blood of His Son." If we would worship God, we must be captured by a sense of, an awareness of the majesty, glory, and power of the omnipotent God in his glorious holiness.

If ever there was a generation that needed to hear the message of Nahum, it is this generation. In the opening verses of Nahum's prophecy, we are confronted with a striking, bold declaration of God's character. Here is that one true and living God before whom sinners are compelled to bow, recognizing his awesome, infinite majesty. This great God is "*a consuming fire!*"

(Nahum 1:1-7) "The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. {2} God *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. {3} The 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. {4} He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. {5} The

mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. {6} Who 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. {7} The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

NAHUM

Nahum's name means "comfort" or "consolation." We know nothing more about him than that. We do not know who Nahum was, what kind of man he was, who his parents were, how long he lived, where he died, who his descendants were, or even if he had any descendants. All we know about this man, Nahum, is that he was a prophet of God who carried in his heart the burden of the Word of the Lord and faithfully proclaimed the message God gave him to his generation. Nahum was one of those men who faithfully served the Lord in obscurity, without fame or recognition in this world. But he was a faithful man who served a faithful God. For him that was enough. God tells us virtually nothing about Nahum; but Nahum tells us much about God.

A MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT

Nahum's message was a declaration of God's determined judgment upon Nineveh. He announces it immediately (1:1, 8).

(Nahum 1:1) "The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."

(Nahum 1:8) "But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies."

About 100 years earlier the Lord had sent his prophet Jonah to this wicked city, warning them of wrath and judgment. Upon hearing Jonah's message the city repented, turned from their idols and the ungodly ways of idolatry to the Lord God and worshipped him, and God who delights in mercy stayed his wrath. The city was spared. But, in the years that followed, the Ninevites forsook the Lord and turned again to their idols and to the ways of cruelty and lasciviousness that idolatry always produces.

Now "*the burden of Nineveh*" was laid upon Nahum's heart by God. His prophecy graphically foretells the complete desolation of that people who violently persecuted the Jews. The destruction came 100 years later, when God, in his holiness, justice, and truth rewarded the sin of Nineveh with indescribable wrath.

- In chapter 1 the judgment determined upon Nineveh is announced.
- In chapter 2 the sentence upon Nineveh is described. God was determined to utterly and permanently destroy the great, renowned city. — "*Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts*" (2:13). — "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" But when God turns against us, who can be for us?

- In chapter 3 the prophet describes the execution of God's wrath upon the city. It would not come to pass for another 100 years; but it would come to pass. The Lord God had bruised the city with an irrevocable stroke of justice. He declares, "*There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous*" (3:19).

To despise God's mercy is to court his wrath. The Lord God had sent Jonah to Nineveh. He had displayed his grace to that wicked city, sparing them in his mercy. But they wilfully turned aside from the revelation of his goodness. Now, the reprobate city was under the irrevocable sentence of his wrath.

Nahum's prophecy describes the utter destruction of Nineveh; and the city was so utterly destroyed that every trace of its existence was covered until 1841, when some archeologists discovered it buried beneath the earth. The Ninevites thought they were impregnable. But the Almighty has his way in the whirlwind and in the sea, in the mountains and in the hills, in heaven and in earth. When the appointed time of wrath came, the Lord God raised up a pagan army to invade and destroy the city and caused it to be buried by the overflowing of the Tigris river which had long served as its protector.

A MESSAGE OF CONSOLATION

Nahum's message to Nineveh was a message of wrath and judgment, wrath and judgment fully deserved. But that is not all there is to his message. As I told you in the

beginning of this message, Nahum means “Comfort” or “consolation,” and his message to God’s elect is a message of comfort and consolation, a message full of instruction. Go back to chapter 1 and observe how fully Nahum describes the great, glorious character of our God.

Nahum began his prophecy with a declaration of God's attributes. He does not declare all the attributes of God's Being. No man could do that. But he does give us six distinct attributes of deity, six things which are essential to and descriptive of God's holy character. Who is God? What is he like? Nahum tells us that...

1. "God is jealous."

With God jealousy is not a fault, but an attribute. It is right for God to be jealous because he is perfect. Any assault upon his person, resistance to his will, rebellion against his rule, or objection to his work is evil. God is jealous for his Son — Ask those who crucified him! God is jealous for his own honor and glory — Ask Moses! God is jealous for his worship and ordinances — Ask Uzza! God is jealous for his people — Ask Pharaoh! God will avenge his own elect. He will avenge the honor of his name. He will avenge himself upon his enemies. Read verse two again. *“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the*

LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath¹ for his enemies.”

Today men talk about God's love as though his love is a fluctuating passion, like ours, and altogether isolated from his other glorious attributes. The fact that "*God is love*" does not in anyway diminish the fact that "*God is jealous*." In fact, it is God's love that makes him jealous, so jealous that he is "*furiosus*" and "*reserveth wrath for his enemies*."

2. "*The LORD is slow to anger.*"

In other words, this great and terrible God, whose jealousy makes him furious, is also patient, forgiving and longsuffering with sinners. God is not in a hurry to punish sinners and execute judgment upon his enemies. Judgment is his strange work. And he always defers it, giving sinners space for repentance. This is mercy. God is willing to be gracious. God now affords his enemies opportunity to repent and commands them to do so (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9).

3. "*The LORD is great in power.*"

He is the omnipotent, almighty God. He has all power, and can do all that he is pleased to do. Our God is a great God, because he is "*great in power*." A weak, frustrated,

¹ The word "wrath" is not in the original text. It was added by our translators. What God reserves for his enemies is inconceivably and inexpressibly horrifying! "*God is jealous*" (Nah. 1:2).

defeated God is as useless as a bucket without a bottom, or a well without water. What is omnipotence? It is the ability and power of God to do all his pleasure (Isa. 46:9-13), to perform all his Word (Isa. 55:11), to accomplish all his purpose (Rom. 8:28-30), and to save all his people (Rom. 9:13-18). A weak god is a frustration to those who worship him, because a weak god is always frustrated. The almighty, omnipotent Jehovah is the comfort and stay of those who trust him.

4. "*The LORD will not at all acquit the wicked.*"

That is to say, God is just. Justice and truth are the habitation of his throne. Though he is longsuffering and patient, he will punish every transgressor. God's forbearance is not an indication that he lacks either the will or the ability to punish his enemies. He is great in power. And he is just. Therefore, "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*" God will not clear the guilty. A just God cannot clear the guilty.

"The LORD will not at all acquit the wicked." — The mysteries of Calvary are bound up in this short sentence. When a known criminal is pardoned, something is desperately wrong, either with the law that condemned him or the administration of it. For God to acquit the wicked would indicate the same flaw, unless he can do so upon the grounds of justice satisfied.

How can he be just, and yet be the Justifier of sinners? If God is just and must punish sin, how can any sinner ever

be saved? Will God lay aside his justice that he might be merciful? No. He cannot. Justice is essential to his character. How then can he save us? There is only one way — Substitution (Job 33:24; Prov. 16;6; Rom. 3:24-26).

If God almighty saves a guilty sinner and forgives his sins, **three things must be done**. *First*, the sinner must be punished to the full satisfaction of justice. *Second*, his sins and guilt must be totally removed. *Third*, he must become perfectly righteous. And these three things can be done only by the substitutionary work of Christ. God punished the sins of all his elect to the full satisfaction of his justice when Christ died as our Substitute (Gal. 3:13). He removed them from us altogether and put them away by the sacrifice of his dear Son (Heb. 9:26). And he has imputed to us Christ's perfect righteousness in exactly the same way and to the same degree as he imputed our sins to Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

5. "*The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm.*"

What do those words mean? They mean that the Lord our God, who is jealous, longsuffering, omnipotent, and just, is also totally sovereign. He rules all things. "*And the clouds are the dust of his feet!*" (Read Psa. 115:3; 135:6). In all things, at all times, with all creatures, and in all places, "*The Lord hath his way!*" In creation, in providence, and in grace, "*The Lord hath his way!*" We rejoice in the glorious sovereignty of our great God,

knowing that God always exercises his sovereignty over all things for the redemption and salvation of his people (vv. 4-6; Isa. 45:7, 22; 50:2; 51:10-12).

As we contemplate what the Lord God did in Nineveh, let us be reminded once more that “*our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased*” (Ps. 115:3). — “*Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places*” (Ps. 135:6). God did not wind up the universe, start it spinning, and then leave it to see what would happen. He is not the some far away observer of history. He is the God of history. He makes history.

It was God who caused the wind to blow for Jonah one day and God who picked up the elements of nature and hurled them upon Nineveh another.

Few there are who recognize these things. When some great tragedy occurs in the world, or an epidemic sweeps over the land, or pestilence strikes, no one turns to God in repentance, because no one imagines that God would do such things. But he declares plainly that these things are the works of his hands (Isa. 45:7).

(Isa 45:7) "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*."

How little we see this. Yet, it should be evident to all. It was but a change in the wind that turned the tide of the

battle of Gettysburg and forever altered the course of our nation's history. — *"He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind"* (Ps. 107:25). Napoleon once challenged the world and God, saying, "The Lord is on the side of the heaviest artillery." But that proud man with his mighty artillery was stopped in his tracks and defeated by an enormous accumulation of unexpected tiny snowflakes! — *"Fire and hail; snow and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word"* (Ps. 148:8). And a century after Nahum's prophecy, God turned loose his elements, and Nineveh fell to the armies of the Medes. **Judgment is God's work.** When we see it, let us be wise and seek his face.

Even as the prophet describes the judgment of God, the fierce anger of his wrath, he raises a question which, when answered, carries a message of hope for sinners — **"Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide the fierceness of his anger?"** Not me! Not you! God's wrath would consume us like a snowflake in a blast furnace! But the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Substitute, stood before the indignation of almighty God and consumed his wrath for us! Do you see these attributes of God? The Lord is jealous. The Lord is longsuffering. The Lord is omnipotent. The Lord is just. The Lord is sovereign.

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

6. "The LORD is good!"

Our great God is good! Goodness is as essential to God's Being as sovereignty, justice, truth, and holiness. In fact, the very name "God" is an abbreviation of the word "good." Goodness is the character of our God; and the goodness of God gives us hope, comfort, and strength in the midst of our trials and sorrows in this world. Look at what the Holy Spirit here tells us by his servant Nahum about the goodness of our God.

"The LORD is good!" — Nahum has been talking about the storm of God's wrath, the terror of his justice, the greatness of his anger, whirlwinds, shaking mountains, melting hills, and burning earth. Then, he comes to a blessed, calm, serene island of rest — "*The LORD is good.*" I can no more explain the goodness of God than a thimble could contain the ocean. But I can tell you some of the things I know about God's goodness.

God is essentially good. Goodness is essential to God. Without it, he would not be God. Goodness is so essentially the character of God that, as John Gill has observed, "There is nothing but goodness in God, and nothing but goodness comes from him" (James 1:13-14). He permits evil, but overrules it for good (Psa. 76:10). He afflicts his children and brings many evil things upon us, but he makes the evil work for good (Rom. 8:28; Prov. 12:21; Gen. 50:20). God punishes sin with vengeance, but even that punishment of sin is good, as a vindication of justice and the protection of his kingdom.

God is singularly good. He is the only good One in the universe (Matt. 19:17). "God's goodness is the root of all goodness. Our goodness, if we have any, springs out of his goodness" (William Tyndale).

God is eternally and immutably good (Mal. 3:6). The goodness of God never varies, changes, or alters. He is good, always good, good in each of his glorious Persons. God, the Father is good. God the Son is good. God the Holy Spirit is good. **God is good in all his acts of grace** (Eph. 1:3-14). **God is good in all his works of providence** (Rom. 8:28). In all that he has done, is doing, and shall hereafter do God is good. **God is infinitely, incomparably, immeasurably good.** Who can measure the goodness of God? To what shall his goodness be compared? He is good beyond our highest estimation of what good is. **God is good to his own elect** (Psa. 23:6).

"*The LORD is good!*" That is a sentence worthy of constant meditation. Eternity itself will not tell out the fullness of God's goodness. And all his goodness is directed toward us at all times!

"The LORD is a stronghold in the day of trouble." — The only place of safety in this world is the place we find beneath the shadow of his wings (Prov. 18:10). The Lord who is good is our stronghold, our place of refuge. He is our refuge in the day of trouble (Heb. 6:18; 4:16).

We have our days of trouble as long as we live in this world, but notice how Nahum describes them. Everyday of trouble is “*the*” day of God's appointment. Every day of trouble is temporary — only the “*day*” of trouble (2 Cor. 4:17-18). Whatever the trouble may be, the Lord is our stronghold in the midst of the ‘*trouble*,’ every kind of trouble (Heb. 4:16). A stronghold is a mighty fortress for the protection of citizens against the aggressions of enemies. It is a place of safety, of peace, of residence, and of provision.

"The LORD knoweth them that trust in him." — Do you trust in him? Do you trust his Son, his finished work, his abundant grace, his many promises, his providential rule, his unerring wisdom? Do you trust this great, mighty, good God? If you do, hear this and be of good comfort — *"The Lord knoweth them that trust in him."*

That word "*knoweth*" is overflowing with consolation. It means that the Lord has foreordained and predestinated them that trust in him (Rom. 8:29). He everlastingly loves them that trust in him (Jer. 31:3). He loves us without cause, without condition, without beginning, without change, and without end. The Lord is intimately acquainted with them that trust in him (Matt. 10:30). He knows who they are, where they are, and what they need. The Lord graciously approves of and accepts them that trust in him (Eph. 1:6). The Lord holds loving communion with them that trust in him (John 15:15). The Lord tenderly cares for them that trust in him (Isa.

43:1-5). He is with you. He will protect you. He will provide for you. He will help you. He will keep you.

Tamar may disguise herself so that Judah does not know her. Isaac, through dimness of sight, may pass over Esau and bless Jacob. Joseph may forget, or be forgotten by, his brethren. Solomon may not be able to tell who the child belongs to. And Christ may come to his own and not be received. But "*the Lord knoweth them that trust in him.*" He knows Daniel in the lion's den. He knows Job on the dunghill. He knows Peter in prison. He knows Lazarus at the rich man's gate. He knows Abel falling to the ground by his brother's wrath. He knows me. And he know you (2 Tim. 2:19).

And the Lord will publicly own them that trust him (Rev. 3:5). He owns us now. He owns us before the throne (1 John 2:1-2). He will own us before all worlds in the last day. Let us ever trust the goodness of God, even when we cannot see his goodness. Let us flee to and abide in our mighty Stronghold. Let us ever trust our Savior's loving care. If the Lord who is good knows us, we want nothing else to satisfy us. He knows us eternally. He knows us perfectly. He knows us universally (Psa. 107:8, 15, 21, 31). If he who is good knows us, all is well!