Nahum - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Minor Prophets, Nahum 1: a Voice for Today

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This is a figure for us to study, a voice for us to bear. What did Jehoshaphat-days, or Hezekiah-days, or Josiah-days, do for Jerusalem? Did judgment after such days enter by the hand of the Chaldean, though they were very fair and promising? We know it did. Did Nineveh want the day of the Lord, though once upon a time the king there descended from his throne and sat in ashes, and man and beast were clothed in sackcloth, and neither did eat nor drink? Yes, we know this also. And I may ask again, “What has Reformation done for Christendom?” Coming judgments, and not the Reformation, or progress, or education for the million, will prepare the world for the glory and kingdom of the Lord.

The earlier history of God’s dealing with Nineveh by the hand of Jonah may, in this day of judgment announced by Nahum, witness to us that He is “slow to anger”—for He sent a preacher then to warn, and turn them to that repentance which He received, and spared them. But He that is slow to anger, does not “acquit the wicked” (see Nah. 1:3). There is a separating between the precious and the vile. “He knows them that trust in Him,” even the remnant in Nineveh if there are such, as we said before (Nah. 1:7); but the Judge of all the earth, like the Judge of Sodom who stood of old before Abraham, “will do right.”

Minor Prophets, Nahum

The Ninevite was the first great man of the earth in the age of the kingdom, as I may speak; as Nimrod, the ancestor, as to territory, of the Ninevite, had been the great man of the earth in the earlier age of the fathers. Nimrod had affected dominion and empire then, when as yet things were in a simpler and primitive condition. Now that kingdoms have been formed, and nations rather than families overspread the earth, the king of Nineveh, in Nimrod-pride and worldliness, affects dominion and empire in the midst of them.

He is not one of the great imperial powers that are looked at in Daniel. He is neither the head of gold, nor the breast of silver, nor the thighs of brass, nor the legs of iron. Such an image had not begun to be formed in the day of Nineveh, when the king of Assyria was supreme in the world. But among the kingdoms which were then formed, in days preceding the day of the Chaldean head of gold, he was eminent. Asshur had carried away captive many of them. Amalek was then gone from the scene, and the Kenites had been wasted until their full removal was accomplished by the Assyrians (Num. 24:20-22). And further, the Assyrians had insulted and reduced that people whom the Lord God of heaven and earth had chosen as the lot of His inheritance, and formed for Himself.

The Lord, in that action, had used him as a rod upon His disobedient, rebellious Israel; but “he meant not so.” He purposed “to prey the prey, and to spoil the spoil.” Pride gives him his only language, “Are not my princes altogether kings,” he says—“as my hand hath formed the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel those of Jerusalem and of Samaria, shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?” (Isa. 10:8, 10-11). The Lord God was angry. He pronounces a burden upon him, and Nahum delivers it. “The Lord is a jealous God and a revenger” (Nah. 1:2).

The ministry of Jonah, as well as of Nahum, had respect to Nineveh. We have considered that already in our chapter on Jonah’s prophecy. Jonah preceded Nahum, it may be, about 120 years. Under the word of Jonah, Nineveh had repented; but the word which now follows by Nahum is a notice of judgment, final judgment, judgment that is to make an utter end. “Affliction,” says the prophet, “shall not rise up the second time” (Nah. 1:9).

What are we to say then of Nineveh’s repentance in the day of Jonah? Was it, as the morning cloud, or early dew, a goodness that passed away? It may have been such. Or, it may have been reformation, and a genuine work like that in another Gentile world, the Christendom of this present age. It worked its fruit and had its blessing at the time, and it would seem, left its witness behind it, even in this distant day of Nahum (see Nah. 1:7). There may have been a remnant in Nineveh! I say not otherwise. But at the most it was but a blessing in the cluster. “My leanness, my leanness,” Nineveh surely had to say. The repentance in the day of Jonah, like the Reformation in Christendom, secured nothing—it did not prepare Nineveh for glory, or for a place in the kingdom of God. Whatever may have been the moral fruit of it in a remnant in this distant day of Nahum, Nineveh, as a city or kingdom, had returned, like a sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire, and ripened herself for the cutting off of the land.