Nahum - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Things New and Old: Volume 25, Coming Judgment and Divine Goodness

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

Nahum 1:6-8.

When we contemplate the prophetic scriptures, we have to consider the people, and their state, of whom the prophet speaks, and also how far the principles of divine truth there set forth can be used for the profit of souls in the present day.

Nahum's ministry, though peculiarly solemn, was simple. He pointed to the divine judgments impending on the great and arrogant city of Nineveh. It had long been exalting itself, and it must be laid low.

Nineveh was a most ancient city, the capital of Assyria. From Gen. 10:11 (margin) we gather that Assyria was founded by Nimrod, and the city was built by Asshur. Historians tell us that it was about sixty miles in circumference, surrounded by a wall one hundred feet high, wide enough for three chariots to drive abreast, and having fifteen hundred towers, two hundred feet high. It contained "much cattle" so that it evidently enclosed a great space of fertile and cultivated land, besides dwelling-houses. In Jonah we read that it contained, in his day, "six-score thousand persons, that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand;" and, if this refers to children, the; probability is that the population of Nineveh might not have been less than half a million.

It is true that Assyria had been allowed by Jehovah to come against His people in His governmental dealings with them. But the Assyrians were lifted up; they ascribed their success in oppressing God's people to their own power and prudence, and their desire was to destroy them. We read, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few.....Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, O my people that dwelleth in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction." Again, we read, "For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with the rod." The Assyrian oppressed them without cause. (Isa. 10:5-25; 30:31; 3:4.) Thus the rod which Jehovah used strove against Him who used it, and came under divine judgment.

After announcing the truth that God is jealous, and revengeth, the prophet Nahum declares that Jehovah is "slow to anger." This had been remarkably exemplified in God's previous dealings with men, and now also with Nineveh, as we know it was afterward with the Jews, and still is with professing Christendom and the world. But, though "slow to anger," judgment must come, for "he will not at all acquit the wicked." It is because God is long-suffering, and that, after eighteen hundred years of warning, the Lord has not yet come to carry it out, that the scoffer says, "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the infidel folds his arms with self-complacency, and despises the truth, because there is no outward appearance of coming judgment. Thus the scripture is being fulfilled," Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set upon them to do evil." (Eccles. 8:11.) It was so with Nineveh.

Upwards of a century before Nahum's prophecy, Jonah was sent to this great city. The word of Jehovah came to him, saying, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their cry is come up before me." We know that he did not go at first, for he needed to pass through death and resurrection in his own soul before he was competent for the mission. "And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying. Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.... and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." The effect was that the Ninevites heard, believed, repented, fasted, and put on sackcloth, so that God spared the city, and did not bring the judgment He had said He would upon it.

It was long after this that the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel (the ten tribes) away into Assyria. For the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hands of spoilers, until he had cast them out of His sight. So were Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. They are generally called the " lost tribes" because no one knows where they are. (2 Kings 17:6-23.)

Only a few years after this, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them, and afterward came against Jerusalem with a great host, and, with great haughtiness, sought to overcome the city. But God answered the cries of His faithful servants, and sent an angel to destroy a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of the king of Assyria's army in one night, and the king himself was murdered by his own sons.

It was about this time that Nahum predicted the fall of self-exalted Nineveh, which would be so effectually done, that it would "not rise up a second time," and the city be so entombed in its own ruins, that the scripture should be literally fulfilled, "I will make thy grave, for thou art vile," and of it should be said, "Behold I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste; who shall bemoan her?" "Woe to the bloody city, it is all full of lies and robbery: the prey departeth not." The prophet tells us concerning the siege and ruin of the city (chap. 3:14), that "the gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved; and the fire—devour thee;" and historians tell us that the river Tigris overflowed its banks, and poured into the doomed city, and that the haughty king, after sustaining a siege of two years, set his own palace on fire, and in this way perished. Thus Nineveh was utterly destroyed, never more to raise its head, while "Assyria" and "the king of the north" will occupy an important part by-and-by, and Assyria will have special blessing in millennial days. (Dan. 11; Isa. 19:25.)

Such is a brief glance at Nahum's prophecy, which we know had a literal fulfillment; so that even now Nineveh's ruins are a desolation. Antiquarians are exploring it, and exhuming from this huge "grave" vast varieties of testimony to the accomplishment of the word of the prophets; its site is a place for flocks to " lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations; both the cormorant, and the bittern," &c. (Zeph. 2:13-15.)

Bat does not this illustrate another coming judgment of a far more serious character? Has not the clear and loud prophetic warning concerning this long ago gone forth? Let us turn to the apostolic writings. In 2 Thess. 1 we read, "The Lord himself shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction." What can be plainer, and yet how very solemn! Again, we are told, that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (1 Thess. 5:2, 3.) Peter also speaks of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night, and John assures us that when the Lord does thus come out of heaven to judge the living, "every eye shall see him.... and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 1:7.) Because God is "slow to anger," He has been giving this warning for upwards of eighteen hundred years; yet, as certainly as Nineveh did fall, and wicked Jerusalem, after much long-suffering, was destroyed by murderers, and burned with fire, so surely must the threatened judgments, which are still hanging over this doomed world, have their awful accomplishment, for God "will not at all acquit the wicked." Truly men will know then that "His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and that the clouds are the dust of his feet..... 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. Who can stand before his indignation? or, who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." (Nah. 1:3-6.) What saith the reader to these awful predictions of prophets and apostles? Has it ever occurred to you, that every step the unconverted take is one step nearer to this appalling reality? Are you, dear reader, at peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ? and therefore able to contemplate this dreadful scene of men being punished with everlasting destruction, in the surest confidence that, ere this, Jesus will have come, and received you and other loved ones unto Himself, and taken you to the Father's house. If, dear reader, you are not converted, may you now turn to God, and receive remission of sins, through the cleansing value of the precious blood of Jesus.

But amidst these sounds of divine judgment from Him who "will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies," a still, small voice is heard to comfort any who have ears to hear. To such the voice is profoundly precious and consoling. "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him." (Ver. 7.)

1. "The Lord is good." Though the righteous God loveth righteousness, and will not at all acquit the wicked, yet Jehovah is good; God is love. The cross of Christ blessedly manifested this. The love of God to sinners was there told out; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yes, it was for sinners Jesus died—He came into the world to save sinners. This is divine goodness to us when we were in our sins, enemies, and far from God. "For God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins." Wondrous love! And this is not all, for the free, unmerited love of God has brought us who believe into the same life, position, nearness, acceptance, and relationship as Christ Himself, at His own right hand, and given us the hope of being yet conformed to His image, and of reigning with Him in glory. "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them." Dear reader, dost thou believe God? Do these testimonies of holy scripture concerning the goodness of God so touch thine heart, as to cause thee to cry out with others, "We love him, because he first loved us"? Does the highest thought of goodness thou hast ever conceived in the least degree compare with this goodness of God? Has it broken thine heart? for truly the goodness of God leadeth to repentance. Surely those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious long for ten thousand tongues to praise Him? and if they had a hundred lives, would like to give them all to Him and His precious service.

2. But He is also "a stronghold in the day of trouble." Yes, if the faithful then living had seen Nineveh falling into a heap of ruins, or the king's palace consumed by the flaming fire; if, at another time, believers had seen the justly-doomed city of Jerusalem under its predicted judgment they would in either case find the presence of Jehovah their hiding-place and stronghold. And by-and-by, when men are crying out to the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to cover them, and hide them from the presence of Him who is coming to execute the vengeance due to this Christ-rejecting world, the church of God will be safe in glory, and truly rejoicing in the goodness of God, and the stronghold they know Him to be. Even now, to faith, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." And so, on every occasion of sorrow, where is the child of God who does not know that the Lord is good and a stronghold in the day of trouble! What a stronghold we find when we are abiding in the consciousness that we are in Christ, and loved by the Father as He loves Jesus!

3. He knows who believe— "He knoweth them that trust in him." Yes, He knows, and that is all we wish. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." My faith may be the feeblest, but He knows that I look to Jesus, the object of faith, that I "come unto God by him." How consoling is this sweet truth! There is not a thought in our hearts, not a word on our tongue, but He knows it altogether. As Peter, when it was a question of love, could say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;" so the believer can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I look to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to Him alone, as my Savior, my way to Thee, my life, righteousness, and all." Oh yes, "He knoweth them that trust in him" These very words might have been an unspeakable comfort to the Annas and Simeons of a former time, and another remnant may by-and-by lift up their heads in times of infidelity and apostasy, and say, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him." . H. S.

clickbible.org