

Close to Those Who Trust Him

If our current sermon series in the minor prophets was a television show on a streaming service, now would be the time for a recap of important information you would need to know for today's episode. You know the part where the voice of one of the actors says, "Previously on Hearing from God through the Minor Prophets." And then we would see scenes from previous episodes to catch us up on what has happened. The recap might remind us of a particular character that has shown up before in the series and we would know to watch for that character in scenes to follow. It might provide background information about what the series is about or other things we need to know to enjoy the episode.

Well today, we are in the book of Nahum, and an old familiar character will play a part in the episode. But the character becomes bigger in their influence on the rest of the story.

Our recap begins by reminding us that the series is all about hearing from God and gives us an insight before we start. Nahum 1:7 says,

"The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,". (NIV)

"The Lord is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him." (NLT)

Remember those words as we move into our story today.

Nahum 1-3

In the Book of Nahum, we find the name of a familiar city, Ninevah. Now that is a familiar character in the story. You will remember this city from the book of Jonah. Pastor Katelyn preached from the book of Jonah two weeks ago. I'm sure you remember the story. But you might be confused by why Ninevah is coming up again. Some scholars believe that Jonah was written about two hundred years before this book of Nahum, but the dating of these books is challenging to say the least. Yet, it is possible that the timeline goes something like this.

God sends Jonah to preach to Ninevah.

Jonah runs away from the prophetic role God gives him.

Jonah gets disciplined by God in the belly of a fish.

Jonah repents and goes to Ninevah.

Jonah preaches to Ninevah.

The people of Ninevah repent.

God spares the people of Ninevah from the destruction Jonah had predicted.

Jonah complains but God still has compassion for the Ninevites and gives them a second chance.

Now, it is just possible or maybe quite likely, that when God relents in bringing destruction on Ninevah, the people of Ninevah *eventually* return to their old ways - after some period of time.

If the book of Nahum is written two hundred years after the book of Jonah, then we see that God is patient for two-hundred more years before instructing Nahum to prophecy against Ninevah once again.

This time, what we see in Nahum, is it is not just Ninevah that is about to be destroyed. Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria, represents all of Assyria. God is warning the Assyrian Empire that they are about to be destroyed. Nahum warns that Assyria will be overthrown by another warring, destructive, evil nation - bigger and badder than Assyria. And Assyria is eventually conquered by the Babylonians.

It may be that Nahum was written as encouragement to the people of Judah to revolt against the Assyrian empire as it began to break apart and be destroyed by these external forces.

Let's take a few minutes to recap the history of Israel and Judah at this time in history. If we continue the idea that we are watching a television series unfold, this would be when the show would flash back to a previous incident in the character's life. Here the flashback has to do with how God has been at work all along with the nations of Israel, Judah, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia.

God's people had become a divided kingdom with the nation of Israel in the north and the nation of Judah in the south. Assyria came along and overthrew Israel and carried many of the people off to other parts of their empire. Judah, in the south had managed to avoid outright exile by the Assyrians and bought themselves some time. This did mean that the king of Judah was mostly a puppet of the Assyrians.

Judah had been paying taxes to the Assyrians and trying to find another nation that would rescue them. Egypt was in the mix and sometimes supported Judah and sometimes left them to fight for themselves. But then another nation rises into power. The Babylonians came along and, by military might, they overpowered both Assyria and Judah. And Judah was taken into the Babylonian exile.

This will allow First Baptist to eventually produce a spinoff series from our current series entitled, "Hearing from God through Daniel in Babylon." Watch for it wherever sermons are preached.

So, the fall of Ninevah predicted in Nahum is likely referring to the fall of the entire Assyrian Empire, as they fell to the more powerful Babylonian Empire. Nahum is a dark book about the destruction of Assyria. It tells specifically of the fall of Ninevah, the fall of the king of Assyria, and how this will be a very dark Day of the Lord for the Assyrian Empire.

So, what do we hear from God in the book of Nahum. We hear about a lot of destruction of Assyria. Here is just a sample of what we hear in Nahum 3:1-3

Woe to the city of blood,
full of lies,
full of plunder,
never without victims!
² The crack of whips,
the clatter of wheels,
galloping horses
and jolting chariots!
³ Charging cavalry,
flashing swords
and glittering spears!
Many casualties,
piles of dead,
bodies without number,

I will spare you some of the gruesome parts of the predicted destruction, but I encourage you to go home and read it and meditate on what happens to lying, warring nations that trample over other nations. Remember God is still on his throne, and he will destroy the warring nations that seek to expand their territory at the expense of other nations.

Ultimately, the book of Nahum is about who we will rely upon for protection from war: God or the nations. It is about God being in control and that he will one day destroy violent empires.

Remember, near the beginning of this series on the Minor Prophets, we read in Joel of how God called the people of Israel, and he calls us as well, to "Rend our hearts." That is, we don't act like we are repentant by tearing our clothes, but we tear our hearts in true repentance. He called Ninevah and Assyria to this, he called the people of Israel to this, and he calls *us* to humbly repent from our hearts.

Joel 2:13 says,
Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead."

God called his people to return to the LORD our God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.

Here in Nahum 1:7 he says,
"The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,"

And in Nahum 1:15 says,
Look, there on the mountains,
the feet of one who brings good news,
who proclaims peace!
Celebrate your festivals, Judah,

and fulfill your vows.
No more will the wicked invade you;
they will be completely destroyed.

Nahum speaks to what he calls, "those who fulfill their vows." That is, those who remain faithful or what we will simply call, "the faithful remnant."

Who are the ones who count as the faithful remnant?

- Those who worship God regularly? – well, yes
- Those who tithe to the temple or today, the church? – yes
- Those who pray? – yes
- Those who read God's word? – yes
- Those who bless others? – yes
- Those who serve the oppressed? – yes

Yes, all of that and more. But it is not just the external acts that God is looking at.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Last week, Pastor Troy did a great job preaching from Micah and telling us that God has given us some basic instructions for life here on earth. You may have heard people talk of the Bible as Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Yes, that is one way to see the Bible. Pastor Troy summarised it nicely for us by saying that we are to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." We must never ignore the instructions God gives us; but God is looking for more than just following the rules. As Joel says, God is looking for a repentant heart; a heart that is torn, soft, and pliable in his hands. God is looking for people whom he can teach. We are to be constantly humble, constantly looking for the next thing God has to teach us. We will never be done learning while we are here on this earth.

So, if the last thing you learned from God was in 1953, or 2012, or even 2024, you may not be one of the people that is open to God with a torn heart. If you learned something from God yesterday, rejoice, you are one of his teachable ones.

And specifically in Nahum, God is telling the people of Israel don't trust Assyria to give you peace, don't trust Egypt to give you peace, and certainly don't trust in the Babylonian Empire to give you peace. Trust in God.

It might be easy to trust in doctors when we are unwell; and we should trust our doctors. It might be easy to trust our government when they are doing things that are good for us.

It might be easy to trust our military when it is strong and fights for our belief system.

But there are times when the doctors, the governments, and the militaries do not have a solution. There are times when they are not the *right* solution. Who will we trust then?

More importantly, who will we trust above all doctors, governments, and militaries?

Nahum 1:7

"The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,"

Psalms 20 says something similar to the message of Nahum. Psalm 20:7

⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

When cancer comes, when the cost of living rises and we struggle to meet our responsibilities, or when it looks like an army might invade our country, who do we trust? "we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

[Pause]

God has a way of teaching us just what we need to know at the right time. I will not tell you that this is easy or that I always trust God. I work at it, and I am getting better at it all of the time. I know many of you work at this too and are getting better at trusting God. But I was really challenged last week. About a week ago, my laptop was stolen. I won't give you the details of the theft, but I will tell you some of what I learned from this situation. When that happened, I wanted to trust the police to get it back. I wanted to trust an app on my phone to find my laptop. I wanted to trust people to solve this problem. But little of that could help me. And so, who do I turn to? I trust the Lord my God to solve the difficult situations in which I find myself. Can I do that in a tough time? It is not easy. Will I do that in a tough time? I pray that I will. I pray that you will be able.

What difficulties are you facing right now? Where is your trust? Our ultimate trust cannot be in money, police, doctors, or governments. Our ultimate trust cannot be in our family, our friends, or our church. Our trust is in Jesus. Our trust is in the one who has made God known to us, the one who is God in the flesh.

The warring nations of the world will one day be brought to their knees and be destroyed much as Assyria was destroyed. We have seen it time and time again, the many nations that expand their territory both literally and figuratively will one day be destroyed.

Psalm 20:7

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Let's say that together:

"We trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Let us pray.