

**"Why Did God Record  
Nahum's Message for Us?"  
Sermon on Nahum 1:12-15  
Weekend of June 13, 2004  
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI  
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Scripture says: *Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* Amen.

God's Word to us today begins a three-week sermon series on three of the Minor Prophets—Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. So, today's sermon text is Nahum, chapter one, verses twelve through fifteen:

***This is what the LORD says: "Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and pass away. -- Although I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away."***

***The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh: "You will have no descendants to bear your name. I will destroy the carved images and cast idols that are in the temple of your gods. I will prepare your grave, for you are vile." -- Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.***

This is the Word of God.

### **Introduction: Why Are We Hearing Something from Nahum?**

Dear fellow Christians—who treasure all of the Scriptures:

Nahum?! Of all the books of the Bible, why are we hearing something today from Nahum? ...and for that matter: from Habakkuk next week? ...and from Zephaniah the week after that?

Well, let me tell you: Here at Saint Mark's, one of our goals is eventually to share with you something from each book of the Bible. We want to do that because we're convinced: if God wrote it and caused it to be recorded, then it's profitable for us to hear it.

### **Theme: Why Did God Record Nahum's Message for Us?**

So, what is it that the dear Lord wants to tell us today. Or maybe better put: \* WHY DID GOD RECORD FOR US NAHUM'S MESSAGE? This particular section of the book of the Prophet Nahum gives us a pretty good, step-by-step answer. It's because: (1) OUR ENEMIES ARE STRONG AND NUMEROUS, but God wants us to know: (2) JESUS HAS DESTROYED OUR ENEMIES' POWER! And that means that: (3) WE CELEBRATE CHRIST AND DEDICATE OURSELVES TO HIM.

### **Part One: Israel's (& Our!) Enemies Are Strong and Numerous**

The Prophet Nahum lived and operated probably in about the year 640 BC—that would have been some twenty-six and a half centuries ago. Nahum prophesied to God's Israelite people: all that was left of them, in the Kingdom of Judah, in and around Jerusalem—a half a world away from here.

And the first thing that Nahum says to Judah, at least in this section of Scripture, is this: ***This is what the LORD says: "Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and pass away."*** Now, what in the world was God talking about here?

Well, all three chapters of Nahum's prophecy are written for the Jewish people and against the city of Nineveh—the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria is modern-day Iraq. The city of Nineveh is modern-day Mosul, Iraq. And in the days of Nahum, this empire – Assyria – was the archenemy of God's people.

It was Assyria, six hundred miles away, that had plagued God's people for two hundred years. It was Assyria, some eighty years earlier, that had brought entirely to an end the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It was Assyria, sixty years earlier, that had nearly put an end to the Southern Kingdom of Judah—under Hezekiah. It was the Assyrians in Nineveh, just as we read here, who had *allies* and were *numerous*—and still threatened the existence of God's people.

So, do you and I have any of those kind of enemies? Sure!—right...?! Who are they?

Well, these Assyrians were from Iraq. We are still fighting the Iraqis, and the Afghans, and certainly Al-Qaeda, and we've got troops stationed against North Korea, and Cuba.... Are those our enemies? No, not exactly.

Well, how about the enemies within? How about those who promote the perversion of homosexuality, and even dare to dirty with it Holy Matrimony? How about those who promote the brutality of abortion, making mothers and fathers murderers of their children? How about those – and there really are these people in our country – who seek to destroy Christianity? Well, now we're getting close....

Who are our enemies? How about the devil and his demons? Yeah, those are our enemies! Is there any institution as bad as hell—to which they want to drag us off? Is there any war as bad as sin—into which they so often lead us? Are there any entities that hate us so—such that our eternal death is their goal?

You know, we pastors meet together every Tuesday morning, and we have always started our meetings with some theological study. Recently, we read these words from Doctor Martin Luther's Large Catechism: "Now, what is the devil? Nothing else than what the Scriptures call him, a liar and a murderer. A liar who seduces the heart from God's Word and blinds it, making you unable to feel your needs or to come to Christ. A murderer who begrudges you every hour of your life. If only you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are at every moment aimed at you!"

## **Part Two: Jesus Has Destroyed the Power of the Enemies of Israel (& Us!)**

True! ...not so? And scary! We may wonder whether we will win in Iraq. We may wonder whether we'll win the culture war. But our eternal life depends on winning the war against Satan! Is it going to happen?

Listen to Nahum! Listen to God: ***This is what the LORD says: "Although they – the Ninevites – have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and pass away.*** God was promising Judah that their enemies' power was over.

***Although I have afflicted you, O Judah*** – and God takes responsibility for it: he allowed the Ninevites to do it – ***I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away.*** "Judah, you were in slavery to these foreign enemies. I have set you free!" That's what God was promising!

And then: ***The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh***—and it's a three-fold condemnation. First: ***"You will have no descendants to bear your name."*** And it came true. No one these days says, "I am an Assyrian." The second condemnation: ***"I will destroy the carved images and cast idols that are in the temple of***

*your gods.*” Fulfilled! Nobody worships the Assyrian gods – Ashur, Marduk, Nabu, oh, and about three thousand others – anymore. And God’s third condemnation on the Assyrians: **“I will prepare your grave, for you are vile.”** And that happened only thirty years after this, in 612 BC, when the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrians.

Now, wouldn’t that be great news? Wouldn’t it be great news to know – as the Jewish people did here – that your national enemies will face defeat?! Wouldn’t it be great if tomorrow we woke up to the news, “Bin Laden has been captured, and all his lieutenants, and the insurgents in Iraq are all dead”? Wouldn’t it be great news if tonight we learned, “The Supreme Court has come to its senses; it declares forever unconstitutional every law that allows for baby murder and pervert marriage”?

Well, my friend: I’ve got great news for you.... Bin Laden may not be captured, but Satan has been captured! Jesus has banished him to hell! Two thousand years ago, Jesus handled the devil’s biggest artillery – the thermonuclear suffering of hell, the big bomb of death – and Jesus rose three days later unscathed. And he promises: “So will you!” Jesus said: *Because I live, you also will live.*

I’ve got great news for you.... Our earthly enemies may not be destroyed, but sin is destroyed! Two thousand years ago, the Christian Church’s “National Hero” – Jesus Christ! – outlawed envy, outlawed lust, outlawed hatred, outlawed rebellion: when he forgave our envy and lust and hatred and rebellion on the cross. The Bible promises: *He canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*

I’ve got great news for you.... This peace you’ve got from Jesus Christ is going to last forever. Scripture says: *Now the dwelling of God is with people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will take away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

### **Part Three: Israel (& We!) Celebrate Christ & Dedicate Ourselves to Him**

Wonderful! ...isn’t it? Al-Qaeda may strike again. Our citizens may grow more perverted. But we’re going to that place where we will never have to worry about any such thing again! So, what does that mean for our earthly lives until then?

Listen to Nahum! Listen to God.... He identifies for Judah three responses to their good news. First: ***Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!*** God extols the work of the messenger who runs to bring the good news of victory from the battlefield. Every Israelite aspired to be one of those.

The second response: ***Celebrate your festivals, O Judah.*** The Passover in the springtime: commemorating deliverance from Egypt, the Booths in the autumn: remembering tenting in the wilderness, the Firstfruits in the summer: commemorating entrance into the land of Canaan—the Israelites were free to celebrate those.

And the Israelites’ third response to Assyria’s demise: ***Fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.*** Whatever you’ve solemnly promised the Lord you’d do, do it! ...now that you’re free to accomplish it.

Not bad responses for us, right? If Al-Qaeda were destroyed, if Iraq were suddenly peaceful, if our nation suddenly challenged our citizens toward more decent lives, we’d quickly tell others who didn’t know, we’d get to church to celebrate, and we’d feel free. How much more isn’t that true with the much better news of Christ!

So, first: Let’s *bring the good news, let’s proclaim peace*—as it says here! Certainly you know somebody who doesn’t trust Christ, at least somebody who has not often heard about him lately. Any of these early weeks of summer is an excellent time to

take some interest in that individual—and to pray for and seize the opportunity to tell him about Jesus and to bring him to hear more.

Secondly, in response to Christ's victory: Let's *celebrate our festivals*—as it says here! Our worship services are the times – especially – to sing his praise: the stronger the better! Now's the time – especially – to rejoice together that Christ has gathered us and made us one. This is the time – especially – to unite our ears to hear his Word, and to unite our voices to petition him in prayer.

And finally: Let's *fulfill our vows*—as it says here! When we were confirmed, we promised with God's help faithfully to use Scripture and Sacraments in order to remain in faith in Christ to the end. Now's the time to accomplish that! When we were married, we promised with God's help faithfully to benefit our spouse until the end. Now's the time to do that! When we brought our children to baptism, we promised with God's help to bring them up in the instruction of God's Holy Word until the end. Now's the time to do it!

### **Conclusion: If Nahum Is Worth Our Consideration, Why Not the Rest...?**

And all of that ... from the little book of the not-so-famous Prophet Nahum! It's worth our consideration, isn't it? All of Scripture is! So, why not rededicate yourself, in these early days of summer, to studying the Scriptures on your own—maybe a chapter a day, or maybe more. The Bible is better than any novel! After all, it's God's truth—and it's the Book of our eternal salvation ... through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Jesus once said: *You search the Scriptures, because ... by them you have eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.* Amen.