

Nahum 2:10-13

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[0:00] Again, the scripture reading is Nahum, chapter 2, verses 10 through 13. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. Desolate, desolation and ruin, hearts melt and knees tremble, anguish in all loins, all faces grow pale.

Where is the lion's den, the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and lioness went, where his cubs were with none to disturb? The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled prey for his lionesses.

He filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh. Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Welcome this morning to our church. We're glad that you're here. Glad that you've chosen to spend these moments with us in the presence of God and with his people.

[1:32] You've just affirmed that what has been read is indeed God's word. And the call to proclaim the whole counsel of God requires that we preach passages like this.

Requires that we hear, listen, and heed passages like Nahum, which as Josh has well highlighted, it's a message of judgment.

Amen. So pray with me this morning that we indeed will hear, that we would listen, that we would learn in order that we might live well. Heavenly Father, we bless you this morning.

And we give thanks to you for this word this morning to us. We pray that you would be glorified in its proclamation, but even more glorified in its practice.

We pray these things in Christ's name. On Wednesday, September the 12th, 2001, the headlines of newspapers and other sources around the world read something like the following samplings.

[2:48] Devastation. That was the bold headlines and capital letters in the Baltimore Sun time. One word.

One word. Said it. Devastation. Another newspaper, the Birmingham News. Another one-word headline.

Attacked. Attacked. That's what it read. Other news sources highlighted the fact that on the previous day, September the 11th, 2001, our nation had experienced the worst terror attacks in all of our then 225-year history.

I mentioned these things this morning because our text today begins with what well could be a four-word headline. Look at it there in the text in verse 10.

Desolate. Desolation and ruin. It's pretty gloomy, isn't it? What makes the headline in the text so interesting is that in the time of the prophet's writing, Nahum was not reporting the news of what was or what had happened.

[4:10] He was predicting the news of what would happen in the future. So thus, our text begins with what I'm calling a prophetic headline regarding Nineveh.

It continues with a prophetic picture that refers to Nineveh, and it ends with a prophetic pronouncement by the Lord against Nineveh.

Huh? What about the prophetic headline? You see it there with me, don't you, this morning? It is a prophetic headline that actually summarizes the fate of a city.

It summarizes the fate of a nation, if you will. Think of the words recorded here as being in big, bold letters on the front cover or a newspaper or a periodical or the internet news site.

Bold, headlining words that indicate judgment. It's a summary statement, if you will. The specifics have already been given in chapter 2 that we preached a few weeks ago.

[5:26] Huh? But here we have the prophet's poetic and rhetorical savvy come into play in the way that he expresses himself in that four-word headline.

The text here captures a bit of the cadence that you would have heard if you had heard this in the Hebrew language. Three words, three words with the same root translated here, desolate, desolation, and ruin.

I love the New American Standard Version also. It renders this verse this way. She is empty. Yes, she is desolate in ways.

Yes, the words summarize the fate of a city, a powerful city, a city that would be stripped of her fame, stripped of her renown.

Such, friends, is the nature of divine judgment. The mighty fall. The haughty or humble.

[6:35] The powerful become like chaff in the wind. If you please. Because as the writer of Proverbs reminds us, righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

Naom's prophetic voice was not going solo in the Old Testament as it concerned the judgment on Nineveh. Other prophets chimed in about the fate of Assyria.

Now, another obscure prophet by the name of Zephaniah, one of the Old Testament Z-boys, if you will, he had something to say about the judgment of Nineveh also.

As a matter of fact, turn over to Zephaniah. It's in your Bibles. I promise you it's there. As a matter of fact, if you're using the blue Bibles, you will find it on page 789.

A little bit on the other side of Nahum after Habakkuk. Look at chapter 2 and verses 13 through 15 with me.

[7:41] Speaking of the Lord, he will stretch out his hand against the north, and here it is, destroy Assyria, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert.

Again, words of judgment. Look at verse 14. Herd shall lie down in her midst all kinds of beasts, even the owl and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals.

A voice shall not, shall sell hoot in the window. Devastation will be on the threshold, for her cedar work will be laid bare.

And then verse 15. This is the exultant city that lives securely, that said in her heart, I am and there is no one else. What a desolation she has become.

A lair for a wild beast. Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist. Another prophet.

[8:51] On in his heart and on his lips, words of judgment, as a concerned, Nineveh in particular, but Assyria, generally speaking. The prophetic headline summarizes the emptying out, if you will, the ruin of Nineveh, the great capital of Assyria.

But not only do we read a prophetic headline regarding Nineveh that summarizes its fate, we also see in the verses that, in the verse that follows, or the next part of the verse, through verse 12, a prophetic picture that refers to Nineveh.

Look at the last part of verse 10. Hearts melt and knees tremble. Anguish is in all loins.

All faces grow pale. Can't you picture it? They are a people in panic. The same periodicals that gave us the headlines about 9-11, 13 years ago.

They captured images, not only of buildings that were bombed, but it captured images of people who were stunned, seized by fear and anxiety.

[10:14] That's, friends, what we see here in this text. That is what's going on. The NASB says it this way. Hearts are melting. Knees are knocking.

Also, anguish is in the whole body, and all their faces are grown pale. You see? The picture there. Anguish in the loins, and women who are mothers know something about this, pictures the pain and the writhing of childbirth.

That's the picture there. All of this describes the mighty, dominant Assyrians of that day. They were the reigning bad boys of the ancient Near East.

And what we see in verse 10 is not characteristic of the Assyrians. No. They made other people tremble, but now they are aware they had put people in the past. Their ways provoked anxiety and fear, but here, they're the ones. They're the ones who are flush with fear. As we get into verse 11, there is a shift from the focus of impact on the people to the place, the actual city itself.

[11:38] Where's the lion's den? The feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and lioness went. Where his cubs were, with none to disturb.

Huh? The desolation of Nineveh would be like the invasion of a lion's den. When was the last time you even stuck your hand in the lion's cage?

But the invasion, a place that was normally, at least from the lion's perspective, safe and secure, huh? It was not subject to attack.

After all, who would willingly and knowingly venture into a den occupied, notice, by a family of lions? Mama lion was there, daddy lions, and the kid lions, all there.

Huh? Who would do that? In view of the predicted desolation of Nineveh, Nahum asked a series of what could be called taunting questions.

[12:43] Huh? We know about taunting, don't we? Taunting has been described as a form of social competition. Well, one group attacks or mocks others to provoke them to anger in ways that anger them or even weaken them.

I remember my army days in basic training. Tell you, I used to see some of the pictures of me. I went in a green recruit. I remember taking a picture in my dress khakis.

I had my army cap on the front of my head and I had my Bible under my arm, took a picture, sent it to Shirley while I was in basic training. But six weeks later, you should have seen me then, huh? My muscles were tightened up, huh? I didn't have my cap on the top of my head. I had it sort of bent down, you know, right about there. I had been made ready through my basic training for them to send me anywhere in the world.

My mind was fit, my body was fit, and I was ready to go. But sometimes when we were running or marching in basic training, other soldiers from different companies were doing the same.

[14:02] And we had a way of verbally and loudly taunting those other companies. We would call them, we'd say, to the left, and our company would say, sick call.

To the left, sick call. What that meant was that they were so weak that they were ready for the doctor, huh? They were just ripe to go on sick call because they were the weaklings.

Oh, and we were the strong ones. That's taunting. The sports world knows something about trash talking, huh? That's what it is. Trash talking is a form of taunting, huh?

Where individuals or teams, they mock their opponents with boast in their strengths and they highlight their opponents' weaknesses, huh? We have a taunt here, huh?

And so, there are other examples of taunts in Scripture. You remember 1 Samuel chapter 17, Goliath, big bad Goliath.

[15:01] He taunts the enemies of the living God until David arose, huh? Took the occasion and David took care of business in the name of the Lord.

1 Kings chapter 18, Elijah taunted the prophets of Baal and Baal himself who was no real competition for the God who answered by fire, huh?

The Lord Jesus, while he was on the cross, he was taunted by those who passed him by and even by one who hung on the cross next to him. Huh? In 2 Kings 18 and in Isaiah chapter 36, Sennacherib, this great Assyrian king, sent his officials to taunt King Hezekiah who trusted in the Lord to protect the city of Jerusalem.

And he did. Huh? And then, wow, I love this where Isaiah comes before the Lord and the Lord speaks to him and said, go tell Hezekiah how I'm going to take care of him.

Huh? And so, the focus of the taunt here is the place. Here, friends, was a previously secure city.

[16:17] As secure as a den of lions. Huh? And one source notes this, that Nineveh, similar to a lion's den, had been a place of security for its people as well as a repository filled with the plunder of conquered

peoples.

Now, Nineveh itself is seen, it's been destroyed and robbed of people and wealth. Huh? The lion's den was not to be found.

Huh? It was no more. The place was now ruined. It's desolate. But, it's gone. Huh? Look at the activities of the lion in verse 12.

The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled prey for his lionesses. He filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh. Tearing and strangling and filling.

This lion metaphor accurately describes the brutal activity of Assyrian kings. Not only at this particular time, but they had been that way for centuries.

[17:24] Again, another source notes this, torture and inhumanity of the worst sort were a major characteristic of royal life. For 200 years, they ravaged the various peoples of the ancient Near East just as a lion prowls daily for his prey.

They suspended their corpses from poles, tore their skin off, and affixed it to the city walls. One says, I let dogs, swine, wolves, vultures, the birds of the heaven, and the sweet water fish devour their cut off limbs.

The people who lived in the city and had not come out and had not acknowledged my rule, I slew, I chopped off their heads and cut off their lips. Brutal kinds of activity, huh?

What's in view, friends, is the humbling of a powerful, the most powerful nation of that day. Dare I pose a question this morning for us to ponder?

As I read in Nahum about the anticipated destruction of a beastly nation, does this have application to nations today?

[18:37] And maybe even a nation such as ours, huh? on September 11, 2001, we were momentarily humbled and sober.

Our safety had been breached. Our land had been invaded. A place where things like that just don't happen.

We were brought low. Was such a warning? huh? This depiction of the Assyrians as a beastly and brutal nation should not surprise us.

They're bent toward devouring its characteristics of nations of the past and present and will be until the end. Huh? The shooting down of a civilian aircraft for no good reason is nothing less than aggressive and brutal and cowardly.

huh? As are the census acts like drive-by shootings in our city and on our streets and on our highways. Huh? In the affairs of men and nations, often civility is laid aside in the favor of beastly acts against people.

[20:03] People against people kinds of acts. Huh? It's the apocalyptic literature that encourages people of faith in rough times and helps them to see that the Lord is ultimately in control in spite of the way that men and nations treat one another.

Huh? This beastly bent will continue until the lion of the tribe of Judah triumphs over them all.

Huh? He will vanquish all foes who oppose the rule of the Almighty. So in our text, the lion is bested by the Lord himself.

The place of their dwelling will be no more. Ruin the result of God's wrath, the triumph, if you will, of God's judgment.

A prophetic headline is followed by a prophetic picture. And finally on this morning, we look at a prophetic pronouncement from the Lord itself. You see that there in verse 13?

[21:12] Behold, I'm against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions, the source of their strength.

I will cut off your prey from the earth, no more plundering, and the voice of your messengers so no longer be heard. You know that you're in trouble when you have a verse that begins, behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts.

It is as if the Lord takes the mic away from Nahum, and he's going to do the speaking now. He speaks for himself. It's one thing to be opposed by men.

It's yet another thing to be opposed by God when he is on the other side speaking these kind of words. Oh, that word, the Lord of hosts, that phrase, that title of the living God.

It speaks of him as the commander in chief of all of the forces in all of the universe. Whether you're talking about seen or unseen, whether people know it or not.

[22:35] He's the commander in chief. He is the one that is ruling things. He is the one who is ultimately calling the shots. And he is the one who is speaking here. The Syrians were marked for opposition by the Lord, the divine warrior.

He's directing the battle. The forces of enemy nations were his forces. And did you notice oh, the I will statements that sort of jump out at us in the verse.

I will burn, he says, your chariots in smoke. How was he going to do it? Through the agency of the other nations, enemy forces. I will, and not only that will devour your young lines, but notice again, I will cut off again.

That is a figure of judgment, if you will. As a matter of fact, we've seen this already. Turn back over to chapter 1 in verse 15, where we see this wedding of both good news at first in verse 15, but then there's some not so good news.

I want to take you to the not so good news first at the end. It says, for never again shall the worthless pass through you. He is utterly, there's the word, cut off.

[24:00] The worthless one will be cut off. So, it mirrors this also in that we see that the messengers will no longer be heard, but like in verse 15, the message of the good news would go forth to those who were really trusting in the Lord.

You see it? Back in chapter 1, verse 15, behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, and publishes peace. Keep your feast, O Judah, fulfill your vows because there's going to be a restoration, there's going to be a return to normalcy for you.

One of the Assyrian tactics of that day was to taunt the enemy forces. I've already alluded to that. Sennacherib, we see this in both 2 Kings 18 and in Isaiah chapter 36.

And their voices of these messengers, they in fact were indeed bad news for God's people, this taunting, this mocking of the people of God as well as the living God himself.

But such voices of bad news, they were going to be silenced, and the voices of hope would ring out for those who take and find their refuge in the Lord himself.

[25:14] One voice silent, another voice released. Bad news gone, good news is heralded. What we have in this text, friends, is this.

The lion meets the Lord of hosts. And when that happens, whenever that happens, it may not look like it now, but eventually the lion or the beast loses big time.

Such will be the fate of the beastly nations of the world. Those nations who sit securely now.

Nations who bite and devour without knowing that the Lord himself is ultimately in charge.

And that the lion, he doesn't know it, but he's actually on a leash. What we see of Nineveh and Assyria, we also see at the end of the age. Revelation 18, likewise, pictures the fall of the mighty, the devastating powers of this world.

So what am I saying this morning? Our text for you and me helps us to see that powerful, rebellious people. Nations and individuals, they're no match for the Lord of hosts.

[26:30] And as we read this, each of us needs to see the futility here, friends, of living for oneself. The futility of living in rebellion against the Lord. One of the things that we see clearly in the book of Nahum, in contrast to what we saw last week in Jonah, there we saw a moment of God's mercy.

But Nineveh during the time of Nahum, this was not Jonah's Nineveh. We're dealing with a Nineveh that is roughly 100 years ahead in the front of Jonah.

Nineveh, that Nineveh of that day is haughty, not humble. She's not even compliant as David mentioned on last week, let alone in communion with God.

Mercy is past, and judgment is intimate. Oh, can't you hear Paul quoting the New Testament? Behold, now is the day of salvation.

Now's that time where mercy, the mercy of the cross, is for us. There, mercy there is found, and grace is free, pardon, is multiplied to us.

[27:46] The triumph of God's judgment is the theme of this text, and while the text does not specifically demand anything of us or explicitly,

it does require careful self-examination of us, and then prayerful repentance as we see where we too might be haughty, and proud, and in rebellion.

The most powerful men and nations are no match for the Lord of hosts. When the Lord meets the lion, he wins every time.

We see here a lion, a beastly lion defeated. In the end, there will be a blessed lion who conquers even Christ.

So what do we do? We run. We run to the rock of ages. I mean, there's so many different metaphors for God and Christ, this being one of them, who's provided shelter for those who trust in him and in his son.

Because, after all, is not Jesus our Lord, lion and lamb and rock ultimately the only safe place that there is.

[29:17] And so may we find ourselves fleeing our rebellion. May we find ourselves running to him to the shelter of the cross where Christ, our Lord and King, has borne the very wrath of God for us.

In him we find safety both for time and all eternity. Thus far, God's word, yes, this is the word of the Lord, from Nahum chapter 2.

Let us pray. Father, we love you. And yes, even passages like this, we give thanks to you for them, because they are a warning for us as we see the fate of the haughty and the rebellious.

Should there be those among us like that this morning, even in major or minor ways, may we hear and heed the warning of passages like this as far as what the end of rebellion looks like.

And may we run to you and find shelter in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great Savior. Blessed be your name. Thank you.