

THE BOOK OF NAHUM
Lesson 8, Chapter 3 Continued

We continue in this 8th lesson on the prophetic Book of Nahum at the 8th verse of chapter 3. In these remaining few verses, there is much I'd like to tell you. We concluded the previous lesson with the observation that history matters. Perhaps the sharpest divide between Greek philosophy and mindset versus Hebrew philosophy and mindset is the role of history in our lives and in our future. In modern times, in what is currently labeled as Liberal versus Conservative (in all the arenas those oppositional terms are used), at the foundation is that Liberal views tend to think of the timeline of humanity as being a straight line that only goes forward, and thus whatever occurred in the past has little to no bearing on the future other than in few instances, mostly political in nature. The Conservative view tends to think of the timeline on humanity as cyclical or in manifesting patterns. Thus, for the Liberal view, history primarily matters as a source of recorded information that is good for knowledge but holds only a small place in the determination of our present and future. The Conservative view more believes that history plays a significant role in determining our present and our future, because in very meaningful ways the past will be repeated. So, using the terms Liberal and Conservative (which by no means would have meant anything prior to perhaps a couple of centuries ago), without doubt the biblical view is philosophically Hebrew and thus Conservative, as it very much relies on historical cycles and patterns.

This is why the Liberal Christian view downplays biblical prophecy and generally puts little faith in its value or reliability, while the Conservative Christian view sees bible prophecy as having more value and pertinence to us... but even then, only certain of it (and mainly that found in the Book of Revelation). The determination each of us makes about this matter has everything to do with one's faith mindset and doctrines because this will result in how one interprets the Bible. The result is to form a set of beliefs based upon what one finds acceptable and believable in God's Word. So, as with Seed of Abraham Torah Class, we hold strictly to a Hebrew Roots view that is somewhat more akin to Conservative, but even more so we are reliant on the importance and relevance of God's cycles, patterns, appointed times, etc. And

especially as concerns the literal nature and surety that all the prophetic utterings have, or will, happen exactly as spoken. This leads us to look for answers in the Torah and all the Old Testament where this information is recorded (without, of course, shunning the New Testament and the record of the advent of Yeshua). Thus, we must... we need to... base our lives, present and future, on what we learn from the past as presented in those Old Testament documents, but in light of what Yeshua brought into reality.

This point of the importance of history is where we have arrived in the Book of Nahum. Chapter 3 verse 8 says:

CJB Nahum 3:8 *Are you any better than No-Amon, located among the streams of the Nile, with water all around her, the flood her wall of defense?*

God, through Nahum, is telling Assyria to look to the past to understand what happens when the leadership of a nation relies solely on their military might and their defensive walls. No-Amon, a grand city of ancient Egypt, fell when no one thought such a thing could happen. The implication is that God willed it should happen, and No-Amon as a pagan god worship center relied on a bunch of non-gods for their direction and wisdom, instead of the one true God of the Universe. The combination of worshipping false gods and a prideful belief in the invincibility of its fortifications and its military led to disaster... something that is actually completely predictable. Add to it their hostility towards Israel and only one outcome was possible. Since this is a pattern going back to the most ancient of times, of course it played out in No-Amon, and now is about to play out in Nineveh. It is being repeated in modern-era history, today as I speak, and it will for the foreseeable future. The message to us is: God's patterns cannot be altered by any human, and it will affect humanity similarly in every age, until Yeshua returns to establish the Kingdom of God, on earth, in all its fullness.

So, if you come away from the Book of Nahum (and especially chapter 3) with but one thing, let it be that history matters and you will be caught-up in it. History reveals cycles and patterns and that just might be its primary value. The man or nation who believes otherwise will suffer the same end results,

just in different ways, that earliest humanity suffered. Why? Because God never changes. And, in most ways neither does Mankind. Therefore, patterns and cycles never change, only our knowledge and technology advances. At the end of the day, we remain essentially locked into the same pattern and behaviors as Adam. And since we are the same, and we all came from his DNA, we'll do and decide as humans always have.

CJB Ecclesiastes 1:9 *What has been is what will be, what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*

Open your Bibles to Nahum chapter 3, and we'll begin reading at verse 8.

RE-READ NAHUM CHAPTER 3:8 to end

A good label for verses 8 – 10 would be: "how the mighty have fallen". But then, in verses 11 – 13, it would be "now the mighty have become helpless".

After using No-Amon of Egypt as a past example in verse 8, in verse 9 the same theme continues with the reality of allies.

CJB Nahum 3:9 *Ethiopia and Egypt gave her boundless strength, Put and Luvim were there to help you.*

Ever since the beginning of warfare (something the Bible credits to Nimrod), nations have sought allies to further strengthen them. Interestingly, Assyria had largely alienated their allies, but No-Amon had built theirs up. Ethiopia and Egypt, along with Put and Luvim, were their primary allies and no doubt were formidable. Much trust in their combined influence and power gave No-Amon an overblown sense of confidence in their ability to withstand anything that an enemy could throw at them. Nonetheless, when push came to shove, No-Amon didn't receive the level of support at their time of need that they thought they would in their allies, and so this Nile riverside city fell. These same sorts of alliances in all eras of history past, and in our day, are far more fragile than they might seem. Each nation and its leader will always look out first and foremost to their own political well-being. If it means abandoning a supposed ally, it will. I really don't know how old the proverb of "the enemy of

my enemy is my friend” might be, but the reverse of that also comes into play because both are illusions. Alliances are always temporary marriages of convenience and nothing more. They more resemble long-term dating until a more attractive opportunity comes along. Each nation and leader is looking for advantage and will gravitate towards whomever they think at the moment provides for them that advantage. So, alliances shift, break, and re-form into different groups. It is a historic pattern. Those who depend too much upon earthly alliances remaining stable will, in the end, lose. In our current context, No-Amon and now Nineveh are prime examples of depending upon this folly. The result, then, is stated in the next verse.

CJB Nahum 3:10 *Still she went captive into exile, her infants torn to pieces at every streetcorner. Lots were drawn for her nobles, and all her great men were bound in chains.*

Here we see highlighted the brutality and cruelty that occurred when these ancient nations were invaded and conquered. What are reading here are not exaggerations. Small children and infants were rather typically murdered in gory ways before their parents’ eyes as acts of retribution. Today, while such a thing might happen less often in most areas of the developed world, in parts of the Middle East and Africa, it still occurs. In the West we view such a thing as barbaric, and the pain it causes parents is mostly the horror of losing that beloved child. In ancient times, the larger horror was that destroying the small children cut a family blood line off from continuing. And this was the case because it was widely believed that a person went on living after death by means of the continuation of their bloodline. To end a bloodline meant the end of your (hoped for) ongoing existence.

Taking conquered people to be slaves, especially humiliating the elite and wealthy as well as humbling the military leadership, were but a fact of life. God certainly didn’t condone such things, yet the ancients knew no other way. The thing is it was Nineveh (Assyria) that had done this to No-Amon. Now, many decades later, Nineveh would have the same done to them. The warning from God to mankind is: be careful how you treat others, even your enemies. You might be on the winning end today, but it will not always be so. It is one thing to war against another nation, to defeat their militaries, and to remove

their leadership. It is quite another to do horrible and unnecessary things to the people. It was the retribution that Europe and the USA exacted from Germany after WWI that was the cause of the even more horrific WWII. It was only the enlightened attitudes of the victorious WWII Allied leadership that decided the better way forward for the vanquished, was to help them to rebuild rather than to punish. It might not seem so today, but the 80 years of relative peace in Europe is actually an amazing accomplishment compared to past times. It was only for the lack of retribution on the common people that this could happen.

CJB Nahum 3:11 *You too, [Nineveh,] will be drunk; your senses completely overcome. You too will seek a refuge from the enemy*

To get the best sense of this passage from the Hebrew perspective, we have to look at a couple of Hebrew words. This poetic line begins: **gam'at**, which, using Hebrew grammar, best corresponds to the English as "as she, so also you". By interpreting and wording it this way, it emphasizes this ongoing comparison between what happened in the past to No-Amon, that will now happen to Nineveh. So, using the feminine gender when speaking of a city, then No-Amon is the "she". The message is that something that happened with No-Amon is going to happen again in the same way, only this time to you (Nineveh). And what is it that happened that will soon be repeated? It is **tis(h)kari**; "may you become drunk".

"May you become drunk" is not a wish. It is God making a pronouncement. Used often in the Bible especially when it involves military conflict, drunkenness as a curse is directly tied to the biblical literary motif about the cup of God's wrath. Drunkenness, used in such a manner, is about a person or nation being in a state of stupor or bewilderment. Their minds can't make sense of what is happening to them, like a drunk who is drawing near to passing out. They can't make rational decisions. They don't know who they are, where they are, what they're doing or what they're saying. While being related to God's cup of wrath, the cup of drunkenness is not exactly the same, but it does refer to the "cup of" as a metaphor as meaning something set before people as a container of some sort of evil thing. We shouldn't take the idea of a cup as a container, too far. It is really meant as an expression,

usually as something someone in the wrong deserves. We should also understand that it is God who fills this cup with whatever He does. Filling a cup with drunkenness means to make the drinker confused; unable to respond in any sensible way. Here, in this verse, God is making Nineveh drink from this cup in order to not be able to respond appropriately to fend-off Babylon's attack against them.

In this passage, this drunkenness metaphor addresses two things. Diodorus Siculus reports that the people and the soldiers of Nineveh had a big drunken orgy, at which time there was a surprise attack by Babylon. So, taking Nineveh was relatively easy. Several popular Bible versions offer a bit of a different interpretation of this verse that has merit.

YLT Nahum 3:11 *Even thou art drunken, thou art hidden, Even thou dost seek a strong place, because of an enemy.*

Notice the phrase "thou art hidden". That is actually a much more literal (and likely correct) translation than what we see in most Bibles, yet it is in agreement with a few other notable versions such as the NAS and the KJV. Still, what does "thou art hidden" mean? It is actually rather common in the Old Testament to use the term "hidden" to mean vanishing away as if it had never existed. Or it can be used to mean something like being reduced to nothing. In this case, essentially it means any ability or will Assyria had to resist the Babylonians is gone. And, as a result, the army that the king and people of Nineveh counted on to protect them from the Babylonians will start to seek fortified places to run and hide (just as the common people had done) rather than standing their ground and fighting to the death.

Overall, the idea is that the tables have been turned on Nineveh. They have always been the irresistibly powerful war machine, but now one more powerful than them is causing the Assyrians to seek shelter.

CJB Nahum 3:12 *All your fortifications will be like fig trees with early ripening figs; the moment they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater.*

The use of this agricultural metaphor that must have been common knowledge to people of the Middle East sounds unfamiliar to us. The characteristic of early ripening figs is that they come off the tree rather easily so they can be gathered and eaten in a hurry. Although not used a great deal in the Bible, this same metaphor is found in Isaiah. The RSV does the best job of interpreting this verse.

^{RSV} **Isaiah 28:4** *and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer: when a man sees it, he eats it up as soon as it is in his hand.*

Comparing early figs to the fortresses of Assyria is that the fig trees don't have to be shaken all that hard to take the earlier ripening figs. So, the fortresses are attacked and consumed rather quickly. I want to detour a little to show you something interesting. The Hebrew word for early figs is **bikkurim**. That might sound familiar to some of you because at the time of this writing, we just recently passed the holy day of First Fruits, whose biblical name is **Bikkurim**. So, literally the word that is commonly translated to English as First Fruits is actually First Figs. The first edible figs appear on fig trees a few weeks before summer. But, the greater harvest of the figs on a fig tree appears and ripens later in the summertime. An interesting feature of early figs is that they are harvested much easier than the later figs. The later figs have to be picked with some extra labor to get them down because their stems are thicker and require more effort to get them off the tree. The early figs only require a good shaking of the tree to fall off of their smaller stems; so, it takes no time at all to get them and eat them.

Therefore, **Bikkurim** is the official name of a God-appointed holy day that literally means "early figs", but the same word is also used to stand for all the early fruits (the first of the fruits) of any kind of harvest... field or tree or even animal in some cases. Clearly it is used in the Hebrew vocabulary more as a general expression than what it technically means. It makes me wonder if there is some connection between this and that strange and enigmatic story in the Book of Mark about Yeshua and a fig tree He encountered just outside of Jerusalem. People have attempted to understand its meaning for centuries, and so a good many solutions have been put forth. Considering what you just

learned about the actual meaning of **Bikkurim**, and that it doubles for the name of the biblical feast day that is also the day Yeshua would arise from the grave, and that this particular trip to Jerusalem for Yeshua would be His final one, because in just a few days from when this fig tree story happened, He would be executed on a Roman cross. Let's take a quick look at it.

CJB Mark 11:11-23 ***¹¹ Yeshua entered Yerushalayim, went into the Temple courts and took a good look at everything; but since it was now late, he went out with the Twelve to Beit-Anyah. ¹² The next day, as they came back from Beit-Anyah, he felt hungry. ¹³ Spotting in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came up to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it wasn't fig season. ¹⁴ He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And his talmidim heard what he said. ¹⁵ On reaching Yerushalayim, he entered the Temple courts and began driving out those who were carrying on business there, both the merchants and their customers. He also knocked over the desks of the money-changers, upset the benches of the pigeon-dealers, ¹⁶ and refused to let anyone carry merchandise through the Temple courts. ¹⁷ Then, as he taught them, he said, "Isn't it written in the Tanakh, My house will be called a house of prayer for all the Goyim But you have made it into a den of robbers!" ¹⁸ The head cohanim and the Torah-teachers heard what he said and tried to find a way to do away with him; they were afraid of him, because the crowds were utterly taken by his teaching. ¹⁹ When evening came, they left the city. ²⁰ In the morning, as the talmidim passed by, they saw the fig tree withered all the way to its roots. ²¹ Kefa remembered and said to Yeshua, "Rabbi! Look! The fig tree that you cursed has dried up!" ²² He responded, "Have the kind of trust that comes from God! ²³ Yes! I tell you that whoever does not doubt in his heart but trusts that what he says will happen can say to this mountain, 'Go and throw yourself into the sea!' and it will be done for him.***

The Book of Matthew recounts the same story but in highly abbreviated form. So, here is what we learn when we add-in the knowledge we have of Yeshua's resurrection on the day of **Bikkurim**. First, in Mark, we see it usually

translated as explaining that it wasn't fig season as yet. So, one has to wonder all the more why Yeshua would curse that tree for not having figs when the season for figs hadn't even arrived. Mark gives us the wrong impression. It was that Yeshu was correctly expecting to find the early figs as was usual in the late spring, which is the timing of this story (Passover, Unleavened Bread, and then Firstfruits were springtime festivals). But the tree had none even though it had produced leaves... so there was more than time enough for that tree to have produced its early figs that were easy to harvest and fast to eat (even though the main harvest would come several weeks later in what was known as "late figs").

Yeshua's response was to curse that tree and so it dried up and died. His disciples were shocked He could do that, and so Yeshua used it as an object lesson about the lack of trust and faith. I must say that the actual meaning and intent of this pseudo-parable still is unclear to me. But it must have had something to do with both the holy day of First Fruits and likely the symbol of first fruits as it related to His death and resurrection that were just a few days off (something He knew was going to happen). Here's the thing: although this event about the accursed fig tree was real, Yeshua turned it into a kind of parable about first fruits. And one of the chief attributes of Jewish parable is that it has but one overriding point. So, look for that point. I wish I was confident enough to tell you what I opine about it is the answer... but I'm not, so I am going to keep it to myself. Back to the Book of Nahum.

As verse 12 more or less ends this particular section of Nahum, it deserves a brief summary. The fact remains that despite all its draw and seeming promises, earthly security in things like money and militaries are illusions. History proves time and again that the unsinkable, the impenetrable, the undefeatable are just words. The mightiest of every material thing eventually falls. So, why put our faith and trust in those things? The only mighty thing that cannot be defeated or fail is God. No person or nation is invincible. And, if that person or nation has defied the God of the Universe, and defied His laws and commands, God's judgment and wrath will sooner than later fall upon it. If one is foolish enough to also come after and harm what He says is His precious treasure... Israel... that judgment will be harsher yet. The historical fates of Assyria and Babylon prove that such a route means permanence, and

no recovery from God's wrath is possible. The wise response to this truth is to repent and humble oneself before the Almighty and Everlasting God of Israel. Let's move to verse 13.

CJB Nahum 3:13 *Look at your troops! They behave like women! Your country's gates are wide open to your foes; fire has consumed their bars.*

Let's begin with the second thing first. This declaration of people behaving like women needs some explanation. The reality is that virtually the entire known world at this time in history was male dominated. Without doubt, in some societies females were not far from disposable, perhaps of less value than a cow. Although that it not how it was among the Hebrews, still the rights women held were meager in comparison to males. The next thing to grasp is that there was no argument or debate over who was physically stronger, or better able to physically protect, between men and women. Men win hands down. And this biological reality couples with the innate mindset within males to be responsible to secure the lives of their wives and other females in their families from harm.

So, in a combat situation, women were no match. Men were expected to overcome their fears, while women were expected to succumb to them. Thus, women were the vulnerable ones. Women were the ones who were usually kept as far away as possible from a battlefield. Women could be rather easily exploited (at least in relation to confrontation with males). And, in those ancient days it was virtually considered as legitimate spoils of war by armies that their troops had the right to take conquered women to sexually exploit them as a sign of control and of enslaved women as nothing but tools to be used for the pleasure of males. Sad, but it was yet another fact of life in those ancient times.

With the use of the metaphor of wide-open women compared to wide-open gates, the message is just like it sounds. The Hebrew term *patoah niptahu* means "they are wide-open", and used in a poetic couplet way here in Nahum as he speaks both of the vulnerability and the fate of Assyrian women as well as the forced-open gates into the city of Nineveh through which the male

troops of Babylon will pour in. It also doubles as a means to say that all the residents of Nineveh as a community took on the attributes of stereotypically vulnerable females. That is, they became weak and helpless before the Babylonian onslaught. Now, here's the thing: some translators interpret those helpless people as indicating the common folk, while others (like the CJB) assume this is saying that it is Nineveh's soldiers who have turned to cowardice and collapse in the face of the overwhelming enemy. This debate on meaning surrounds the Hebrew word **ammek**. Some translators think it means to say, "your people", while others think the meaning is "your troops". I am aware of at least one biblical scholar that thinks the interpretation should be "your people" but we are to understand it as meaning that the men of the city... troops or civilians... have essentially all been killed off and so all that remains is unprotected women.

It is my opinion that the term "your people" is the intended meaning, and what Nahum was thinking about was the plight of the population of Nineveh in general... civilians including perhaps soldiers. It was a general statement that didn't intend to point out a particular group of the people, but rather *all* the people holed up inside that doomed city.

The statement to end verse 13 that "fire has consumed their bars" is referring to big wooden beams used to secure a city's gates. Therefore, for the bars (the wooden bars) to be burned up means the gates are no longer secured.

It is important that we pause, take a breath, and not lose sight of the bigger picture that has been underway since the 2nd verse of Nahum's prophecy. What is going on here is the earthly expression of God's wrath. God's wrath is, itself, a subject of great consternation to the Constantinian Church. The more evangelically oriented a denomination is, the larger the consternation factor, because it flies in the face of their underlying doctrines of a God (a new God, really) who is only love and mercy and never angry, vengeful, or wrathful.

When the Scriptures speak of the wrath of God, the usual reaction from the Church is embarrassment. But let's examine the nature of God's wrath. The biblical God is beyond human emotion and particularly human-style anger. Pagan religions have angry, petulant, petty, homicidal gods like Kali, Thor,

Zeus, and Allah, but the true and real biblical God is certainly beyond such base human emotions or knee jerk reactions. There is a myriad of ways to deny God's wrath in the Scriptures such as by reinterpreting these biblical passages either spiritually (God is not wrathful, rather our experience in moving away from God only feels to us like wrath), or by reading the passage as though it is not speaking of God but instead of some flawed and lower angelic being, or by simply asserting that we project our human emotions on God, or that if it is found in the Old Testament we can discard it altogether.

Our problem with prohibiting wrath as being associated with God, is that we misunderstand the nature of wrath itself. We think of anger and wrath as being evil or irrational, but that is merely its association, not its essence. We should think of anger like fire – at the right place, and at the right time, and used for the right reasons it is invaluable and necessary. However, once it goes out of control, it becomes evil and destructive. Anger can be good. The opposite of anger is the virtue of patience. However, patience and inaction in the face of unremitting evil is not a virtue, it is evil as well. If it is true that evil triumphs only when good men do nothing, then it is anger, not patience, by which evil is halted. There *is* a time for patience and a time for righteous indignation and action. This is well spelled out for us in Ecclesiastes.

CJB Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1 For everything there is a season, a right time for every intention under heaven-

2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

5 a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to discard,

7 a time to tear and a time to sew, a time to keep silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Perhaps of the two or three greatest underlying themes of the Bible it is God's desired intimate involvement with His creation. The God of the Bible did not simply Create, wind it up like a great mainspring in clock, and then turn it loose to run by itself indefinitely. Rather God actively participates within the created order to bring about both a personal relationship with us and to carry out His moral justice. Therefore, when we speak of the "wrath of God" it is not a pugnacious, serendipitous God who has separated Himself from any objective, meaningful, recognizable code of justice. Rather the "wrath of God" is His exercise of His sole divine sovereignty, contained in His righteous judgment in the legitimate pursuit of this very standard of justice to which He also holds Himself as well as humanity. God's wrath is never spontaneous, irrational, and unpredictable but always is in reference to the covenant terms He has handed down to mankind, through Moses and the Hebrews. Not some hazy, abstract meaning of covenant as the Church tends to give it, but rather to the biblically established covenants of Abraham and Moses, and then the given through Jeremiah and carried out through Yeshua. God's mercy and God's wrath are not opposites, any more than are grace and law. They work organically together. It is the Father's concern for Creation... all of it...that is the source of His righteous anger. As Hosea says: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up."

The very definition of God's goodness necessarily means that He cannot be tolerant or indifferent to evil. His indifference, and our (His worshippers') tolerance to evil is more insidious than evil itself. Evil is a contagion. It cannot be ignored. God's wrath signals the end of divine patience. God's comfort to the afflicted and the oppressed is that evil is nearing its end at the climax of history.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures... as demonstrated in the Minor Prophets and here in Nahum... God's wrath is always conditional on our behavior and our response with His call to repentance. The Bible... Old and New Testaments, repeatedly stress that God is long-suffering and slow to anger.

Yet, God's patience and forbearance have limits and boundaries. The message of God's impending wrath, therefore, is a reminder that God's mercy cannot be taken for granted, not even for those who strongly claim His Son. God has a severe side, and if He did not, and if He did not exercise it, then the word "justice" would have no meaning.

The essential nature of God is love, and yet God's wrath arises from this same love. Goodness, love AND justice are the measures of God's anger. Divine sympathy for the victims of human cruelty is usually the underlying motive for God's anger, and especially that is so concerning cruelty, abuse, and oppression of His people, Israel. God's wrath is never inscrutable or unaccountable but directly related to His delight of justice. But, when God's defined justice is transgressed, His wrath is kindled. In the end, His greatest wrath is reserved for those who harm Israel and those joined in covenant to Israel... His true worshippers.

We'll continue in the final chapter of Nahum next time.