

INTRODUCTION

This is a true story about two ladies in North Carolina who attended the same church. They happened to run into each other one Monday while they were both shopping at the store called Dollar Tree. One lady said, "I'm surprised to see you here after what the Pastor said about this store in his sermon yesterday." The other lady said, "What did he say?" The first lady said, "There were several times when he said Dollar Tree was a terrible sin and that Christians should avoid Dollar Tree." The second lady bent over laughing and when she finally got her breath she said, "Honey, you need a new hearing aid. He was talking about idolatry—idolatry is a sin, not Dollar Tree!"

Idolatry was just one of the sins God's Old Testament prophets preached against. During this series from the Minor Prophets we've seen that God not only relates to individuals, He also relates to nations. Nahum's short but powerful prophecy is one of the most under-appreciated books in the Bible. But there's nothing ho-hum about Nahum. Like a talented artist, Nahum skillfully paints a picture of the character and nature of God.

Nahum 1:1-8. "An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness."

Every time you read the Bible, you ask yourself three questions. First, what did the passage of scripture mean to the original audience to whom it was written? That's explanation. Second, what are the general spiritual principles that can be learned from the passage? That's interpretation. Finally, what is God saying to me in this passage? That's application. In this message, I want to answer those three questions in regard to the message of Nahum.

I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING: Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but 100 years later they had fallen back into sin

If Nineveh rings a bell, it's because about six weeks ago, Lanny Bridges preached from the book of Jonah. Nineveh was the great city where a reluctant prophet named Jonah preached.

You might have noticed that we're not studying these twelve prophets in the order they are found in the Bible. Instead, we are studying them in chronological order. Most Old Testament scholars agree that Jonah was sent to Nineveh in about 750 B.C., and Nahum delivered this prophecy about 130 years later, around 620 B.C., so there was roughly a century between the two prophets.

Jonah proclaimed that unless the people of Nineveh repented, God was going to destroy the city in forty days. Here was their response: The King of Nineveh proclaimed, "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. (Jonah 3:8-10)

Nineveh was the capital of the great Assyrian kingdom. We know a great deal about Nineveh because of secular sources. Nineveh is first mentioned in the Code of Hammurabi, one of the oldest examples of preserved deciphered writing in the world, dating back 1,800 years before Jesus. This smooth black rock with carved cuneiform script can be seen in the Louvre in Paris. The Great Kings Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal built a magnificent palace beside the Tigris River inside the massive walls. It was called "The Palace with No Rival." Nineveh was the largest, most magnificent city of the ancient world.

But a hundred years after they repented, they had returned to their idolatry and immorality. So God sent another prophetic message to Nineveh through Nahum, and this time there is no indication the people repented, so God announced Nineveh would be destroyed.

He said, "With an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh."...This is what the Lord says, "You will have no descendants to bear your name...I will prepare your grave for you are vile." (Nahum 1:8, 14)

God not only predicted that Nineveh would be destroyed, He also predicted exactly how the great city would fall—the river flooded and the foundations of the city collapsed—so with an overwhelming flood, God put an end to Nineveh. We know from history that Nineveh fell to the Medes and the Persians in the year 612 B.C.

Then God predicted He would prepare a grave for Nineveh. He wasn't speaking metaphorically. Nineveh was literally buried for centuries. Three hundred years later when Alexander the Great led his troops in that vicinity, there was no evidence of the great city that once occupied that location. It wasn't until 1845 that a French archeologist stumbled on the ruins of Nineveh, which are located near present day Mosul in Northern Iraq. You say, "Well, that's history, what does it mean for us today?"

II. THE APPLICATION FOR AMERICANS: How have we changed morally and spiritually in the past century?

Let's compare America to Nineveh. God has blessed our nation to become the greatest nation on the face of the earth. Our history is full of times when our nation responded to calls for national humiliation and repentance. Early in this series I read the quote from President Lincoln when he called our nation to a day of national repentance, fasting, and prayer where he said we must, "confess our sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, with the assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the truth that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord."

Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear our President using that language today? You may be thinking, "Oh, Presidents of modern nations don't talk like that anymore." Well, if that's what you think just hang on.

There are many of us who are alarmed as we see the continual moral and spiritual decline in our nation. It hasn't happened overnight, it has been a slow process. It reminds me of what Nahum said, "Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away. 'Stop! Stop!' they cry, but no one turns back." (Nahum 2:8) Can you see the life and vitality of our great nation draining away as we see the loss of these moral and spiritual truths that made us a great nation? It's like water draining from a pool. Many voices are saying, "Stop! Stop!" but America doesn't listen.

So, what was America like a hundred years ago? In many ways, our nation is much better off than we were in 1912, but in other areas, we are worse. Consider these facts about America then and now: In 1912 the U.S. Population was 92 million and today it is 311 million. The life expectancy a century ago was only 48 years for a male and 51 years for a female, and today it is 76 years for a man and 81 for a woman. A gallon of milk cost you 32 cents compared with \$3.39 today. A gallon of gas was only 7 cents compared with about \$3.25 today. You could get a brand new car for only \$690, a Model T Ford in any color as long as it was black. Today the average price of a new car is \$30,300. The average highway speed was 6 mph compared to about 70 mph today. That was mainly because there were only 144 miles of paved roads in 1912 compared to 2.5 million miles today. In 1912 the Army Corps of Engineers drove in a convoy from NYC to San Francisco and it took them 62 days.

A hundred years ago our national debt was \$1.1 billion and today it is over \$16 trillion. In 1912 the entire federal budget was \$690 million and they had a \$3 million surplus. Last year our federal budget was \$3.8 trillion and we had a \$1.5 trillion deficit.

A hundred years ago it was hard to find an atheist in America with about 99.8% of Americans professing a belief in God, today 92% of Americans believe in God or a higher power. A hundred years ago, no stores were open on Sundays and about 2 out of 3 Americans attended church, compared with about 4 out of 10 Americans today.

A divorce was rare 100 years ago with only one out of a thousand marriages ending in divorce. Today about 42% of marriages end in divorce. In 1912 there were 231 murders nationwide, compared to almost 14,000 murders last year. A hundred years ago there were 39,000 Americans in prison compared to about 2.2 million Americas today.

Half of the population of the U.S. lived in rural areas and most of the churches were small. In 1912 the largest church in America was a Baptist Church, but it wasn't in the Bible Belt—it was in Philadelphia. Temple Baptist Church was the only megachurch of that time, and it had an attendance of around 4,000. Today, Temple University still exists, but the congregation that was once Temple Baptist Church is a small church with a few hundred members.

The turn of the 20th century saw huge strides in the growth of Christianity. The Welsh Revival in Britain affected the entire island, and as Lanny mentioned, the coal miners no longer used profanity with the mules and they had to be retrained.

The modern missionary movement was in full swing about this time with missionaries like John Mott and Lottie Moon taking the gospel to people who had never heard the name of Jesus. Faith was leading to moral changes in the U.S. In 1912 legislation was passed outlawing child labor. Both the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were founded in 1912. Women were demanding the right to vote, which they got in 1920 and they were leaders in the temperance movement, which led to Prohibition in 1920.

The beginning years of the 20th century were marked by huge citywide prayer meetings. An article in *Christianity Today* reported: "In Chicago, the Metropolitan Theater was filled every day with 2,000 people praying. In Louisville, Kentucky, several thousand crowded each morning into the Masonic Temple, and overflow meetings were held around the city. In Cleveland, the attendance was about 2,000 each day, and in St. Louis all the churches were filled for months on end."

In 1912 Woodrow Wilson was elected President, replacing William Howard Taft, who had the distinction of being the largest President. Taft was over six feet tall and was a biscuit or two over 350 pounds.

Woodrow Wilson was the son of a Presbyterian preacher and was one of the most devout Presidents ever to occupy the White House. A century ago we had a President who said things like this: "A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do. We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about...America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the tenets of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture." Concerning the Bible President Wilson said, "When you have read the Bible, you will know it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty."

Wilson was a Democrat, but that didn't mean the same thing it does today. He was opposed to big government. He wrote: "Liberty has never come from Government. Liberty has always come from the subjects of it. The history of liberty is a history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it."

That was America a century ago. We have never been a perfect nation. But any student of history would admit that today we are a nation filled with crime and immorality. We are nation that has forgotten our spiritual heritage. Like Nineveh of old we must remember this warning from scripture: "The wicked return to the grave, and all the nations that forget God." (Psalm 9:17)

But just as the prophets preached a message of hope, there is still hope for our nation. There is still time for us to repent and turn back to the God of our Fathers. The reason there is hope is because of the character and nature of our God. Let's look at

III. THE LESSONS WE LEARN ABOUT GOD

Nahum gives a full on portrait of the God who punishes sin, but also of the God who is quick to forgive.

A. God is patient in anger

The Bible says, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." (Nahum 1:3) God is angry about sin, but He doesn't throw a temper tantrum. Ruth Bell Graham, Billy's wife, once said, "If God doesn't judge America, He owes an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah." Some people are wondering why God hasn't already executed His righteous judgment against America. It's because God is slow to anger and full of compassion. He would rather forgive than punish.

Do you remember when God was preparing to punish Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham prayed for God to withhold His hand. He said, "God, if I can find fifty righteous people in the city will you spare it?" God said, "Sure, I'll do it for the sake of fifty good men." Abraham said, "What about forty-five?" "Sure, for forty-five." What about thirty? What about twenty? What about just ten? God said, "Abe, if you can find me just ten righteous people, I'll spare the city."

That conversation says something about Sodom—it didn't even have ten good people. But it says more about God. He is slow to anger.

Some of you may be thinking, "Is there really a God? After all I'm living a sorry life, and He hasn't struck me with lightning or anything." The reason some of you are still breathing today is because God is being patient with you. You're not saved, and if you died you would spend an eternity separated from God. But 2 Peter 3:9 says "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Will you trust Him today?

B. God is awesome in power

Nahum reported, "The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it." (Nahum 1:5) People are fascinated with displays of power. That's why people visit Niagara Falls. It's a thrilling experience to see the power of all that water falling. That's why tourists flock to the Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii, to see the power of a volcano spewing smoke and lava.

As these massive hurricanes churn onto land, millions of people are glued to their televisions just to see the awesome power of a storm.

Nothing in this world can compare to the awesome power of Almighty God. Our solar system is huge. The sun is 93 million miles away. Tomorrow I'm getting on a jet to fly to Africa at about 500 mph. It will take me about 14 hours. If I took the same jet to the sun it would take 21 years.

But our solar system is just one part of a huge galaxy called the Milky Way that has millions and millions of solar systems. If I flew on the same airline to the nearest star in our galaxy it would take 51 billion years—that's a long flight. The nearest galaxy to us is Andromeda. I've got to speed up our jet to warp speed. The speed of light 186,234 miles per second. "Give me more, Scotty." "I'm giving 'er all she's got, Captain." So now we're traveling at warp speed. How long before we reach Andromeda? Two million years. And Andromeda is one of millions of galaxies. Feeling small yet? Now try to latch on to the enormous size of the universe. Then notice that the

Bible says in Isaiah 40:12 that God has measured the Universe between His thumb and pinkie. And Solomon said, "Behold, heavens and the heaven of the heavens cannot contain you." (1 Kings 8:27 NKJV)

God is awesome in power. Yet, He sees when a sparrow falls to the ground, and He has numbered the very hairs of your head. What an awesome God!

C. God is our refuge in trouble

God isn't just a God of anger. Nahum writes, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." (Nahum 1:7) God is our refuge and our strength in times of trouble. Sometimes we bring the trouble on ourselves by our bad choices. When you are in trouble, you should run to God's side. Even when you experience the punishment of God, don't pull away; instead get close to Him.

I was a pretty disobedient child with a mischievous streak. I had my share of spankings from my dad. I know he loved me. In fact he would say, "I'm going to spank you because I love you." I wanted to say, "Hey, don't love me quite so much!" He would take off his belt and hold me by the arm and we'd go around in a circle. With him saying something like, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." And I wanted to say, "Then you must really be in pain, because this hurts a LOT!" Early on, I used to pull away as far as I could from that swinging belt. It hurt more. I didn't understand the physics of centrifugal force, but one day I discovered that if I got as close as I could to my dad when he was spanking me, the force of the belt wasn't nearly as painful. So I learned to just get as close to him as I could. I sought refuge in him, even when he was punishing me. The Bible says, "Whom the Lord loves He chastises." You may feel like you've been sent to God's woodshed and that He is being unkind. But He loves you. And when you experience the chastisement of God, don't pull away. Get as close as you can to Him. Let Him be your refuge in your time of trouble. God is good. Life is tough, but God is good. Pain is real, but God is good. People will disappoint you, but God is good.

CONCLUSION

I'm leaving tomorrow to visit Pastor Emmy and the Parental Care Ministry work in Uganda, Africa. I covet your prayers, as I'll be teaching several hundred pastors using the Healthy Church curriculum. I've said before there is a spiritual awakening that is happening around the world.

As I was studying about the country of Uganda I was surprised to see a statement that the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, made on October 8, 2012, commemorating fifty years of independence from Britain. It wasn't a statement but as much as a prayer.

He prayed, "I stand here today to close the evil past, and especially in the last 50 years of our national leadership history and at the threshold of a new dispensation in the life of this nation. We ask for Your forgiveness." "We confess sins of idolatry and witchcraft, which are rampant in our land. We confess sins of shedding innocent blood, sins of political hypocrisy, dishonesty, intrigue and betrayal."

“Forgive us of sins of corruption and bribery that have eroded our national resources; sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness and debauchery; sins of unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred and revenge; sins of injustice, oppression and exploitation; sins of rebellion, insubordination, strife and conflict.”

“We want to dedicate this nation to You so that You will be our God and guide. We want Uganda to be known as a nation that fears God and as a nation whose foundations are firmly rooted in righteousness and justice to fulfill what the Bible says in Psalm 33:12: ‘Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. A people you have chosen as your own.’”

“I renounce all the evil foundations and covenants that were laid in idolatry and witchcraft. I renounce all the satanic influence on this nation. And I hereby covenant Uganda to You, to walk in your ways and experience all Your blessings forever.”

I never thought I’d ever find myself praying, “Dear God, give us leaders in America like the President of Uganda.” That’s the kind of prayer Lincoln might have prayed 150 years ago, or that Woodrow Wilson would have prayed 100 years ago. God help us to be a nation of people who aren’t ashamed to stand up and say that America desperately needs to confess our sins and seek God’s forgiveness.

OUTLINE

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How have we changed morally and spiritually in the past century?

"Nineveh is like a pool, and its water is draining away. 'Stop! Stop!' they cry, but no one turns back." *Nahum 2:8*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes