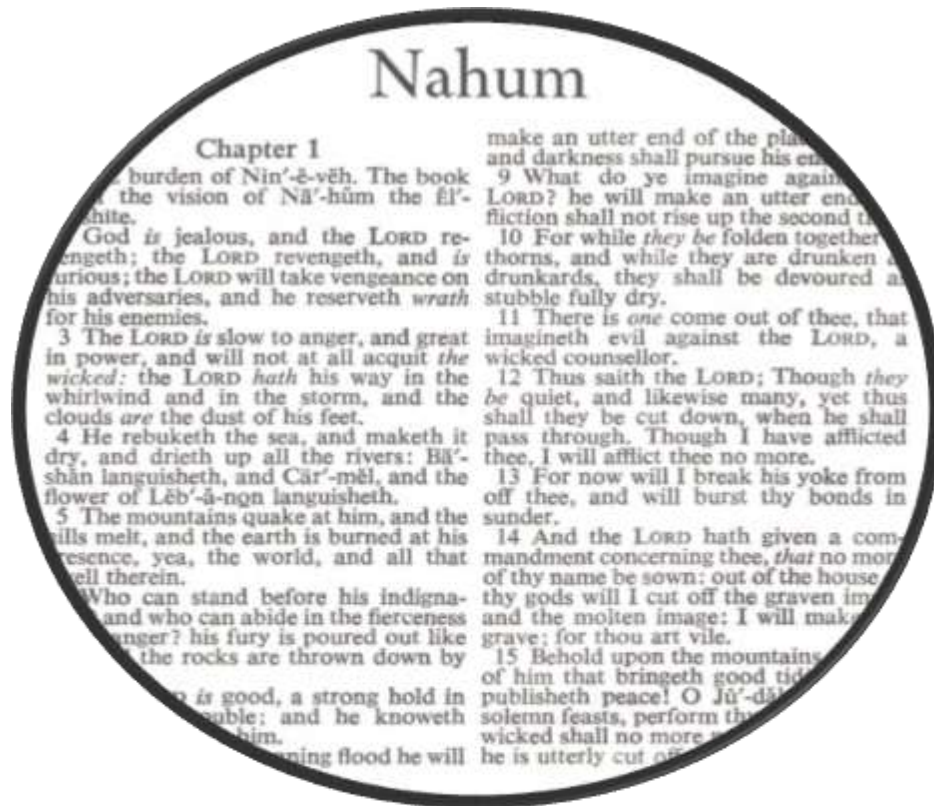


NAHUM—WEEK 2

SPIRITUAL WARFARE



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Nahum, Week 2 — spiritual Warfare

The last half of Nahum portrays spiritual warfare with stunning clarity. Nineveh isn't just to be destroyed; God will make an example of it. Its evil is to be wiped out along with it. Everyone will cheer its demise.

Ding dong, the witch is dead.

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Nahum, Week 2 — Spiritual Warfare
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1 Nahum 2:10-13 (NKJV)

*She is empty, desolate, and waste!
The heart melts, and the knees shake;
Much pain is in every side,
And all their faces are drained of color.
Where is the dwelling of the lions,
And the feeding place of the young lions,
Where the lion walked, the lioness and lion's cub,
And no one made them afraid?
The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs,
Killed for his lionesses,
Filled his caves with prey,
And his dens with flesh.*

“Behold, I am against you,” says the LORD of hosts, “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 be heard no more.”

This passage teaches a tough lesson about the LORD’s priorities. Here Nahum gives a harsh description of how the Ninevites will feel and likens them to a pride of brutal lions who are wiped out. *“Where is the dwelling of the lions?”*

But in verse 13 it’s the LORD speaking. After giving some specifics about what will happen to Nineveh, He notes where that leads. *“The voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.”*

No other consequence is mentioned. This is the endpoint of their destruction. The LORD isn’t just eliminating people; He’s eliminating their civilization. This includes their philosophy and their ethics—*the voice of their messengers*. In other words, He’s exterminating the evil at the heart of who they are. The people aren’t the point of this any more than the buildings are.

That’s spiritual warfare.

One of the key lessons of theology is, “It’s not all about you.” This is especially true of spiritual warfare.

The times spiritual warfare has been most apparent haven’t been times of great death and destruction; they’ve been scandals. While we are hated by evil forces, the war is between kingdoms.

And please don’t think that I mean to minimize the plight of the victims in these scandals. Their suffering is the foundation of why these events are scandalous.

But these scandals are distinctive in how they are embarrassing. That’s the stamp of spiritual warfare.

The target is the gospel.

2 Nahum 3:1-4 (NKJV)

*Woe to the bloody city!
It is all full of lies and robbery.
Its victim never departs.
The noise of a whip
And the noise of rattling wheels,
Of galloping horses,
Of clattering chariots!
Horsemen charge with bright sword and
glittering spear.*

*There is a multitude of slain,
A great number of bodies,
Countless corpses—
They stumble over the corpses—
Because of the multitude of harlotries of
the seductive harlot,
The mistress of sorceries,
Who sells nations through her harlotries,
And families through her sorceries.*

Now Nahum gets specific about Nineveh's depravity. His description of the physical acts is creepy enough, but what's behind all the horror is worse. It's

*all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute,
alluring, the mistress of sorceries,
who enslaved nations by her prostitution
and peoples by her witchcraft.*

Calling Nineveh, "*the city of blood,*" is nothing compared to that.

Movies should show good as good and bad as bad. Unfortunately, the movie industry is more focused on making money. Far too many movies conflate right and wrong.

The best movies teach advanced lessons in the nature of evil and the complexities of fighting it. "*A Few Good Men*" and "*The Bridge Over the River Kwai*" are two fine examples.

Scary movies can also rise above their genre by showing the spiritual forces behind the action. Disney made one such movie in 2010. It's superb, not only for its chilling portrayal of evil but for a grand musical score.

It's "*The Princess and the Frog*" and, astonishingly, it's rated G. I can't imagine what the ratings people were thinking; demonic characters are all over the place. The bad guy ("*The Shadow Man*") is a magician who sings, "I've got friends on the other side." He makes a deal with those "friends" to work great wickedness.

(Spoiler alert!) — In the end, the deal falls through and *The Shadow Man* is literally sucked into hell.

I highly recommend it, but not for children.

A rating less than PG-13 is head scratching. Anything less than PG is insane.

3 Nahum 3:5–7 (NKJV)

*“Behold, I am against you,” says the LORD of hosts;
“I will lift your skirts over your face,
I will show the nations your nakedness,
And the kingdoms your shame.
I will cast abominable filth upon you,
Make you vile,*

*And make you a spectacle.
It shall come to pass that all who look upon you
Will flee from you, and say,
‘Nineveh is laid waste!
Who will bemoan her?’
Where shall I seek comforters for you?”*

Notice that the agenda here is not the destruction of Nineveh. Sure, that will happen, and this passage references that fact, but the point is Nineveh’s shame.

God isn’t just destroying Nineveh; He’s making *a spectacle* of it. His goal isn’t merely to wipe Nineveh’s evil from Nineveh, it’s to wipe it out everywhere. The problem isn’t really Nineveh; that’s just where the problem flourished.

So, everyone cheers Nineveh’s demise.

*“It shall come to pass that all who look upon you
Will flee from you, and say,
‘Nineveh is laid waste!
Who will bemoan her?’”*

Ding dong, the witch is dead.

When we think of God creating the universe, we usually think of God creating things (light, the earth, plants, animals, man).

But those are all nouns. What about the verbs? Did God also create the action? What does it mean to create a universe?

Nahum teaches that God doesn’t just care about the objects in His creation, He also cares about the action. Good and evil are embodied in the action.

We typically see people and other things as the subjects of God’s wrath—they’re the things we see get hammered—but that’s just what’s happening on the surface. The real battle is spiritual.

Don’t get me wrong here. People are not unimportant. It’s just that the war is a battle of ideas. In the same way, a Supreme Court case is fought by litigants, but the battle is over the law.

In spiritual warfare, we can be warriors, even casualties, but we’re not what the war is about.

Like he did with Job, Satan’s trying to get people to sin.

4 Nahum 3:8-13 (NIV)

*Are you better than Thebes,
situated on the Nile,
with water around her?
The river was her defense,
the waters her wall.*

*Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength;
Put and Libya were among her allies.
Yet she was taken captive
and went into exile.
Her infants were dashed to pieces
at every street corner.
Lots were cast for her nobles,
and all her great men were put in chains.*

*You too will become drunk;
you will go into hiding
and seek refuge from the enemy.*

*All your fortresses are like fig trees
with their first ripe fruit;
when they are shaken,
the figs fall into the mouth of the eater.
Look at your troops—
they are all weaklings.
The gates of your land
are wide open to your enemies;
fire has consumed the bars of your gates.*

The Ninevites must have thought Nahum’s dire prophesy was hilarious. They were invincible. They were the world’s only superpower. They were at the top of their game.

This is Nahum’s response to their laughter. He details the history of previous “invincible” nations.

But nations at the top inevitably become overconfident, lazy partiers. That begins their downfall.

*You too will become drunk;
you will go into hiding
and seek refuge from the enemy.*

Great nations are destroyed from within before they are destroyed from without. Human sinful nature virtually guarantees it. Pride is the great enemy of every individual. Everyone should be aware of pride’s insidious nature and struggle to resist its traps.

But for a whole society, especially one on top of the world? Avoiding pride is almost impossible.

That’s how Rome fell.

The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and, instead of inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long. ... The emperors, anxious for their personal safety and the public peace, were reduced to the base expedient of corrupting the discipline which rendered them alike formidable to their sovereign and to the enemy; ... and the Roman world was overwhelmed by a deluge of Barbarians. — Edward Gibbon

No nation is exempt, including us. Pray for revival.

5 Nahum 3:14-19 (NKJV)

*Draw your water for the siege!
Fortify your strongholds!
Go into the clay and tread the mortar!
Make strong the brick kiln!
There the fire will devour you,
The sword will cut you off;
It will eat you up like a locust.*

*Make yourself many—like the locust!
Make yourself many—like the swarming locusts!
You have multiplied your merchants more than
the stars of heaven.
The locust plunders and flies away. Your
commanders are like swarming locusts,
And your generals like great grasshoppers,*

*Which camp in the hedges on a cold day;
When the sun rises they flee away,
And the place where they are is not known.*

*Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria;
Your nobles rest in the dust.
Your people are scattered on the mountains,
And no one gathers them.
Your injury has no healing,
Your wound is severe.
All who hear news of you
Will clap their hands over you,
For upon whom has not your wickedness passed
continually?*

The evil that must be exterminated infects more than just Nineveh.

The extermination is complete when everyone applauds Nineveh's demise.

*All who hear news of you
Will clap their hands over you,
For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?*

Thus does Nahum conclude with a wondrous point. The battle isn't against evil people; it's against evil.

The battleground of spiritual warfare is our hearts and minds. (There are other things going on beyond our view, but that's it as far as we're concerned.)

Satan's goal is not our death; it's more sin and less gospel. Death may result, but it's not the point.

One of the ways we battle evil is by teaching about it using things like books, movies, and museums. A great example is the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. It portrays history bluntly, so that people will be shocked by what happened, lest they forget.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." — George Santayana

The best way to combat evil is by showing it for what it is. The Holocaust Museum turns people's stomachs. That teaches the horrors of sin in a way that you can't forget.

Schindler's List does the same thing.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What scandals have affected you the most?
2. What's your favorite movie (in terms of theme)?
3. How are people "pushed" towards sin?
4. Are we overconfident as a nation?
5. What great lessons have you learned about the nature of evil?

Items for prayer: