

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 40  
The Sequel to Jonah's Book. The Book of Nahum  
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There is a present-day phenomenon in the movie industry which I am sure you are familiar with. When they have a big hit we have come to expect a sequel. Quite often the possibility of a sequel is even inserted at the end of a movie just in case.

Recently we studied the Old Testament book of Jonah. It is a favorite among church and un-church people alike. If you remember, the ending of the book is abrupt. It is like the story doesn't end, and we are left wondering what ultimately happens. That's where the book of Nahum comes in. It can be considered the sequel to Jonah's book.

Most sequels will jump us ahead in time so we can see how certain activities play out. The same is true for the sequel to Jonah's book. The book of Nahum jumps us ahead 100 years. To get a good understanding of the historical setting you might want to read Isaiah chapters 36-37. Jonah's worst fears came true. He did not want to go to Nineveh because he perceived them as the enemies of Israel. It was Assyria's seat of power. After the days of Jonah they grew stronger and eventually overtook the Northern Kingdom and led the 10 tribes of Israel away into captivity. Of course, this was not due to Assyria's strength, but Israel's sinfulness.

They also over-ran the cities of the Southern Kingdom. Isaiah chapters 36-37 describe them up against the walls of Jerusalem. Hezekiah was the king of Judah at the time and he did the only thing left to do; he threw himself on the mercy of God.

It is generally believed this is the setting in which Nahum prophesied. If that is the case, then he was privileged in saying what Jonah wanted to say, and seeing what Jonah wanted to see: God's judgment against Nineveh.

The ungodly leader of Assyria **underestimated God in a number of ways**. He underestimated God's uniqueness, goodness, and fierceness. In our time, society, and lives we often do the same thing. Therefore the message of Nahum becomes one we still need today.

## **I. He Underestimated the Uniqueness of God.**

First, we will learn in the book of Nahum that he underestimated the Uniqueness of God. Please open your Bibles to the book of Nahum with me. It is located between Micah and Habakkuk.

The opening words of this book are striking, because they provide a vision of God we are not accustomed to seeing. It is a vision of God which makes us uncomfortable, because it is a vision of His unique fierceness. Look with me at verses 2-6...

My first response to that vision is: *there is none like the Lord!* It is this uniqueness and fierceness of God that the ungodly leader of Assyria had underestimated, and that we too, often underestimate. Sennacherib, who was the leader of Assyria, reached the conclusion that Judah's God was just like all the gods of the other nations he had overcome. So he boastfully shouted to the people of Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:10), "*Let not thy God in whom thou trust deceive thee!*" He assumed God was no different than all the other gods of the world, and like them would also prove to be powerless.

Increasingly, in our society, and even among Christian people, we are thinking the same way. We place everyone's religious orientation and everyone's god on the same level. One is no better than the next, each is just as valid the other, and ultimately we are all headed to the same place.

But is that really the case? Is there a difference between our God, and the other gods of the world? I believe there is, and that is exactly what the Scriptures teach us! That our God can help, while all the other gods can not. Remember Elijah upon Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18? He pitted the God of Israel against the false gods of the people, and demonstrated God alone is real and powerful.

Our God is not like other gods, He answers when others cannot, and He acts when others cannot. So comparing Him with any other god is a grave mistake. Look with me at Isaiah 46:5-9...

There is no comparison. There is no equal. There is none like our God. He is unique. Nahum's prophesy reminded the people of Nineveh how foolish it was for them to forget that. Because not only is God gracious, merciful, slow to anger, loving, and forgiving as they had found Him to be in Jonah's day.

He is also a jealous God, a furious God, and a God of vengeance and wrath, who will not forgive those who continue in their wickedness

What a grave mistake it was for Sennacherib, the people of Nineveh, and even the people of our day to think of God in a common way. As if there is nothing unique about Him, or as if He is like any other. It cost the people of Nineveh their lives, city, and nation. And there is no reason why we should not expect the same if we fail to acknowledge the uniqueness of God.

## **II. He Underestimated the Goodness of God.**

The leader and people of Nineveh also underestimated the goodness of God. Look at verses 7-15...

In Isaiah 36 the message of Sennacherib to the people of Jerusalem was, *“Don’t look to your God for help, He could care less, He is not good!”* At the time he seemingly had a valid argument. The Northern Kingdom had already fallen to him and was taken away into captivity, all the countryside of Judah had also been overtaken, and now it looked like Jerusalem would fall as well. If God cared, if God was good, wouldn’t He have helped?

Perhaps that’s a question you have asked or someone close to you has asked in a time of trouble when there seemed to be no escape. But Sennacherib underestimated the goodness of God. As Jesus told the rich young ruler (Luke 18), there is none good but God. He always does that which is best for them who trust Him.

Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem found that to be true, for as they trusted the Lord their God, He came to their rescue. You and I will always find the same to be true. A favorite verse of mine is 1 Peter 5:7, *“Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”* Another is Romans 8:28, *“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

But sometimes we misinterpret our circumstances. Bad things happen and too often we understand them to mean God is not always good.

In Israel’s case and in Judah’s case the only reason Assyria had any power over them was because of their own sinfulness. They had rebelled against God, and God was using Assyria to punish them for their good.

As a father, I know the times I punished my children for their good were sometimes taken as meanness and not goodness. But a good father does discipline. Look with me at Hebrews 12:7-11...

God punishes us because He loves us and it is the best thing for us. The same was true for the people of Israel and Judah.

Sennacherib and the people of Nineveh misinterpreted their success over Israel and therefore underestimated God's goodness. Doing so cost them their army, their empire, and their lives.

If we conclude God is not good, should we expect any less? But if we conclude that no matter what happens God is good, then what a stronghold we'll find in our day of trouble!

### **III. He Underestimated the Severity of God**

And then, finally, we learn that Nineveh underestimated the Severity of God.

We are not going to read them, but the whole of Nahum chapters 2-3 describe in detail the destruction of Nineveh. The words which gripped my own heart the most are found in 2:13 and 3:5, "*Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.*" Can you think of any words more terrifying?

In Romans 8:31 it says, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" Well, the opposite is also true, if God is against us, who can help us?! No one can.

How foolish then to oppose Him, or to underestimate Him. But that's exactly what the people of Nineveh did. A big part of that was taking God's grace and mercy for granted. Over 100 years earlier when Jonah warned them of God's judgment they believed and humbled themselves before God. There was no question they needed to fear Him. But now their leader goes up to the walls of Jerusalem and dares God to do anything about it. He gravely underestimated the severity of God. And just a few years later, Nineveh was destroyed to the last detail given in Nahum's prophesy.

So complete was the destruction, the site was left unknown until its discovery in 1842. That's the danger of underestimating the severity of God.

I wonder how close we are as a people to making the same mistake. Do you think God will be any less severe with us? Look at Hebrews 10:26-31...

How would you describe your estimate of God? Does He hold a proper place of respect in your life, or is He treated with disrespect?

Roman 11:22 provides a fitting conclusion to this study, *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*"