

SPIRITUAL CAT SCANS

NAHUM

We're going through a section of Scripture I like to call "Spiritual Cat Scans." At the end of the OT God uses twelve prophets to X-ray the nations. He reveals their hidden sins, and prescribes His remedy.

So far we've tackled 6 of these prophecies. We've got 6 more to go...

Beginning today with a neglected Nahum... *Just out of curiosity, before this past week, how many of you had ever read the book of Nahum?*

Well, let me begin with a quiz... What do Dan Rather, Wolf Blitzer, Christiane Amanpour, Peter Arnett, and Nahum have in common?

Answer: *They are all famous war correspondents.*

During the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the US military allowed news reporters to go into battle embedded with the troops.

The term "war correspondent" took on a whole new meaning.

Newsmen traveling in armored vehicles came under enemy fire and live combat. They slept on the battlefield. They ate vacuum-packed MREs.

Chris Reid, a former embedded journalist for NBC, recalled his combat experience, "I cover Congress now. I

wear a coat and tie. I go home every night and sleep in a bed. It's safe and secure... and a bit too predictable.

I'm afraid whatever I cover in the future will never match the adrenaline-induced, heart-in-my-throat sense of anticipation I felt while embedded with the US Marines on their march from Kuwait to Baghdad." I imagine so...

Nahum also reports from the battlefield. He's embedded with the troops. He was probably never literally in the line of fire. Verse 1 suggests Nahum saw it all in a vision, but his prophecy reads like an eyewitness observer.

In his vision he's ducking arrows. Swords and spears are clanging in his ears. He writes of the horrors of war. He draws word pictures of shields, and uniforms, and chariots, and weapons, and troop movements...

And when Nineveh falls to the invaders and its army runs for its life – when blood fills the streets and rulers are led away in chains – Nahum reports on the slaughter and reminds Assyria of the reason for their defeat... **they insulted the God of glory and made Him jealous.**

The book begins with an introduction, **"The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."** Nahum lived in the seventh century BC. An approximate date for the book is 630 BC.

He calls his prophecy **"the burden against Nineveh."** The word **"burden"** means *heavy message*. It's a word from God with dramatic implications.

There's nothing "*ho-hum*" about "*Na-hum.*" It's a heavy *revvy*.

Nahum was born in "*Elkosh...*" The town's location remains a mystery...

Scholars have a few suggestions, but to me the best intel on Nahum's background comes from the Sea of Galilee. There's a town on the famous *north shore* where Jesus did the lion's share of His miracles. It's called "*Kafar Nahum*" or "*village of Nahum.*" The NT calls it "*Capernaum.*"

Capernaum is where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of a spiking fever - and a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day - and a gal who'd been bleeding for 12 years. It's where He raised Jarius' daughter from the dead... *Kafar Nahum* was Jesus' headquarters in the Galilee.

The town that saw the *Lord's miracles* first heard the *Lord's burden*.

Wherever Nahum lived the focus of his prophecy was elsewhere.

His eyes were on the superpower of his day – Nineveh and the Assyrian empire. Nahum was assigned to cover the fall of the capitol city, Nineveh.

And guess who would've loved to apply for Nahum's job? ***Jonah!***

Much to his chagrin, Jonah was instrumental in Nineveh's revival. 150 years earlier Jonah preached - Nineveh repented - and turned to God.

This was the outcome Jonah tried to avoid... Remember Jonah was a bigot. He hated Assyrians. *He figured they'd repent* – and he knew God to be so merciful He'd forgive them and afford them a second chance.

Nineveh was east. That's why Jonah boarded a boat headed west.

And you know the story... Jonah was intercepted by a storm, tossed into the sea by desperate sailors, and redirected by a hungry whale.

The revival that Jonah sparked was the greatest spiritual awakening of all time. A million-plus people turned from sin and followed the one, true God. But that was a century-and-a-half earlier. The revival didn't last.

It died out in just a few decades. Assyria reverted back to its idols and its barbarous ways. Now Nahum comes on the scene, and he informs everyone that God has said there'll be no more chances for Assyria.

Nineveh is set to be destroyed. God will finally judge her evil.

Nahum begins his prophecy with three bold words...
“**God is jealous...**”

Often when we think of jealousy we picture a person battling insecurities and a low sense of self-worth. The

guy doesn't feel lovable – so he finds it hard to believe he's truly loved. He develops an unwarranted jealousy.

He constantly questions and doubts his loved one's loyalty. This kind of preoccupation is a character flaw. It's a weakness that drives his loved one away. This is a personal paranoia. *It's nothing like God's jealousy.*

To help you understand a righteous jealousy I want to refer to a recent news story. And I realize I'm wading into circumstances without firsthand knowledge. I'm basing my comments solely on media reports...

Yet I'm sure you're aware of the celebrity golfer who pretended to be a family man while carrying on adulterous liaisons and sexual escapades with multiple mistresses. He was supposed to be putting on a private course – *membership only* – instead he opened it up to the public.

And I want to focus on his wife. This woman has been to hell and back. In recent weeks she's been humiliated by her husband's behavior. She's been betrayed, embarrassed, disgraced – and in the most public arenas.

By no fault of her own she's been mocked, and made fun of by the mistresses, and the national media, and the talk show hosts.

And I'll bet she's angry – *I say justifiably so.* If I did to my wife what this fellow has done to his wife I'd have the grip of four-iron sticking out of my mouth - and the head of a driver sticking somewhere else.

Here's my point, no person should be expected to put up with that kind of infidelity and betrayal. *Even the Bible gives this wife a way out...*

Here's a woman who's no doubt jealous, but her jealousy isn't born from some insecurity, or weakness, or paranoia, or insufficiency of character.

Just the opposite is true... From all indications she's a strong woman who knows she deserves better treatment. How dare anyone dishonor her in such a bold and cavalier way! She's loved this man. She's been faithful. She expects his loyalty – *and rightly so!* Her jealousy is righteous not evil.

And if the news reports I'm reading are true, the billion dollar golfer's estranged wife is about to hit him with some "green fees" of her own.

Welcome to the message of Nahum!

This is God's jealousy. God isn't insecure, or weak, or paranoid. He has no lack or need. God needs you and me, like we need a hole in the head.

God loves us. In a myriad of ways He's been loyal, and faithful, and gracious to us. He sacrificed His only Son so we could be forgiven. All the other blessings I could add to the list only pale in comparison.

Is there any doubt God deserves our allegiance and our trust?

One of my Christmas presents was Season 7 of the TV Show "24."

I don't know if you've seen this show. But in "24" special agent, Jack Bauer, runs around stopping terrorists. Jack gets falsely accused, shot at, chemically and physically tortured, exposed to toxins – you name it, Jack suffers it - it's amazing all the sacrifices Jack Bauer makes for his country.

Yet nobody wants to give Jack the credit he deserves. It's frustrating...

I actually got angry at how Jack was treated. I wanted to write a letter – *then I recalled it was just a TV show.* Finally, near the end of the day, Jack pleads with the President, "You can trust me..." *And the President can...* because Jack has proven his trust for 7 seasons, 24 episodes each.

And this is what God is saying in Nahum... *Why don't you trust me?*

God is jealous of our trust. He's proven His loyalty at every turn. He's been faithful to us even when we've been unfaithful to Him.

Why do we forsake Him the first time life doesn't go exactly as we planned - or our circumstances don't turn out the way we'd wanted?

Hasn't God earned more from us? Doesn't He deserve better?

It's right that God be trusted!

I'm not sure what's going to happen between the golfer and his wife, but I know after Nineveh's indiscretions God was ready for a divorce...

And the Prophet Nahum was sent to deliver the paperwork.

In chapter 1 Nahum provides us a grand and glorious portrait of God...

If your idea of God is Father Time ushering in the New Year - an old guy with a gray beard and a white robe holding a sickle and hourglass... cast that notion forever from your mind. It couldn't be further from the truth...

Chapter 1 portrays a bigger-than-life God who feels, and cares, and acts justly, and isn't afraid to do what's right. The prophet writes "God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious.

The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies." Verse 3 tempers the picture, "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked."

God is amazingly patient. In the days of Noah the world grew so wicked there was only one recourse... *wash it out and start over*. Yet God waited 120 years for Noah to build and preach - hoping the world would repent.

God's wrath amasses slowly. He never races down the judgment path.

God pauses often, and pleads with us to repent... Yet don't mistake His patience for *approval* or *apathy*. In the end, the wicked will be judged.

Nobody gets off the hook except the person who comes to the cross.

Ever heard of William Silva, age 44? He was arrested recently in San Jose, California on a burglary charge. It was Mr. Silva's 550th arrest. His *rap sheet* fills 127 feet of computer paper... *Yet what about you and me?*

How long is our rap sheet - our *sin sheet*? How many times have we violated God's law - broken His heart - been arrested by His Spirit?

God is "*slow to anger.*" He tolerated Nineveh's sin 130 years – gave her a century-long pardon. But there's a point when God's tolerance runs out.

Don't presume on His patience. He "*will not at all acquit the wicked.*"

Nahum pictures God's raw power. Notice the middle of verse 3, "*The Lord has His way...*" The Lord is strong. His arm is mighty.

Never forget it, God's way ultimately prevails.

Frank Sinatra might sing, "*I did it my way.*" Burger King suggests, "*Have it your way.*" But I'd listen to Nahum if I were you. Buck and kick all you'd like, but in the end God will have the final say. "*The LORD has His way...*"

Nahum pictures God dancing on the wind. He controls the sea. He dries up rivers. Lush, fertile areas in Israel that turn green and flower - Bashan and Carmel – suddenly wither at God’s command. He melts mountains - causes earthquakes. God’s fury reminds Nahum of a volcano.

Verse 6, **“Who can endure the fierceness of His anger?”**

Hey, I know God loves me. He’s kind toward me because I’m in Christ. But I don’t take His grace for granted. I fear what He *could* do to me.

Nahum says in verse 9, **“What do you conspire against the LORD? He will make an utter end of it.”** You don’t box with God and win. It’s foolish and futile to resist His will. Scheme against God and your plans will fail.

Notice the next line, **“Affliction will not rise up a second time...”** God is saying to Nineveh, **“You were warned once, now don’t push Me!”**

Ever heard the expression... **“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”** Out of the goodness of my heart I might choose to trust someone and get snookered. But I’m a fool if I let myself get conned a second time. *And why would we not think the same applies to God?*

Yet I know people who try to play God. They think they can shuck and jive, and weave and bob – and get around God’s will. Try to dodge God and you’ll get smacked down. God is the tackler who never gets jukeed.

Nahum is warning Nineveh - next time it's judgment not mercy.

Which brings up a great New Year's strategy...why **not aligned yourself with God's will for your life?** In your family, finances, career, ministry... It's best to find God's will – sync up your life, and stop conspiring against Him.

Verse 7 is hope! **“The LORD is good...”** *The Lord is jealous... The Lord doesn't acquit the wicked... The Lord refuses to be played... The Lord has His way...* But also, ***the Lord is good.*** You can trust His mercies.

Nahum says, **“The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.”** On a planet crowded with billions of people God senses the one person who reaches out and touches the hem of His garment... At Kafar Nahum God healed a woman when she touched Him by faith – and He'll do it again for you. ***The Lord is good.***

In Nahum's day Assyria was the greatest empire the Earth had ever seen. Nineveh's kings held sway from the Tigris to the Nile – the entire Fertile Crescent. Yet today, unless you're a Bible student or a Middle East archeologist you've probably never heard of Assyria.

Which reminds me of *the woman who married the archeologist?*

When asked what she saw in her new husband, she answered, **“Well, the older I get the more interested in me he becomes.”**

Verse 14 tells us why Assyria was so soon forgotten. The Lord commanded Assyria, “Your name shall be **perpetuated no longer...**”

Assyria was great in its day, but God chose to make it a footnote.

Nahum goes on to say God will cut off Nineveh’s idols. He threatens the Assyrians with ominous words, “**I will dig your grave, for you are vile.**”

And we see the grave God digs for the Assyrians in chapter 2.

In 612 BC joint-armies of the Medes and Babylonians stormed the city of Nineveh... Chapters 2-3 provide us play-by-play of the city’s invasion and conquest. Here Nahum writes as war correspondent. It’s as if he’s there – on location in the city - embedded with the troops...

Verse 1 “**He who scatters has come up before your face. Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks! Fortify your power mightily.**”

As Nahum writes you hear the sounds of battle – *commanders barking orders... chariots rumbling through the streets... drawn swords clanging...*

Remember, by this point in history Assyria was Israel’s archenemy. In 722, 100 years earlier, Assyrian had sacked Samaria, the capitol of the northern kingdom – and had scattered Israelis across the empire.

Verse 2 says God is about to defeat Assyria and restore Israel.

In verse 3 Nahum describes the invaders, “The shields of his mighty men are made red, the valiant men are in scarlet...” They’re dressed in scarlet. Their shields are dyed red. *Ancient armies liked the color red!*

For one, red was the color of intimidation... Like Bulldog jerseys on a Saturday afternoon red made the opposition quiver and shake.

But also, red camouflaged wounds sustained in battle. If you started to bleed, no one could tell. *Red blood* blended in with the *red uniform*.

Which reminds me of the Captain of the British battleship... One day his first mate rushes into his cabin and announces, “Captain, there’s a Spanish galleon on our port side.” The Captain barks out his orders, “Quick, bring me my red vest and man the battle stations.”

The next day, the first mate runs into the captain’s quarters again and shouts, “Captain, there’s a Spanish galleon on our starboard side.” He answers, “Quick, bring me my red vest and man the battle stations.”

Well, the sailor had to know... “Captain, why do you always ask for your red vest?” The brave captain answered, “Well, if I’m ever hit in battle I don’t want my men to see me bleeding and lose heart.” Wow, what courage!

The next day the first mate rushed into the Captain's cabin with terrible news, "Captain, you'll never believe it. We're surrounded by the whole Spanish Armada." The surprised Captain shouted, "Quick, bring me my red vest, my brown pants, and man the battle stations."

Verse 6 tells us how Nineveh was conquered. "The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved." Verse 8, "Nineveh of old was like a pool of water, now they flee away." A wash-out toppled Nineveh.

The Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, lived around 20 BC. He wrote that the fall of Nineveh was due to abnormal flooding of the Tigris River.

Two tributaries of the Tigris flowed under the city walls, and when the river swelled over its banks the floods washed out a 2½ mile stretch of the wall surrounding Nineveh. It created a gaping hole the invaders used to enter the city. Nineveh was easy pickings for these armies.

It's amazing that God gave Nahum a detailed prophecy predicting the downfall of the Assyrian capitol 20 years before it actually came to pass.

Nahum 3:1, "Woe to the bloody city!" Assyria was infamously cruel.

Babylon is remembered in history for its idolatry – its assault on God.

Assyria also worshipped idols, but it was known in historical annals for **its assault on its fellow man**. It was barbarous, and bloody, and brutal.

Assyria angered God by attacking the image of God in his fellow man.

In the ancient world, kings like *Shalmaneser* and *Tiglath Pileser* – *not exactly household names today* – were feared by millions of people. They not only committed shameful atrocities - they bragged of it afterwards.

Throughout the ruins of Nineveh archeologists have found inscriptions of the brutal boasts of Assyrian kings. Here's a few... **"Many within the border of my own land I flayed, and spread their skins upon the walls."**

Prisoners were skinned alive and their flesh used as wallpaper.

"I cut off their heads and formed them into piles."

"Three thousand captives I burned with fire."

"I cut off the limbs of the officers, the royal officers who rebelled."

"From son I cut off their hands and their fingers, and from other I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers, of many I put out their eyes."

"I bound their heads to posts round about the city."

Assyrian kings liked to bury their enemies alive inside the walls of their buildings... Defeated kings were led

around on dog collars, and housed in kennels... Tactics of torture and humiliation were perfected by Assyrians.

Here's a famous Assyrian torture... a spear was driven through a man's gut, and out the top of his head – the other end of the spear was stuck into the ground. The victim was left to squirm in pain until he died.

This was the precursor for what would later develop into crucifixion.

Here's what all this means to us... **God cares not only about how we treat Him, but how we treat our fellow human beings.** Every person you come in contact with – *male or female, young or old, married or single, black or white, born or unborn, crippled or whole, rich or poor, jailbird or free bird – Christian, or Jew, or Muslim, or Mormon, or Hindu...*

Every human carries in them at some level the image and likeness of God. And for that reason alone humans are owed a degree of respect.

This is why the idea of human rights is a distinctively Christian concept.

It doesn't come from Islam. The Koran refers to Christians and Jews as infidels... Hinduism assigns and enslaves folks to a tiered caste system... Even Judaism treats Gentiles as unclean and outside of God's love...

Only Christianity acknowledges a common Creator, and because we were made in His image, every human is owed certain alienable rights.

Yet sometimes I think we also live in *“the bloody city!”*

When over a million innocent babies die each year - *their only crime being conceived in an uncaring womb* – how can there not be blood on somebody’s hands?... *The politician or judge who permits the abortion... the voter who puts them in office... the society that doesn’t care for the unwed mother who’s in trouble... there’s blood on somebody’s hands.*

What about the cycle of domestic abuse that accounts for much of the violence in today’s society? Ever ignore a situation you should have reported – or walked away from instead of getting involved?

When an 18 year old gang member in Milwaukee murdered a 15 year old girl, the boy was quoted, *“This is going to wreck my whole summer. It’s not like she was the president or anything. She was just a girl...”* Hey, dads who raise sons to think that way about women *have blood on their hands...*

What about your own anger toward your spouse – or kids – or parents?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment,” but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”*

Granted, the consequences of pulling out a revolver, and putting a few slugs in a guy, is far more severe than yelling at him in traffic.

Nevertheless, don't become smug and self-righteous. Don't assume you lack violent tendencies. You might be too law-abiding – or lack the nerve to bury a blade in somebody's back - yet the same anger boils in you.

Jesus is saying, *you might not do the deed, but **the seed behind the deed** lies in your heart.* Ever heard the expression, “**If looks could kill...**”

How often have you murdered your boss with cold-blooded gossip?

Or stared a hole through a co-worker – or silenced the neighbor with the barking dog – or smothered your parents under a mound of indifference – or injected a lethal poison into the relationship with your spouse?

O my, how close do we live to **“the bloody city...”**?

Along with your black-eyed peas and cabbage this New Years there's a truth to chew on - **God cares about how we treat people.** God is jealous not only of how we treat Him, but of how we treat others. *Christians and non-Christians, believers and unbelievers, good drivers and bad drivers...*

God loves *all people*. Jesus died so *all people* can be saved. *All people* need to be loved... The path a person takes to become a Christian often begins when a Christian on that path loves that person.

And the best way to love a lost person is to tell them about Jesus.

The end of Chapter 3 tells us Nineveh is ripe for judgment. Verse 13 accuses Nineveh of cowardice. He says Assyria *fights like a woman*.

Nahum is saying that the Ninevites are just a bunch of sissies.

I understand this stereotype, yet I've known a few gals I wouldn't have wanted to meet in a dark alley... In fact, I always thought women would make fine soldiers. All you have to do with a female soldier is give her a loaded gun, point at the enemy, then whisper, "Those guys just said you look fat in your uniform..." You can expect a high body count!

Nahum closes with a surprise twist. In verses 8-10 he mentions the fall of another city, "No Amon." History recognizes this city by its Egyptian name, "Thebes." It was a wealthy city - the treasure of the Nile.

And guess who destroyed the city of Thebes? Assyria!

Now God says to Nineveh in verse 8, "Are you no better than No Amon..." In other words, the brutalities Assyria used on Thebes are about to be repeated on Nineveh. What goes around comes around!

Here's another reason to be careful how you treat people. The golden rule still applies, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them."

Verse 19 sums up God's judgment on Nineveh, "Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you..." Apparently, nobody regretted the fall of Nineveh.

Nations applauded! A cruel city got a taste of its own medicine.

I want to wrap up the prophecy of Nahum with an excerpt from the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Ancient History. "The disappearance of the Assyrian people will always remain a unique and striking phenomenon of ancient history. Other, similar kingdoms and empires indeed passed away, but the people lived on... with the Assyrians a nation which had existed 2000 years, and had ruled a wide area, lost its independent character."

Historians marvel at the defeat and disappearance of ancient Nineveh, *but it's not so hard to figure out...* When a person - or people - only love themselves and care little about how they treat others - God sees to it that person ends up defeated, abandoned, and forgotten themselves.

Ultimately, how you treat people will determine how you get treated.

Matthew 7:2 says it best, "and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you..." Nahum sees it, and God brings it to pass!