

## Lesson for March 29, 2009

### Old Testament Survey

#### The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah

Nahum was a contemporary to Isaiah and prophesied about 150 years after Jonah. Like Jonah, Nahum's message was directed to the city of Nineveh. Unlike Jonah's message, Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh because they had become apostate and turned away from God. Less than one hundred years later, Nineveh was destroyed as Nahum had prophesied.

The character and attributes of God formed the basis of Nahum's message. Even though God is slow to anger and full of compassion for all mankind, He could not allow the human race to become as it was in Noah's day. Destruction is God's answer to continued apostasy by a nation. A nation whose people "sow to the wind" will "reap the whirlwind." This was what Nineveh had done and Nahum's message was twofold: 1) God's justice must be satisfied and 2) those who remain faithful to God will be protected by the same power that brings judgment.

The first test of apostasy, heresy or the spirit of antichrist is *the clarity of the Gospel message*. Those who distort the Gospel can be, even without knowing it, apostate, heretical and antichrist. In Galatians chapter one Paul tells us what the fate should be of those who preach a different gospel. He says that they should be accursed, which means to be destroyed. Paul is not saying that these people should go to hell. He is using a metaphor meaning that they should be stopped from preaching a false message. The message, of course, is already accursed. The Bible tells us to test the spirits of men. The best test is what do they say about salvation and eternal life? (Galatians 1:6-9)

The Gospel is not: "turn from sin," "do penance to atone for your sins," "make Jesus your Lord," "invite Christ into your heart or life," "commit your life to Christ," "give your heart or life to Christ," "repent of your sins," (which they say means to feel sorry for your sins) "be water baptized," "join a particular denomination" or any other form of human works. Those who preach this are at best, ignorant of the truth and at worst, apostate. In either case, they are enemies of the Cross of Christ and it would be better for them to be accursed (destroyed). It is a serious matter to God to distort the truth of the Gospel. It would be better for the believer to be destroyed and be taken to Heaven now, rather than stand before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ and explain why he distorted the Gospel. (Philippians 3:17-19; Romans 14:10)

The second test of apostasy, heresy or the spirit of antichrist is *the doctrinal accuracy of the message*. This is where it takes a greater amount of doctrine in the soul to discern the false from the true. Only through spiritual growth can a believer avoid being deceived by these false teachers. There are some obvious signs that a preacher or a teacher is presenting false doctrine. For example, the motive of most false teachers is to seek fortune, fame and power. There are some ministers, however, that appear to be sincere and appear to have correct motives, but have allowed themselves to be deceived. Both are still teaching false doctrine and both are enemies of the Cross of Christ. (II Timothy 2:25-26; II Timothy 3:1-7)

### The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk prophesied in the latter years of the reign of Josiah. Habakkuk could be called “the perplexed prophet.” Habakkuk could not understand how God could withhold immediate judgment on Israel because of her rebellion against Him. Habakkuk questioned God and God answered his questions. The answer Habakkuk got was that God will bring judgment upon Israel, but He is also longsuffering and, a delay in judgment does not mean that judgment is not inevitable.

“The arrogant will be brought to nothing” answered Jehovah, “but the righteous will live by means of faith (faith-rest in the Old Testament).” Habakkuk, a chorister himself, then offered a prayer in the form of a beautiful poem, which many say rivals that of the Psalms. In his prayer, Habakkuk extols the character and attributes of God and praises Him for His salvation.

### Arrogance

Arrogance is saying that we don’t need God or His plan; that we have a plan of our own. Arrogance is the first in a list of sins in Proverbs 6:17-19 that God hates. Arrogance is part of all sin if we really examine it. Any time we commit a sin, we are saying that our way is better than God’s way.

Arrogance comes in many forms: *self-justification*, *self-deception*, *self-absorption* and *self-righteousness*.

*Self-justification* was illustrated for us in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. According to Genesis 3:8-13, Adam blamed Eve for his failure and Eve blamed Satan. We would say today in our vernacular, “It’s not my fault, the Devil made me do it.” Or “I’m a victim of my environment,” or “I have a disease” or “it’s my parent’s fault.” Self-justification rejects any personal responsibility for the actions of a person. Self-justification is a dangerous form of arrogance (look what it led to in the Garden of Eden!).

*Self-deception* is another deadly form of arrogance, as we see from I John 1:8-10. When a person is involved in practicing any pattern of sin over a prolonged period of time, it is easy to deceive oneself into believing that what I am doing is not sin at all. Self-deception can also be thinking about yourself in a conceited manner. For example, thinking that you are better, holier, more spiritual or closer to God than other believers. Self-deception can lead a person into self-absorption.

*Self-absorption* is total preoccupation with self. The scriptural illustration of this form of arrogance is the rich young ruler of Matthew 19:16-22. Here we have a story of a man who came to Jesus asking what he could do to inherit eternal life. Just like the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus illustrated to this man that he was a sinner in need of a Savior. It is the rich young ruler's self-absorption that kept him out of Heaven. Blinded by his riches and possessions, he was unwilling to recognize his need for a Savior. He was much like the Scribes and Pharisees (the religious leaders of Israel at the time of Christ) who were full of themselves to the point of having their consciences seared (unable to recognize their own sinfulness). We, as believers in Christ, are to be occupied with Him, not ourselves. (Philippians 2:5; Hebrews 12:2)

*Self-righteousness* is running rampant in society today, especially in church organizations. Self-righteous arrogance totally ignores God's righteousness in an attempt to establish one's own righteousness. Believers are also guilty of this destructive sin. Paul recognized it in the nation of Israel according to Romans 10:2-3.

What we need to realize is that as believers in Jesus Christ we already possess God's righteousness. Any attempt on our part to establish our own human righteousness as a means of gaining God's favor, is a waste of valuable time. Instead, we could be using that time to build our lives on God's righteousness already resident in our souls. God is not impressed with our human righteousness *before* or *after* salvation. God is only impressed with His own righteousness, which we possess, and this is the only means of blessing from Him. In other words, God blesses us based on His integrity, His righteousness and His justice. As we have studied, if you want increased blessing from God, you must increase your capacity to receive blessing from God, by the consistent intake of His Word. God's blessings are always given by means of His grace.

### The Book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and prophesied to Judah and to the surrounding nations. His message was one of impending captivity for Judah and judgment for the surrounding nations. Even though Israel had rebounded spiritually for a time under the leadership of Josiah as king, Zephaniah pointed out the fact that they had sinned against the Lord and must suffer the consequences. The only thing that can save them from captivity or destruction was a change of mind and a return to worshipping God.

Zephaniah spoke much about the day of the Lord, as a time of destruction and restoration. Destruction would come upon those nations who opposed Israel and restoration would come to Israel, if they turned back to the Lord. Zephaniah 3:14-20 has been called the sweetest love song in the Old Testament and refers to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ (though there will be many times throughout history when Israel will be restored and subsequently dispersed or destroyed).