

God Is Good And Angry

Louis Sahagun, staff writer for the LA Times published an article called "Traditional View of an Angry God Has Softened."

He wrote, To err is human. But is punishment divine? And if God is unleashing his wrath, how do you know? In antiquity, Romans blamed their army's losses to Hannibal on their failure to complete important religious rites. In the Middle Ages, the Black Death was viewed as the wages of sin.

But the view of a vengeful god has softened over time. God is less interested, many scholars and religious figures say, in creating catastrophes than in seeing how humans react to them.

He then quotes J. Gordon Melton, director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in Santa Barbara who said, "The Old Testament God who shows his pleasure in dribs and drabs by sending rain or drought is not alive and well. Within evangelical Christianity it is still spoken about, but everywhere else it is almost gone."

I'd say that Sahagun has part right and part wrong. The part he gets right in the article is questioning the idea every natural disaster is the direct result of God's judgment. We don't know that for sure and we'd better be careful of speaking for God.

The part he gets wrong though is saying that God doesn't express His anger at times in tangible ways.

The Bible is clear. God is good and God is angry. In fact, God is good and angry!

I'd like you to open your Bibles this morning to a short little Old Testament book, **the book of Nahum page 823,**

Last week we looked at the prophecy of Ezekiel. We call Ezekiel one of the major prophets because God's revelation to Him encompasses 48 chapters.

Nahum is one of the minor prophets. His message from God only consists of 3 short chapters. But, Nahum isn't a minor prophet because what he has to say isn't important.

God uses Nahum to bring a sobering message of God's judgment but also a message of God's grace and love. In Nahum we're going to see God's goodness as well as His righteous anger. The important thing is, those two attributes of God are actually complementary.

The prophets Nahum and Jonah have something in common. God used both of them to speak to the people of ancient Nineveh.

Jonah was a prophet somewhere around 760 BC at the time when the nation of Israel was divided into 2 kingdoms. The northern section was known as Israel and the southern part was called Judah.

God says, "Jonah, I've got a mission for you. Go 500 miles east and preach to the guys in Nineveh. Tell them they're wicked and if they don't get their act together I'm going to destroy them."

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and Assyria was the enemy of Israel. God was calling Jonah to preach to his enemies. Today the ruins on Nineveh are outside of the city of Mosul in Iraq.

To say that Nineveh was wicked was a bit of an understatement. The Assyrians were famous for the fierceness and cruelty. When they won a battle, which was most of the time, they would impale people on stakes and put them all around the conquered cities. One of their delights was skinning people alive and tacking their skin upon the city wall for a trophy.

So naturally, they weren't the people Jonah wanted to spend a lot of time with.

After a bit of a detour that involved a great fish, Jonah preached God's message to the Ninevites and by God's grace they listened.

Unfortunately their change of heart didn't last long. Nahum, who was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah, prophesied during the second half of the seventh century BC prior to the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC.

Nahum came with another message for Nineveh. God was still dealing with the Assyrians, but things were tightening up for Nineveh. God was now responding to the fact that the Assyrians went back to their old ways.

So God sends Nahum to Jerusalem to speak about the Assyrians. His message is

powerful.

I. God Is On The Throne And Will Ultimately Destroy Evil

Read 1:1-6

The city of Nineveh is to be totally wiped out. And that is exactly what happened. The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that in the centuries that followed armies marched over its site without even knowing that a city ever existed there. And Nineveh was no small village.

Nineveh has been excavated and studied by archeologists since the early 1800's. The city walls were approximately eight miles in circumference. In addition to its massive walls, Nineveh had a remarkable canal and river system. It was a center for all kinds of commerce and a city of monumental military might.

The Assyrians were known for their absolute brutality. Nineveh symbolized an empire that struck fear into the hearts of everyone wherever its armies went.

In the eighth century they surrounded the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria. For three long years they Assyrians pressured Samaria.

Finally, Samaria fell and Israel was overpowered, as the prophets Amos and Micah had predicted. And the people of Israel were taken away into captivity.

Later, Assyria turned its attention to southern kingdom of Judah. You can read about it in II Kings 17 - 19. As the Assyrians moved into Judah, they overwhelmed all the cities until they came up against Jerusalem.

There, Sennacherib, the king of the Assyrians, surrounded the city. There the Assyrians suffered one of their rare defeats.

For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake. And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses--all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. (II Kings 19:34-36)

This is the context in which God speaks about the Assyrians, through Nahum. Obviously the people of Jerusalem were thrilled. They'd seen Israel taken into captivity. They figured their very survival was questionable, but now God has

intervened.

I can imagine that in their joy, it would have been real easy for them to forget why the Assyrians were there in the first place. The people of Judah were being judged by God for their rebellion!

So Nahum speaks to them and reminds them that God isn't through with the Assyrians yet. And he reminds them that they have something to answer for to0.

So let's take look at the content of Nahum's message. **Read 1:12-14**

First of all, there is a message of consolation to the people of Jerusalem. The name Nahum, *nacham* in Hebrew, means "comforted" or "consolation."

Back in verse 2 we read *God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious.*

You might think, where's the comfort in that? What does it mean? What it means is this: Consolation is also very much a part of God's character. There is a message of consolation and comfort to the people of Jerusalem who have just escaped cruel destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. It is this: *When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.* (Isaiah 59:14)

That's a message of comfort that a lot of us need. We live in a world where evil seems to triumph and where good people suffer. We live in a world where criminals often get away with their crimes, where people who mock the holy principles of God, seem able to do so with impunity.

It seems like the wicked ones get away with evil. It seems, and the good ones tend to suffer.

Here's our challenge of hope from Nahum: Don't ever think that the wicked will get away with it. Don't think that we can mock God's holiness with out paying a price. God is a God of justice and He's committed to punishing wrong and rewarding right. That's Nahum's message of consolation to the people of Jerusalem. His message is a reminder of God's character.

Nahum also gives us insight into God's purposes. **Read 1:15**

The day will come when the Assyrians will be utterly destroyed and Nineveh will be

totally devastated. And the good news will come that Judah has been freed from its enemies. That's God's purpose.

The message of hope that comes to God's suffering people at all times is this: *I. God Is On The Throne And Will Ultimately Destroy Evil*

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Romania was brought out from under the iron fist of N i c o l a e C e a usescu. Ceausecuc was a tyrannical dictator who eventually began to see himself as god-like. He hated competition, especially from God Himself.

Under his rule any Bibles confiscated being shipped into the country were ground up and made in to toilet paper with the stipulation that there should be enough material (parts of words and letters) identifiable that it was obvious it was made from the Bible.

A Romanian pastor was exiled from Romania because of his stand against the government. He said that the favorite book in the Bible in the Romanian church was the Book of Revelation. But he said it wasn't the favorite for the same reason that it is one of the favorite books of the church in America.

He said that the church in America seemed to study Revelation because it's interesting - intriguing - the way things are going to work out.

He said the Romanian Christians love the Book of Revelation because they suffering unjustly. They were being desperately abused and subjected to all kinds of cruelty. So, the message of Revelation to them is the message of Nahum. It is this: God is God, and He's committed to seeing that good is ultimately rewarded. He is committed personally to seeing that evil will not finally triumph.

I. God Is On The Throne And Will Ultimately Destroy Evil

II. God Is A God Of Justice And Grace

Nahum's warning to Nineveh is a reminder that God ultimately brings judgment on evil, but before He does He always gives warning. God doesn't enjoy meting out judgment. That's why He gave Nineveh a clear warning. The Bible says, *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* (II Peter 3:9)

Notice the warning. We see political entities.

Here's what God sees: **Read 1:11**

This is clear reference to King Sennacherib, who had come up against Jerusalem.

Here's how arrogant he is. Before he invades he sends a messenger in to urge the people of Jerusalem to give up. He says, *Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?* (II Kings 18:35)

He said, "Nobody's god has stopped my army. Jehovah surely isn't going to do it!"

What God sees is a whole lot more than regional politics. He sees someone attacking His name and His people. So here's what He says... **Read 2:13**

Those are some of the most chilling words in the whole Bible. Romans 8:31 asks, *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Nahum gives us the flip side: If God is against us, what does it matter who is for us? This is the overwhelming message of Jehovah God to Nineveh. He has seen what has come out of Nineveh - He has formed his opinion about it - and this is what He thinks of Nineveh.

God sitting on the throne, says emphatically, unequivocally: *I am against you.*

The kings of Assyria had gone down all the way into Egypt. They had overthrown Babylon, occupied Israel, and taken over Judah with the exception of Jerusalem. They were all -conquering. They figured they could never fall.

Read 3:11-15

In 612BC the enemies of Assyria, the Babylonians and the Medes, formed a confederacy and worked their way up toward Nineveh laid siege to it. The Ninevites said, "No one can get to us," so they threw a big party. Everyone was drunk when the Tigris River reached flood stage. It rose so fast that it undermined the the walls. In the midst of the Ninevites drunken orgy, when the soldiers came in, their army was defenseless. The city was completely overthrown and decimated. God had said this would happen - and it did.

The message of Nahum is, first of all, a message of consolation to Jerusalem, and secondly, a warning to Nineveh. But third, it is a message of instruction about the character of God.

The first part of Nahum describes God as an angry God. The second part speaks of him as being a good God. In a lot of people's minds the two cancel each other out.

They believe that to say God is good and also angry is inconsistent. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's great goodness and his awesome wrath and anger are inextricably bound up in each other.

I think one of our problems is not understanding that God displays His characteristics in perfection. He's not bound by a sin nature like we are that distorts so many of our emotions and thoughts. Nahum 1:2 *God is jealous, and the LORD avenges*

When the Bible says God is jealous, that can be confusing for us. But remember, just like our English words "jealous" and "zealous" are related, so the Hebrew word that Nahum uses can have both meanings.

To be zealous is to be impassioned and intense. To be jealous means to feel deeply about something - to be stirred emotionally and motivated into action because of that emotional involvement.

When the Bible talks about the zealousness (or jealousy) of God it's talking about a depth of emotion that stirs Him into action. This depth of emotion is a zeal arising from His deep felt love of His people and His deep felt commitment to His own holy nature.

We always think of the word "jealous" as a negative. Nahum's using the word positively of God's love, and the intensity of that love. It speaks positively of the activity of His love. God's so zealous in His love for his people that He won't let anything get in His way. He's jealous for the object of His love.

When the Bible says that God is an avenging God, again we have a problem. When we think of vengeance, we usually think in terms of retaliation.

When the Bible says that God avenges, it doesn't mean that He is into retaliation. It means He's committed to retribution.

Retaliation is merely "me getting even with you for what you did to me."

Retribution is about a system of justice. It's not a case of getting even.

In our system of law we've become very focused on reforming people. That's not a bad thing if it's done correctly. But first and foremost, jail time or a fine when I break the law is supposed to be punishment.

If we don't punish someone for what he has done, we have insulted him, because we don't hold him accountable. If we don't hold him accountable, we are saying to him,

“Your not that significant so your actions aren’t that significant to us.”

If we do punish people for what they’ve done, we’re saying to them, “You did it. You’re responsible. It was your action and your actions are significant because you are significant.”

Therefore, when we read about God exercising vengeance, we hear Him say, “You are significant. You Assyrians are responsible. And to show you how significant you are, I personally will deal with you. I will punish you justly for what you did and I will punish you justly for what you are.”

When we read about divine vengeance, we’re reading that God places human beings in a position of tremendous significance. What He’s saying to us is: “Everything you do is significant - and when you do evil, you will be punished.”

The awesomeness of our God is seen in the fact that He’s zealous for those that He loves, He’s jealous for his own holy nature, and He’ll bring just retribution upon those who do evil.

Almost every Hebrew word related to judgment and wrath is found in the first few verses of Nahum.

God's wrath and His holiness and His righteousness are all linked together. But here’s our problem. We don't like jealous people. We don’t like people who retaliate. We’re not into people who judge us.

Because we tend to see everything through the lense of our human experience we tend to dismiss what the Bible teaches about God. People have mistakenly seen Him merely as jealous and vengeful and losing His temper.

One blogger wrote: *There’s an old saying: “God created man in his own image. Man quickly returned the favor.” Consider the possibility that this explains some of the bizarre and psychotic acts attributed to God in these old stories.*

Many of the actions attributed to God are really inventions of men.....because men felt better about their own acts of murder if their God was a murderer.

I. God Is On The Throne And Will Ultimately Destroy Evil

II. God Is A God Of Justice And Grace

III. God’s Wrath Is Evidence Of His Righteousness, And His Anger Against Evil Is Evidence

Of His Stand For What Is Good

How do we know that a person stands for what's good? One of the ways is to see how angry they become about the opposite of good, which is evil.

Tolerance has been the buzz word for our society. That's not all bad if by tolerance we mean being respectful of each other as human beings.

Unfortunately tolerance has been redefined to mean that we put up with anything, no matter how wicked or destructive. That is cowardice. We need to be courageous enough to stand up for the right in the face of wrong.

Do we want God to reward righteousness? Do we want Him to see that good ultimately triumphs? Then we have no alternative but to accept a God of judgment and anger - holy, righteous, and pure. He must visit His wrath and His anger on all who reject His authority and all who insult His moral character.

I hear people joking about about Jesus coming again. The New Testament tells us that when Jesus comes again, He'll visit fiery indignation and vengeance on His enemies. We need to be sure we are taking God seriously!

Well, finally, Nahum tells us that God exercises patience. He's jealous and vengeful, filled with wrath but according to Nahum 1:3 He's ... *slow to anger*.

What does that mean? It means that God is willing to give people the opportunity to face up to their evil, to see the wrong in their ways. He wants them to see the rightness and the inevitability of His judgment.

God gives us time to have a change of mind. That's why He's slow to anger. That's why He pops this "slow to anger" ray of hope right here in the middle of His horrible indictment of Nineveh and the Assyrians.

God is good. How can I say God is good when I have just said He's a God of judgment? Because His goodness is demonstrated by his jealousy, vengeance, wrath, patience, and His commitment to ultimate justice.

If God wasn't angry, he couldn't be good. If God didn't commit Himself to ultimate justice, He wouldn't be just. If God didn't commit himself to the final punishment of evildoers, he wouldn't be righteous.

Here's the key. It is only as we understand the sinfulness of our sins and the awesomeness of God's judgment that we really grasp the full meaning of His grace

and His goodness.

So what are the consequences for us of Nahum's message?

Listen to God's evaluation of our goodness. *The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.* (Psalm 14:2-3)

Did you catch that? We look out horizontally and measure who's good and who's bad by comparing ourselves to one another.

God looks down from His place of perfection and says, "No one measures up. They all fall short of my glory. They all deserve my wrath."

But the Bible doesn't stop there. It goes on to explain that God, the awesome judge, committed to holiness, righteousness, and justice, assumed our humanity and in the person of Christ took our sin and our guilt.

God, the judge, became the substitute and accepted our judgment. All our sin was placed on Him. The righteous, holy, unrelenting wrath of God was placed on Jesus Christ. *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, (in another words the not guilty for the guilty) that He might bring us to God.* (I Peter 3:18)

Why did God deal with the Assyrians the way He did? He did it to show His righteous wrath against evil. He did it to show that the most awesome, cruel regime imaginable was no match for the omnipotent God. To show categorically that evil in any form would ultimately be dealt with by a holy, righteous God.

Why does God deal with us the way He does? Why did God assume our punishment and in Christ die for us? Because He wanted us to recognize our own evil. He wanted us to realize how we break His laws and abuse His holiness. And He wanted us to go free.

Have you faced the fact that if you were to stand before a righteous God to answer for you life, you wouldn't have anything to stand on?

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (II Corinthians 5:21 NIV)

God is good. Because He's good He's angry at sin. Because He's a God of grace He punished His Son in your place. Have you personally trusted Christ as the only provision for your salvation?