

NAHUM 1:2-8

GOD FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
the LORD is avenging and wrathful;
the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries
and keeps wrath for his enemies.
The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.
His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.
He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers;
Bashan and Carmel wither;
the bloom of Lebanon withers.
The mountains quake before him;
the hills melt;
the earth heaves before him,
the world and all who dwell in it.

“Who can stand before his indignation?
Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.
The LORD is good,
a stronghold in the day of trouble;
he knows those who take refuge in him.
But with an overflowing flood
he will make a complete end of the adversaries,
and will pursue his enemies into darkness.”¹

The fall of a great city is disturbing. It is disturbing to read of the fall of Rome to hordes of advancing barbarians at the beginning of the fifth century. Canadians are rightly moved when reading how, despite the bravery of young Canadian soldiers, Hong Kong fell to Japanese armies. Though they were enemies, accounts of the fall of Berlin to the Russians leave us distressed and sorrowing. More recently, the fall of Saigon to the NVA and the VC disturbs those who recall those hectic days in April, 1975.

Nahum is known as one of the Minor Prophets. It is not because his prophecy is less important than, say, the prophecies of Isaiah or of Jeremiah; it is because it is a brief prophecy focused on one great event—the fall of Nineveh. That’s right! The prophecy is focused entirely on God’s judgement of the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was a great city—far greater than any of the cities I just mentioned. We don’t think of Nineveh that way, if we think of it at all, because it is largely unknown to us; therefore, the fall of Nineveh means little to us today.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

NAHUM 1:2-8
GOD FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES

Nahum's prophecy is meant for two audiences—Nineveh and Israel. In a broader sense, we could say that Nahum's prophecy is meant to warn those who stand opposed to righteousness and to comfort those who seek God. You see these two themes of comfort and confrontation throughout the book; this is especially the case in the first chapter. To the righteous, God reminds the reader that "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power" [NAHUM 1:3a]. To the wicked, The Lord God reminds, "The LORD will by no means clear the guilty" [NAHUM 1:3b].

Again, in VERSE SEVEN, God comforts,

"The LORD is good,
a stronghold in the day of trouble;
he knows those who take refuge in him."

[NAHUM 1:7]

However, in VERSE EIGHT, the LORD warns,

"But with an overflowing flood
he will make a complete end of the adversaries,
and will pursue his enemies into darkness."

[NAHUM 1:8]

What is God like? The answer depends on where you stand, or kneel. If your position leads you to stand as an opponent of righteousness, God will terrify. Though you may not be terrified now, you will be terrified, if you persist in doing what is wicked. If your position before God is as a worshipper, as a humble supplicant you will find God to be gracious and gentle.

NINEVEH THE GREAT — Since the key to understanding Nahum's prophecy is knowing something about Nineveh, let's do a bit of exploring. The founding of the city of Nineveh is buried in the dark mists of antiquity. The first mention of Nineveh is associated with a bad actor named Nimrod. In **GENESIS 10:8-13**, we read: "Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore, it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.' The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land, he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah."

In Genesis, Nimrod is named as the first despot to have built a great world empire. Of the cities attributed to Nimrod, the two most prominent are Babylon and Nineveh. Throughout the Word of God, from the founding of the city until the return of the Christ, Babylon is presented as the archetypical secular city. The biblical citations present Nineveh as the embodiment of human violence and conquest. In the broadest sense, Babylon stands for man's continual war against God and Nineveh stands for the warfare of man against his fellow man.

The earliest secular source to mention Nineveh appears to be the Code of Hammurabi (~2,250 years BC).² Hammurabi identifies himself as the king who made the goddess Ishtar famous through building the temple of Ishtar in Nineveh. After this, little is heard of Nineveh for centuries. We do have the name of a Ninevite king from ~1900 BC and a few other scattered references; but we hear little until the middle 800s when Israel came into contact with Assyria.

² "The Code of Hammurabi," Constitution Society, <http://www.constitution.org/ime/hammurabi.pdf>, accessed 27 December 2016

In Scripture, we hear of the Assyrians when the armies of Shalmaneser III invades the northern kingdom of Israel. Shalmaneser III reigned as King of Assyria from Nineveh during the period of 858-824 B.C. On the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III on display at the British Museum, he includes a depiction of Jehu bowing down and bringing tribute. The caption reads, “Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins.”³

Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria during 745-727 B.C., invaded Judah and received tribute from Azariah. In 733-732 B.C., this same despot invaded Israel, deposed Pekah and placed Hoshea over the nation as an Assyrian vassal. At the same time, he received tribute and deported many of the people to other areas of his kingdom.

Israel was confronted by the Assyrians one final time when Tiglath-pileser’s son, Shalmaneser V, returned and besieged Samaria in 722 B.C. Shalmaneser V died early in this campaign and was replaced by Sargon II, who would reign from Nineveh during the period of 721-705 B.C. Sargon, founder of a new dynasty, would see Samaria fall and the history of the northern kingdom come to an end. Sargon recorded, “At the beginning of my rule, in my first year of reign ... I carried away 27,290 people of Samaria. I selected 50 chariots for my royal equipment. I settled there people of the lands I had conquered. I placed my official over them as governor. I imposed tribute tax upon them, as upon the Assyrians.”⁴

In 701 B.C., Sennacherib, Sargon’s son, invaded Judah. Sennacherib ruled from Nineveh during the period of 705-681 B.C. Sennacherib’s account of this invasion is given as follows. “I approached Ekron and slew the governors and nobles who had rebelled, and hung their bodies on stakes around the city.”⁵

His boasted exploits continue, “As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to his strong cities, walled forts, and countless small villages, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps and battering-rams brought near the walls with an attack by foot soldiers, using mines, breeches as well as trenches. I drove out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them slaves. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were his city’s gate. Thus, I reduced his country.”⁶

Sennacherib continues his account by writing, “I threw up earthworks against him—the one coming out of the city-gate, I turned back to his misery. His cities, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land... [F]or Hezekiah, the terrifying splendour of my majesty overcame him, and the Arabs and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him.”⁷

The Word of God relates quite a different story, however. **2 KINGS 18:13-19:37** relates how Sennacherib invaded the land. Sennacherib’s field commander, the Rabshakeh, stood before the walls of Jerusalem and defied the LORD God. When that failed to move Hezekiah, Sennacherib himself sent a letter demanding surrender. It is important for us to note Hezekiah’s response.

³ <http://slideplayer.com/slide/5960098/>, accessed 27 December 2016; see also

<https://vaisamar.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/jehu-son-of-omri-paying-tribute-to-king-shalmaneser-iii/>

⁴ Walter A. Maier, **The Book of Nahum** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1980) 89, cited by James Montgomery Boice, **The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2002) 370-371

⁵ <http://slideplayer.com/slide/5960098/>, accessed 27 December 2016

⁶ “Sennacherib,” (art.), Ancient History Encyclopedia, <http://www.ancient.eu/sennacherib/>, accessed 27 December 2016

⁷ <http://slideplayer.com/slide/5960098/>, accessed 27 December 2016

“Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: ‘O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. Therefore, they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone’” [2 KINGS 19:14-19].

In answer to Hezekiah’s prayer, God sent His prophet, Isaiah, to assure Hezekiah that the LORD Himself would defend Jerusalem. The LORD responded to Hezekiah’s prayer thusly, “That night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh” [2 KINGS 19:35, 36].

The Assyrian king may have been turned back by God in 701 B.C., but God did not destroy the empire at that time. Nineveh was still at the height of national power and influence. Sennacherib doubled the size of the city of Nineveh, making it the largest city known at that time. The inner city was surrounded by a wall that was eight miles in circumference. Those inner walls were one hundred feet high and wide enough that three chariots abreast could race round the wall. The wall had twelve hundred towers and fourteen gates. Beyond this was a much longer, outer wall surrounding the suburbs of the city. Jonah writes that Nineveh was “an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth” [JONAH 3:3].

Nineveh’s might was unrivaled at that time; such power the world had never witnessed. As an example of the nation’s might, it is reported that Sennacherib’s armoury, where he kept his chariots, armour, horses, weapons and other accoutrements of war, covered forty-six acres and took six years to build.⁸ The Assyrians were using iron weapons at a time when their enemies were still using bronze; their iron-tipped arrows easily pierced the bronze shields of their foes. The Assyrian Empire was a powerful empire; however, they had grown cruel in their power; and their cruelty moved God to wrath. The LORD had sent Jonah to warn them of impending judgement, and the nation had repented. At least seventy years passed between the preaching of Jonah and Nahum’s prophecy. Revivals have a way of dying out surprisingly quickly.

What is evident from existing historical accounts, both that from Assyrian sources and that from their enemies, is that this was both a warlike and a cruel nation. They were noted for gruesome torture of conquered nations. Men, women and children were flayed, dismembered, beheaded and thrown alive from cliffs. Those spared such grisly deaths were sent into slavery. No conquered population was permitted to remain in its homeland. Though armies from earliest times have been denoted as cruel and brutal, the Assyrians appear to stand out for their brutality, even during the era in which they existed.⁹

⁸ Boice, op. cit., 371-372

⁹ Cf. Erika Belibren, “Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death,” BAR 17:01 (Jan/Feb 1991), http://faculty.uml.edu/ethan_spanier/Teaching/documents/CP6.0AssyrianTorture.pdf, accessed 28 December 2016;

“The Assyrian Empire, <http://cdaworldhistory.wikidot.com/the-assyrian-empires>, accessed 28 December 2016; David Andersen, “Nineveh: The Most Cruel Capital,”

<http://www.capitolcom.org/virginia/studies/947/2012/05/31/intro-to-jonah-nineveh-the-most-cruel-capital>, accessed 28 December 2016; “Lachish Captives Being Skinned Alive,” <http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/assyria/capture-lachish-flaying.html>, accessed 28 December 2016; “Assyrians, the Lords of

JUDGEMENT —

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
the LORD is avenging and wrathful;
the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries
and keeps wrath for his enemies.”

[NAHUM 1:2]

Whether exhibited by individuals or enshrined in national cultural norms, cruelty will be judged by the LORD God. People often mistake God’s patience for a lack of ability on His part. At other times, they misinterpret His patience as approval of their evil actions. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is to everyone’s advantage to remember the admonition Peter gives: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” [2 PETER 3:9].

The Lord, speaking through His Prophet, Habakkuk, cautions those who questioned whether His judgement would actually come,

“The vision awaits its appointed time;
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.
If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will surely come; it will not delay.”

[HABAKKUK 2:3]

“If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.” Here is a word to the wise. Then, of the wicked, God warned,

“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.”

[HABAKKUK 2:4]

The righteous will continue in confidence. Though the righteous are beset by the wicked, judgement will come at last to the evil one. The evidence that an individual is counted as righteous is that such a one lives by faith.

Nations that set themselves in opposition to the Living God experience ruin. Where is Assyria today? Where is Babylon? Where are the Moabites? The Amorites? They all were relegated to the dustbin of history. However, God’s ancient people, the Jews, continues as a people. Those who position themselves to destroy God’s ancient people are fighting against the Living God—they shall fail. Ask Germany!

This past week I watched a documentary detailing the overthrow of the German Reich. The destruction visited on Germany was terrible in the extreme. Watching the brutality of the advancing Russian armies was comparable to what is written of the devastation visited on Assyria. Yes, Assyria was God’s instrument of judgement on Israel; however, the LORD took note of their brutality toward those they conquered and announced their own destruction.

the Massacres,” <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Assyrians-the-Lords-of-the-Massacres-77262.shtml>, accessed 28 December 2016

Assyria was God's instrument for punishing Israel [see 2 KINGS 17:7-24]. Israel was punished because they had ceased looking to the LORD, looking instead to their own devices; but Assyria trusted in her might, and God sent a prophet to pronounce judgement. That prophet's name was Jonah. His message was but five words: *'ôḏ 'arbā 'îm yôm wə'nînewē nehpāket*—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" [JONAH 3:4]! Talk about a pointed message! That simple message resulted in a great revival. The Bible notes quite simply, "the people of Nineveh believed God" [JONAH 3:5a].

But now, as Nahum writes, almost one hundred years have passed since Jonah's prophetic ministry to this warlike city; the Assyrian empire has reverted to brutality and cruelty. God long ago ceased to be a factor in national life. Historians give various reasons for the fall of the Assyrian empire. Postulates include internal corruption, the rise of Babylon, external forces beyond Assyria's control—all of which may have contributed to the fall of the empire. However these conditions may have contributed to the overthrow of the empire, Nahum provides the true answer—the avenging God destroyed Nineveh.

Here is the message to nations today: *God holds nations accountable for their actions*. The Psalmist has written, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" [PSALM 33:12a]. While that benediction was pronounced for Israel, it is a universal benediction that is repeated when the Psalmist writes, "Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD" [PSALM 144:15b]. Modern nations must be reminded that a nation does not honour God through religious exercise—it is in righteousness and obedience to the will of the LORD God that a nation honours the Living God. One need but think of Micah's warning to Judah to understand this truth.

"[The LORD] has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?"

[MICAH 6:8]

A nation cannot claim to honour God while it condones the slaughter of millions of children that He has given. To abort our infants is to ensure that we move inexorably toward judgement. The nation ages and in order to ensure a future that nation is compelled to invite people into the nation who have no respect for the heritage and culture that has been built over centuries. No nation can honour God when children are commonly seen as an encumbrance that steal pleasure from mothers and fathers. Can a nation honour God when government and judiciary conspire to enable parents to slaughter their children in utero? Nations that honour God receive His gift of children with gratitude; they do not react to His gift of children with disdain.

The holocaust of infants leads inevitably to statutory execution of the weak and the vulnerable. The nation that accepts the slaughter of the unborn will shortly sanction the murder of the vulnerable. No nation can honour God while justifying the murder of the vulnerable. No nation can honour the Living God while acting as if it can somehow create a master race by allowing for the slaughter of the frightened, the weak or the vulnerable.

Can a nation honour God while the legislators and judiciary of that nation unite in the name of tolerance to silence the righteous and embolden the wicked? A nation cannot honour God when that nation normalises abominable sexual practises in defiance of biblical morality. No nation can continue to enjoy the smile of heaven while despising godliness and celebrating evil. God has warned us:

“Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!”

[ISAIAH 5:20]

Can a nation honour God when it is governed by politicians rather than being guided by statesmen? When the primary consideration of those who govern is how to be re-elected rather than governing wisely and justly, it is impossible for them to expect God’s imprimatur of their actions. It is impossible for God to bless a nation while that nation refuses to act honourably, choosing instead to be timid in the face of evil. When a nation turns her back on God’s ancient people in order to exalt evil nations that despise freedom and righteousness, the people must not imagine that they will long enjoy God’s blessings.

When a nation has embraced sexual immorality as entertainment, that nation has rejected God’s blessing in favour of their own perverted desires. A nation that employs the degradation of men and women as a form of amusement should not expect that God will bless it. When even the professed followers of the Son of God within a nation employ sexual activity as a form of entertainment, that nation is in jeopardy of divine judgement. Professed Christians are no longer horrified at the subtle teaching that casual sex is acceptable—and that teaching is ubiquitous! We permit our children to view such trash to keep them amused, to listen to the message repeated in their favoured music and even to dress as though they were participants in such depravity; we dare not say “No!” to our children lest they pout, whine and complain that we are unfair. How can the Lord God bless us when we are indistinguishable from the world?

When the youth of a nation spend twelve years in school and are unable to read, write or add and subtract numbers, and yet those same youths are indoctrinated to recognise thirty-four different forms of “gender” dysphoria, why should that nation imagine that God will bless it? When language becomes so degraded that we accept crude language even in casual conversation, why should the nation that tolerates such speech anticipate God’s continued blessing? When our youth are trained to question whether they are male or female, what would cause anyone to think that God who gives us our being will bless that nation? When educators see their role as indoctrinating their young charges to exalt themselves rather than thinking of how they can strengthen the nation through elevating others, God can no longer bless that nation.

And when a nation refuses to hold the wicked accountable, excusing evil actions because the perpetrators are young, or because they had a rough childhood, or because they feel discriminated against, or for any of a myriad of other excuses, that nation cannot expect God’s continued blessing. The nation that tolerates and excuses unrighteousness is acting with cruelty; and the nation that acts with cruelty must expect that God will surely judge it.

Nations that ignore righteousness must expect that the message of Amos applies to them: “Prepare to meet your God!” When the Lord God says to a nation, “Enough!” the people can expect only His wrath. When judgement comes, not even His people will be spared. Though they are alive in Christ, they must realise that they will not escape the judgement of God on the nation. I fear for the western nations in light of what we have become; I fear for the churches because of our silence and how we have tolerated wickedness.

DELIVERANCE —

“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.”

[NAHUM 1:3]

The first three verses of Nahum’s prophecy can be encapsulated by three words that are near-homonyms in the Hebrew tongue: *naḥûm* (Nahum, “comfort”); *naqam* (“vengeance”); and *naqah* (“clear”). The message of Nahum delivers divine *comfort* to those who have suffered Assyrian atrocities; God will rain *vengeance* down on those who have been *unpunishment* for their evil deeds. This message applies far more broadly than merely being applied to the ancient Assyrians. All who do evil, though they appear to escape divine retribution, must know that they shall ultimately face judgement. Judgement of the wicked comforts those who are afflicted.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:19]. Let me state very clearly, the professing Christian who places her or his hope on this present existence will discover that she or he has nothing on which to build hope. When we die, the things of this life will be left behind. However, when our hope is in the Eternal God, we shall be delivered from despair, from desperation, from pessimism, from cynicism, from hopelessness.

Though we must never take God’s goodness and mercy for granted, neither must we ever forget that God is good and that God is merciful. When the Living God revealed Himself to Moses, He emphasised this point. Moses had again ascended the mountain to receive the new copy of the Ten Commandments. The old warrior had destroyed the first tablets in a fit of anger. Now, he was called again into the presence of the Living God atop Mount Sinai. This is the account provided of that encounter. “The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the Name of the LORD. The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty’” [EXODUS 34:5- 7a].

The message that God is good, and especially that He is slow to anger is the identical message conveyed in Nahum’s prophecy:

“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.”

[NAHUM 1:3]

Though “the LORD is slow to anger,” no one should ever imagine that He will ignore sin. Peter warns all who will hear his words, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” [2 PETER 3:9, 10]. It is essential to note that the LORD “is great in power.” This means that He is able to do what He says He will do—in this instance, hold the guilty to account. It is this knowledge that the LORD will by no means clear the guilty that comforts His people, even when He is judging their nation!

Job had reached a point of despair; in frustration, he cried out,

“The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
He covers the faces of its judges—
if it is not He, who then is it?”

[JOB 9:24]

He felt that God was ignoring sin. He would require divine revelation to be set straight again. Sometimes, we also need a more direct revelation of God to understand that He does not ignore sin. The saints of another era were wont to say, “The wheels of God’s justice grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.”

God will not delay justice. Perhaps a word from Jesus Himself is in order for us now. “[Jesus] told ... a parable to the effect that [disciples] ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, “Give me justice against my adversary.” For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.”’ And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth”’ [LUKE 18:1-8]?

Regardless of what happens in this coming year, will we remain faithful? Even if our nation undergoes judgement for the wickedness that is fostered and promoted, will we remain faithful? Even if our families, many of whom we have neglected, are brought into judgement, will we remain faithful? I draw encouragement from some of the earliest Christians. The Christians of Thessalonica were persecuted severely; it must have felt as though they were being punished by the Lord God. Yet, the Apostle wrote them an encouraging note. The Apostle said, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-10].

We must not permit ourselves to despair. We stand poised on the cusp of a new year. Things look quite bleak. Jerusalem appears deserted as the nations of the world gang up on God’s ancient people. Wickedness seems to be in ascendancy; righteousness appears to be suppressed. Will tensions with Russia escalate? Will China begin to bully the nations of Asia and even push the United States? Will Iran get the bomb? Will North Korea attack the western world? We don’t know. However, we know who is in control in each of these situations!

Christians need to hear the Psalmist who grappled with these same challenges. He wrote,

“Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

“For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
And they say, ‘How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?’
Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

“But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

“Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!”

[PSALM 73:1-19]

NAHUM 1:2-8
GOD FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES

Pressure does not always mean that we are deserted. Many times, the trials we face are evidence of a Father who makes no mistake. Listen! Our God is too good to needlessly hurt us; and He is too wise to make a mistake. We must hold to this knowledge of His desire for what is best for us. May God bless each one who looks to Him and especially as we enter into this new year. Amen.