



A 14th century manuscript showing the beginning of the book of Nahum

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (Nahum 1:7).

Nahum, a minor prophet from the tribe of Simeon, may well be one of the most succinct prophets of the

Old Testament. He is a prophet of few but thunderous words. Many scholars believe that Nahum originated from the city of Capernaum ("the village of Nahum") at the Sea of Galilee. His name 'Nahum' means 'consoler'. Why was 'a consoler' sent to Nineveh rather than one crying out from the wilderness for repentance? The Prophet Nahum's prophetic vision concerned consolation rather than repentance. God had already sent the Ninevites a call to repentance through the reluctant prophet Jonah with a message of what would happen to the people if they continued their wicked ways.

We read of no reluctance on the part of the prophet Nahum in the sharing of his divinely inspired vision that would soon come to fruition. Although desolation was the theme of his vision concerning the sins of Nineveh, nonetheless, Nahum must have surely had compassion in his heart for the sinful people based on his willingness to warn them of

their destiny. The prophet Nahum pre-empted his teachings with an assurance that God is merciful and just to those who trust in Him.

In the Holy Book of Nahum, we learn that the Kingdom of Heaven is a Heavenly Kingdom for everyone including those of Israel and Jerusalem along with the Assyrians. God does not discriminate against even the worst of sinners; God will embrace all who seek repentance and are remorseful for their sins. The Ninevites heeded the warning of Jonah for two to three generations, responded to his preaching, and then all was forgotten. The people of Nineveh returned to their wickedness.

The Ninevites instituted the worship of the goddess Ishtar, and had become reputedly brutal in their conquests with absolutely no regard for human life. It has been written that the Assyrians would hang those conquered in battles on poles and take their skin from their bodies while still with a heartbeat and line the walls of their tents with the skins of those taken in battle. The smell of death had become likened to the smell of victory and honor and respect for human dignity became meaningless.

One can surmise the prophet Nahum spoke what was directly on his mind or divinely delivered to him in a vision. The prophet Nahum preached the

destruction of the Assyrian Empire and its capital city Nineveh boldly. He exhorted the Ninevites to examine themselves. Yet, the Ninevites grandiosely did not heed his warning.

"There is no sin that cannot be forgiven except the one without repentance" (St. Mar Isaac).

Though God is merciful, He remains always a just God. Never in Biblical history is there an incidence where God accepts, welcomes, and overlooks idolatry. In fact, this is where we can be certain of God's justice. Idolatry contradicts with God's Divine Perfection.

"Behold, I am against you," says the Lord of hosts, 'I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.'" (Nahum 2:13).

The prophet Nahum seems to understand this principal well. He specifically preaches this directly to the Ninevites 120 to 140 years past the time of the prophet Jonah. The Holy Old Testament Book of Nahum tells of the Nineveh legend of sadism that would leave recorded within its ancestry a nation that went from being repentant and wearing sack cloth and ashes to being idolatry. How could this possibly happen to a nation of people whom had two

Old Testament prophets sent specifically to them from the Lord our God?

What can prevent this from happening in today's contemporary world? Our beloved Coptic Church through its history, remembrances in the Divine Liturgy, Synaxarium, and many books which honor our Coptic saints can help us to understand the importance of the Sacraments of Confession and Repentance as well as to learn from those who turned from sinful ways never repeating those sins such as St. Moses the Black, St. Mary the Egyptian, St. Augustine, David the Prophet, and St. Paul.

Perhaps the Ninevites had no insight and reasoned this could not possibly happen to them and they continued as a nation of idolatry. Perhaps when a teenager approaches me and says, "Your Grace my father does not understand me or the world I live in or my friends outside the church" the youth need to remember the Ninevites and the lessons they did not learn from their forefathers.

St. John Chrysostom's written words continue to teach us all plainly about the dilemma we can fall into by not heeding the lessons history has taught each of us...

"You who do not believe in eternal punishment, tell me who drowned with the flood—all the people of

Noah's time did; Who burnt all the people in Sodom and Gomorrah? Who drowned all the Egyptians in the Red Sea including Pharaoh? Who killed the six hundred thousand JEWS in the wilderness? Who ordered the earth to open its mouth and swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram? Who killed seventy thousands in King David's time? Who killed eighty-five thousands of the Assyrians in one night? How do you answer that? Therefore NEVER take advantage of God's mercy" (St. John Chrysostom).

God's grace saves the obedient, the willing to be faithful and the repentant; but those who are not living in this manner assuredly will not be saved. During the Holy Great Fast it is important to examine what happens to those who are warned and admonished to turn from their evil ways. Seeking to establish their own importance and form of righteousness, the Ninevites continued in evil although warned specifically of the atrocities of their evil ways of life. The Ninevites were wealthy and were strong. Some might even consider them smart to have attained the riches they had accumulated but they definitely were not wise.

The Holy Book of Nahum calls for the Ninevites to assume their repentant nature and specifically denotes that they did not. Instead they preferred to embrace a radical yet modern character consistent

with that of everyone else in the city. Riches and affability, the desire to fit in, with other Ninevites would bring doom and despair.

Ultimately, the prophet Nahum gives the city of Nineveh this epitaph, "*Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually*" (Nahum 3:19).

Sadly, it took less than 150 years for Nineveh to return to idolatry, accompanied with violent and arrogant behaviors. Once again the Lord God sends another prophet to Nineveh to preach and warn them of the city's certain doom and destruction. This time they were not receptive, not even a little. By not heeding the warning of the prophet Nahum sent by God, Nineveh fell to Babylon in total destruction. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria thought to be incapable of falling. Like the tower of Babel, man is not capable of building anything eternal, only God's hands alone builds glory.

Repentance and reconciliation is the theme of the Holy Great Fast. The prophet Nahum plainly tells the Ninevites with certainty due to their great wickedness and deference to change--they will be destroyed. The prophet Nahum, unlike the prophet Jonah, did not speak to mercy and to repentance but

rather adamantly declared the doom of Nineveh. God is not mocked, is not repetitive, and is not ambivalent.

God does not waiver. God is slow to anger, tries to forewarn to making the right choice, and is merciful to those who seek His mercy through repentance. But if someone turns away from God to serve his own desires, he engulfs judgment.

It has often been written they we are living in an age of mercy, but that the future surely holds the age of justice and accountability. How God treats us in these ages is vastly divergent. In the Lord Jesus Christ's First Coming, He came humbly and was obedient to death. He came as a shepherd seeking the lost sheep. Yet His Second Coming will embrace judgment. He will come in His glory to judge the living and the dead. He will be surrounded by all the angels and saints in His Second Coming. He will be sitting on the throne of His Just Judgment. With the song of the trumpet, planets will fall.

In His First Coming, he endured the blasphemers and forgave all who insulted Him. On His Second Coming, He will come as a just judge giving everyone according to his deeds. This is something to meditate upon during this Holy Great Fast. Idolatry worships

anger, hatred, envy, and slander. Fasting assists us to guard against idolatry and its evils.

St. John Cassian was fervent when he taught that "Happy is the man who can reach the fasting of the soul and the fasting of the mind. No doubt he will eat spiritual food, and feed on every word that comes out of the mouth of God. My food is to do the will of the Father." The Holy Great Fast offers a time for not only contemplation but the strengthening our weaknesses.

During this Holy Great Fast may we all listen to our consciousness, the voice of our forefathers, read our Church histories and hear the voice of the prophet Nahum by heeding his warnings and being called to true repentance. May we all thank the Lord our God for the Coptic Church, as our protector and refuge in times of trouble. We pray that we may not become as the Ninevites, losing our sense of self as the faithful who trust in the Lord, but instead seek peace rather than spite and serve the Lord our God first and foremost over all idolatries of this contemporary world.

May the prayers of most repentant St. Moses, St. Mary, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and David the Prophet be with us all,

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