

Building on Biblical Foundations

“The Sign of Jonah”

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Genesis 10: 8-12

Genesis 10:8

Cush was the father of Nimrod, who began to be a mighty one on the earth.

9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; so it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.”

10 His kingdom began in Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah,

12 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and the great city of Calah.

Nineveh was one of the most important cultural centers in the ancient world and was adopted by the Assyrians as their political seat. The Assyrians were an enemy of God’s people – known as ruthless and violent, committed to conquering and expanding their territory.

Ninevah, in existence from 6000 BC.to AD 600, was established as the capital of the Assyrians about 700 BC. by Senacherib, whose successors lived there until its destruction in 612 BC.

The city wall of Nineveh has a circumference of over 12 km. And six gates have been excavated. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1465/>

Where is it? 410 km north of the city of Bagdad on the eastern bank of the River Tigris.

What else do we know about Ninevah?

The Book of Nahum - an Old Testament minor prophet had much to say about Ninevah. . . Nahum was a minor prophet – chronologically his book falls between Micah and Habakkuk. This was about God’s justice. Nineveh enslaved the nations with prostitution and witchcraft. Which I will read for you.

Nahum Chapter 1. (NIV)

1 A prophecy concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

The Lord's Anger Against Nineveh

2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God;
the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.

The Lord takes vengeance on his foes
and vents his wrath against his enemies.

3 The Lord is slow to anger but great in power;
the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.
His way is in the whirlwind and the storm,
and clouds are the dust of his feet.

4 He rebukes the sea and dries it up;
he makes all the rivers run dry.
Bashan and Carmel wither
and the blossoms of Lebanon fade.

5 The mountains quake before him
and the hills melt away.
The earth trembles at his presence,
the world and all who live in it.

6 Who can withstand his indignation?
Who can endure his fierce anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire;
the rocks are shattered before him.

7 The Lord is good,
a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him,

8 but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh;
he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.

9 Whatever they plot against the Lord
he will bring[a] to an end;
trouble will not come a second time.

10 They will be entangled among thorns
and drunk from their wine;
they will be consumed like dry stubble.[b]

11 From you, Nineveh, has one come forth
who plots evil against the Lord
and devises wicked plans.

12 This is what the Lord says:

“Although they have allies and are numerous,
they will be destroyed and pass away.
Although I have afflicted you, Judah,
I will afflict you no more.

13 Now I will break their yoke from your neck
and tear your shackles away.”

14 The Lord has given a command concerning you, Nineveh:
“You will have no descendants to bear your name.
I will destroy the images and idols
that are in the temple of your gods.
I will prepare your grave,
for you are vile.”

15 Look, there on the mountains,
the feet of one who brings good news,
who proclaims peace!
Celebrate your festivals, Judah,
and fulfill your vows.
No more will the wicked invade you;
they will be completely destroyed.[c]

The book of Nahum begins with a somber tone — “the burden of Nineveh” — which suggests that a pronouncement of judgment is imminent.

The name “Nineveh,” of course, brings memories of the book of Jonah. While Nahum spoke of Nineveh’s doom, Jonah was God’s messenger of mercy.

Jonah –

**1:1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.**

But we know how the story goes. . . Jonah refused to obey the Lord and instead got on a ship headed for Tarshish. . .and a great storm arose and the sailors cast lot and they fell to Jonah and he confessed to the men that he was a Hebrew and had run away from the Lord’s command. . .and he told them to throw him overboard and they did not, but as the storm grew greater they threw him into the sea. The Lord sent a big fish to swallow him, and three days in the belly of the fish . . . Jonah eventually agreed to go to Nineveh with the message of judgment and repentance.

3:1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Jonah 3:10

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

The LORD Said to Jonah:

4:11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Yes, Nineveh repented and the Lord spared the city – for another 150 years.

Nineveh eventually went back to its old ways and as Nahum the prophet declared - the city was indeed destroyed – utterly. In 612 B.C. the city of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians, and was burned to the ground.

This destruction was announced by several other prophets too. You can look these up and read them. . .

- Isaiah 10:12-19
- Ezekiel 32:22,23
- Zephaniah 2:13-15
- Zechariah 10:11

Why does this matter today. . . thousands of years later?

There is much to learn from scripture, not just history, but the character and nature of God as He is revealed throughout the Bible.

The nature of our God is to warn. He extends mercy, and forgiveness. He is patient, he is the perfect example of forbearance and long suffering. These are character traits that we are also called to bear as children of the most high God.

We see evidence of the Lord's patience and mercy in the story of Nineveh. The Apostle Peter wrote also wrote . . .

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

You see He waits. He extends His mercy. He offers opportunities to turn from wickedness. But do not be mistaken – God will not wait forever and He will not be mocked. We will reap what we have sown.

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived: God is not to be mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return.

Galatians 6:8

The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life

Job 4:8

As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

Ninevah plowed iniquity. Nineveh and the Assyrians reaped destruction upon themselves.

Here is a sobering question. What has America sown lately?

Iniquity? Or Righteousness?

Where do we – as a nation – stand before God?

Cities are judged and so are nations.

Psalm 110:6

He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

1 Samuel 2:10

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

The adversaries of the Lord? Who do you suppose they are? Those who do what is evil in his sight. Those who reject his Son, Jesus. Those who trade truth for lies. Those who fill the earth with bloodshed, violence, hatred, idolatry, greed, lust and every other abomination described in the bible.

He is a God of justice and his justice is perfect. He is not a man that he should lie. When he judges he looks into the heart of man.

Yes... The Lord will bring judgment to those who refuse to repent.

When iniquity rises to unacceptable heights, he brings judgement. He has done it before and He will do it again.

There is a point when the Lord – even though he is slow to anger – will indeed say “ENOUGH.”

How close are we to that day? I don't know. I will tell you what I do know.

We worship a holy God. He will not tolerate this evil forever. How do we know what evil is?

Well, we can look to the 10 commandments to start.

Let's consider the most obvious commandment – Thou shall not murder. I don't imagine anyone here will defend murder. Did you know. . .

- More than 62 million legal abortions have occurred in the United States since 1973. https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/
- <https://windowwalker.podbean.com/e/jeremiah-191-15-child-sacrifice-cannibalism-and-god-s-judgment-on-judah/>

The commandment – as translated from Hebrew is not Thou shall not *kill* . It is actually Thou shall not *murder*. In biblical times worshippers sacrificed their children to Baal and Molech – throwing them into the fire. They did this for prosperity. I could draw analogies here but I will refrain. The Lord brought judgment upon those who engaged in such practices.

Jeremiah 19:4-5

"Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind."

Jeremiah mentions three reasons for God's judgment:

- 1. They had forsaken the Lord, and all forms of evil followed.**
- 2. They desecrated the Holy place by making sacrifices to idols in Jerusalem**
- 3. They sacrificed their innocent children to Baal.**

But it is not only physical murder that brings judgment: Jesus expanded this to include hating your brother. Jesus said that if you had hatred in your heart, it was just like the sin of murder.

While it is easy to see that our nation has disregarded this commandment by intentionally sacrificing own children through abortion – our society is also guilty of increased hatred for one another.

Where does this put us as a nation before a Holy God? I would suggest that we are teetering. We - who know the Lord - should be aware of how dangerously close we are to the judgment of God falling upon this nation.

Tomorrow we will experience an unusual event – the solar eclipse. Everyone is in a bru ha over it. Traveling to see it and probably selling t-shirts. It is a natural event so what's the big deal? These things happen... right?

There was a total solar eclipse in 2017 that covered our nation from Oregon to South Carolina. There was another lesser eclipse in 2023.

Monday there will be another total eclipse from Texas through Maine.

Slide with map of eclipse

These two solar eclipse's will form an X over the USA. The center of the X falls over the New Madrid Seismic Fault line. . .coincidence? Maybe.

The path of this eclipse will come awfully close to 7 US locations named Nineveh. And 2 will be in its totality – one in Indiana and one in Ohio. I can't make this stuff up.

1. Nineveh, Texas
2. Nineveh, Missouri
3. Nineveh, Indiana
4. Nineveh, Ohio
5. Nineveh, Pennsylvania
6. Nineveh, Virginia
7. Nineveh, New York

That's a lot of Ninevehs. . .by the way there are only 8 places in the modern world named Nineveh. The 8th is in Nova Scotia.

Nineveh – a place known as being hostile toward God, a wicked city. Even so, what did Jesus say about Nineveh?

LUKE 11:

29 As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.

31 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here.

32 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. . . what kind of sign?

I did a little digging... and guess what I found...?

In June of 763 BC – there was a total eclipse of the sun over Nineveh and historians place Jonah and his trip to Nineveh in right about that time.

“A total solar eclipse over Nineveh in northern Iraq on June 15, 763 BCE fits this time frame for the life and career of Jonah.

Assyriologist Donald Wiseman, a former curator at the British Museum, and editor of *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* and *The Alalakh Tablets*, published a lecture in the *Tyndale Bulletin* in 1979 where he argued persuasively that this eclipse would help explain the dramatic reaction to Jonah's preaching.

According to the Assyrian writings cited by Wiseman, here's what a solar eclipse would have meant to them: 'the king will be deposed and killed, and a worthless fellow will seize the throne ... rain from heaven will flood the land ... the city walls will be destroyed.'

The Assyrians tell us that at such a time, there would be solemn fasting, and the king would hand over his throne to a substitute until the danger passed. At least once when there was a total solar eclipse, the Assyrians cry, 'Nineveh shall be overthrown!' (in Assyrian, *adi arbat ume alninuaki innabak*, which can also mean, 'Nineveh shall be made to repent!').

[Scholars] believe that Jonah was in Nineveh in June of 763 BC during the total eclipse of the sun, which would help explain the remarkable response of the people of Nineveh.

Jonah preaches at exactly the right time for the people of Nineveh to listen to him. The Assyrian nation was weak and in chaos in the decade around 760 BCE. They had one earthquake (one sign of divine wrath). There was a famine from 765-758 BCE. Assyria was losing battles and losing territory to its enemies. There were domestic riots.

With all the trouble they already had going on, they could have easily believed that Jonah's warning would come to pass. Now was a perfect time for a prophet from far away to arrive on the scene and command a response."

<https://www.johnpratt.com/items/docs/2019/jonah.html>

https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/TynBull_1979_30_02_Wiseman_JonahsNineveh.pdf

Hmmm.

Jesus said we were to watch. Watch the skies. Watch the earth. Pay attention. Don't get sleepy. Don't get distracted. Don't be discouraged.

LUKE 21:25

25 “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

29 He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees.

30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.

31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32 “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34 “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

35 For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth.

36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

We can't dictate how everyone around us should live. We can't steer this ship – the USS America. However, we are each responsible for what we do with our lives, who we serve, what we exalt, how we treat each other.

As Christians – we do not need to fear whatever the future brings. The steady composure of unbelievers will serve as a witness to those around us in uncertain times. Unbelievers will ask you what is the reason for your peace.

And this is your response:

The Lord says of those who love him:

Isaiah 43:2-4

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee...

Proverbs 18:10 NIV

The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe

2 Samuel 22:3

My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation. My stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior, You save me from violence.

Psalms 91:2

I will say to the LORD, "You are my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

No one knows what a day may bring. We are all living one day at a time. And whether you meet Jesus because your days are done like our sweet Flora who is dancing with Jesus today – or you are caught up in the air with him as the Apostle Paul described, one day we will be with our Lord.

When Nimrod laid the foundation of Ninevah he was determined to build a fortified city, a city that would withstand enemy forces and the storms of life. But it came down – it was actually burned to the ground – and nothing remained.

All that we know has an expiration day - not unlike Nineveh. A day of reckoning will come. The Lord Jesus – the righteous judge will separate the good fish from the bad fish, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, the harvest from the weeds. There will be no escaping his divine judgement.

So today – while there is yet time – today is the day of salvation. Don't let it pass without being right with God. Jesus paid the price that we could not pay, for a debt he did not earn. So we could be united with God the father forever. Don't be fooled, indecision is a decision.

How then should we pray? Like Jonah who said . . .

“God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in mercy, abounding in steadfast love, and One who relents of disaster (Jonah 4:2)”

Let's pray.