WOE TO NINEVEH, THE CITY OF BLOOD

Nahum 3:1-19

Keyverse3:1,5a

Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! "I am against you," declares the Lord Almighty.

In the last two lessons, we studied God's vengeance against Nineveh and God's comfort to Judah, and Nineveh's fall and Judah's restoration.

Chapter 1 revealed that the Lord is jealous and avenging God. He takes vengeance and pours out his wrath against his foes. At the same time, the Lord is slow to anger and great in power. He is good, a refuge to those who trust in Him. He gives comfort and peace to his people.

Chapter 2 vividly described the fall of Nineveh as if we watch a movie. God's judgment on Nineveh was swiftly and completely executed by the attacker as the Lord Almighty declared. And Nahum prophesied the restoration of the splendor of His people.

Chapter 3 provides us with a deeper insight into the cause of the fall of Nineveh along with her identity. And it also teaches us our identity and where we belong. Exposing Nineveh's identity and her sins to the nations, chapter 3 delivers the same message of warning to us who live in our time. We as the bride of the Lamb Jesus do not commit idolatry and do not compromise with the temptations of the Nineveh-like world. Rather as citizens of the Holy City, we deliver the message of God's judgment and God's restoration and seek and build up his kingdom.

Part I. Woe to the city of blood.

Look at verse 1. Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The city refers to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Multiple wars brought the Assyrian Empire immense wealth and power. She boasted of her power and splendid civilization. However, Nahum's vision catches and exposes her cruelty and shamefulness of sins hidden in her dazzling splendor. Look at verse 1 again. Nineveh is called the city of blood. It was built and grown by the blood of many nations, full of lies, and full of plunder of countless victims. Fundamentally, her civilization was the result of her sins of greed, selfishness, and atrocity. It seemed that Nineveh would last forever, but the living God declares, "Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims."

Look at verses 2-3. 2 The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! 3 Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses. Nineveh will be destroyed according to what she has done. This paragraph describes bloody and terrifying battles that soldiers, chariots, and cavalry make in rapid motion and vigorous sound, and immediately connects the horrific scenes in a breath-taking way. As a result, the city of Nineveh will be filled with casualties and countless corpses. It's hard to even imagine. Jesus said in Mt 26:52, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."

Verse 4 now explains why this is to happen to Nineveh. Look at verse 4. 4 all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft. Nineveh is compared to a harlot(prostitute) who allured and enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft. The Bible calls it prostitution when His people abandon fellowship with God to commit adultery with other gods. Assyrian Empire had threatened and seduced many nations, especially God's people to turn against God and then to rely on and fellowship with her. On one occasion, Assyria enticed Ahaz king of Judah to rely on herself rather than God, promising him protection from Northern Israel and his allies. After that Assyria destroyed northern Israel and scattered them away. However, later she invaded Judah and blasphemed God in Hezekiah's time. In this way, she enslaved many nations. She spread her idols and ruined them.

The Bible describes the relationship between Christ and the church as bride and bridegroom. The Lord loves us more than his life. He wants to share all his good things with us. However, the world like Nineveh or Babylon intimidates and tempts God's people, pulling them away from the Lord and eventually turning them away from Jesus our bridegroom. Unknowingly, we Christians are deceived by the lies of the world, succumbed to temptation, and even participate in her spiritual prostitution.

Just as God revealed the identity of Nineveh as a prostitute, God also reveals in Revelation chapter 17 Babylon, the great prostitute. John gets his vision of the city of Babylon as "the great prostitute, who sits on many waters," with whom "the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

Also, Nahum expressed God's people like Judah, and Rev 21 clearly states our identity as the bride of the Lamb. The angel said to John: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he reports: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."(Rev21:9-12)

So Nineveh, the city of blood, is a miniature version of Babylon, the great prostitute in Revelation. And both Nahum's and John's messages are the same. We need to be aware of Babylon the great prostitute behind which there is the ruler of the kingdom of the air, Satan. We should not be deceived by her temptation. We should not rely on or be tempted by the Nineveh-like, Babylon-like world. We must not participate in blood-shedding, lies, plunder, and spiritual prostitution. Rather in the day of trouble, we must take refuge in the Lord our Bridegroom. The word of God must be boldly proclaimed.

Look at verse 5. 5 "I am against you," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame. Verse 5 is God's final declaration to Nineveh. God's declaration in Chapter 2:13 only speaks of the destruction of Nineveh, but this declaration is not only a message of Nineveh's fall but even a stronger message to uncover her shame and make her a spectacle of all nations in all generations. It shows how Nineveh would receive God's perfect and complete judgment. God exposes her sins of prostitution and cruelty to all nations and puts her to shame in history. She bares the things she brags about, revealing how shabby and shameful the civilization she has built-in sin. According to the actual historical record, the Assyrians were proud of their brutality. Impalement, flaying, and amputations were the trademark of the Assyrians.

Impalement — slow and extremely painful death

Flaying — the victim's skin was hung on the city wall

Grinding of bones to erase the memory of ancestors

Beheading

All this evidence has become the shamefulness of her sins and condemned throughout generations. This is also a warning message that any individual, city, or nation will see a shameful ruin if anyone becomes like Nineveh. Look at verse 6. 6 I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. God will put filth on their nakedness. He will make her a spectacle to the nations. Look at verse 7. All who see you will flee from you and say, 'Nineveh is in ruins-who will mourn for her?' Where can I find anyone to comfort you?" It means that there will be no one left to mourn, and there will be no one left due to utter annihilation. She has no true allies or friends. When she frightened and tempted many countries, everyone was close to her and envied her, but there was no one to comfort her who became a spectacle. They run away. On that day, God no longer has compassion for her, but only wrath. Nineveh is completely lost and never rebuilt. According to 'The Ancient History of Cambridge', 'no other country in history has been so destroyed and plundered as Assyria'.

Part. II Everyone claps his hands at your fall(8-19)

Look at verses 8-10. 8 Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall. 9 Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya was among her allies. 10 Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains. At that time Thebes was in rivalry with Nineveh. Its location was on the upper Nile River and it was the center of Egyptian civilization. The city, with its temples, obelisks, sphinxes and palaces, is sometimes described as 'the greatest monumental city in the world'. The similarity between the two is that they were both invincible cities surrounded by a river, and both enjoyed the glory of their prime time. However, Thebes, despite being surrounded by allies, was destroyed and taken captive. Even babies who could grow up as potential enemies were slaughtered, and nobles and great men were sold into slavery. It was Assyria who destroyed her. So how proud Nineveh must have been! But the Lord Almighty asks. Are you better than Thebes? She thought she is. But God said that she will fall more thoroughly than Thebes for she will be a shameful spectacle for the nations.

Verses 11-19 describe figuratively how Nineveh will be naked and put to shame. 11 You too will become drunk; you will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy. As in the case of Thebes mentioned earlier, Nineveh "you too" will be judged and will surely perish by God's wrath. This is consistent with the prophecy in chapter 1. Nineveh will be like a 'drunken man' as the LORD has proclaimed (1:10), and their efforts to find 'refuge' will be in vain because they have put their trust in idols(1:7).

Look at verse 12. All your fortresses are like fig trees with their first ripe fruit; when they are shaken, the figs fall into the mouth of the eater. Starting with verse 12, list how they are stripped and put to shame, one by one. Frist, all her strong fortresses will be fallen helplessly as if the firstfruits of a fig tree fall when shaken. In the same way, when God executes his judgment, he makes all the fortified strongholds useless.

13 Look at your troops- they are all women! The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed their bars. Second, her troops are supposed to defend the city, but they will be as weak as women, and will be of no use in fighting against the enemies, so the gates of Nineveh will be wide open to the enemies. Verse 13 is an indirect expression that Nineveh will be utterly plundered and ruined by the attacker.

14 Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defenses! Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork! Nahum sneers and tells them to prepare diligently for battles. However, it implies that no matter how strong the defense is, it is of no use.

15 There the fire will devour you; the sword will cut you down and, like grasshoppers, consume you. Multiply like grasshoppers, multiply like locusts! Verse 15 says that as long as they defend themselves, they will all die on the spot with fire and sword. Here Nahum expresses the invasion of Babylon and the destruction of Assyria, by using grasshoppers and locusts. Based on their eating habit, the city will be naked with nothing left on the ground.

16 You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more than the stars of the sky, but like locusts they strip the land and then fly away. Like the stars in the sky, the merchants of Nineveh have amassed great wealth during the Assyrian Golden Age. But when Nineveh fell, they took away all that was left and disappeared, just like the locusts.

17 Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day- but when the sun appears they fly away, and no one knows where.

No matter how many guards and officials there are, there is no one to protect the city with loyalty at the risk of their lives. Since they pursued their interests, they will all disappear when faced with a crisis. Indeed, God stripped away the things they wore and boasted about, one by one, clearly showing that the civilizations, cities, and countries they had built up were false images of shameful sin.

Look at verse 18. Now Nahum calls the king of Assyria. 18 O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them. There was no one left to stand by the king of Assyria, or to fight for him. The shepherds and nobles fled, and the people were scattered. No one wakes up to rebuild Nineveh. Look at verse 19. Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty? There is no one to help Nineveh and the king of Assyria, covered with filth in a fatal wound. No one sympathizes. Rather, it will be a great joy for all who hear of Nineveh's fall.

The cities in the Bible do not start with good motives. It begins with self-defense, self-pride, and greed caused by man's fear of departing from God, and it develops into a challenge against God.

What does the city we live in today look like? We cannot deny that human greed, lies, plunder, and cruelty are at work, not God's law. This week there was a big headline. 42B dollars disappeared in a few days as the value of Terra/Luna, one of the Bitcoins, collapsed. A significant amount of coins were put up for sale on the market, giving negative signals, and as the number of coin sellers soared and the number of buyers plummeted, resulted in a 91% fall in the coin value, which could not be solved even with stable algorithms. People who sold large amounts of coins earlier made money, but many small investors lost enormous money. Looking at this case, I cannot but think that it is like legal lies and legal plundering. Real estate, stocks, and Bitcoins are not identical but work on similar principles. This world is no different from Nineveh in that there is no bloodshed, but never without victims shedding bloody tears. This applies to individuals as well. What if you build your security city at the price of someone's blood and tears, lies, and plunder, spiritual prostitution and idolatry? You will not be able to escape the righteous judgment of God on the day of judgment. We may live as a pure brides of the Lamb Jesus.

We live in a world like Nineveh, but we are not of the world. God bought us with the price of the blood of Jesus. Therefore, we belong to the holy city of the kingdom of God. The holy city that God revealed through Moses and Apostle John is different from these worldly cities. This is new Jerusalem where the throne of God and of the Lamb is in the city, full of righteousness and holiness, mercy and forgiveness, no shame and deceit, pure devotion without any hint of plundering, no tear, no victims. This is the city of New Jerusalem where we will reign with Him forever and ever. Therefore, we, citizens of the Holy City, should not agree with or compromise with the deceitful or intimidating Nineveh-like world and her prostitution. Instead, we may live as pure brides of the Lamb Jesus. We may devote ourselves to seeking and expanding the kingdom of God as Kingdom builders of God.