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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“CONTRA MUNDUM PRO MUNDI”
Nahum 2:1-13**

⇒ **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”** John 3:16 is the word of the Lord. So is Proverbs 6:16-19: **“The LORD hates...”**

**haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,
a false witness who pours out lies,
and a person who stirs up
dissension in the community.**

⇒ {Rom 5:8, 8:7} **“God demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners”** – while our minds were **“hostile to God,”** unwilling and unable to surrender to God and to please him – **“Christ died for us.”**

{Ps 5:5} And yet, O God,

**You hate all who do wrong;
you destroy those who tell lies.**

Who in the world does not sometimes **“do wrong”**? Raise your hand if you do not, occasionally, **“tell lies.”**

⇒ God loves the world because love is the center of God’s being. First John 4:8 declares, without using any modifiers, **“God is love.”** Not **“God is love” if,** not **“God**

is love” when, not **“God is love” for those who...** Simply, **“God is love.”**

Nevertheless, according to Psalm 11:5:

**The LORD examines the righteous,
but the wicked, those who love
violence,
he hates with a passion.**

“God” who “is love” “hates” “the wicked... with a passion”?

⇒ {Ro 3:23} In short, **“God... [loves] the world,”** the entire human population, all of whom **“have sinned.”** At the same time God **“[hates] all who do wrong”!**

? What are we to make of this?

If YHWH’s posture toward us was a trivial topic of interest only to ivory tower academicians, we might ignore it. Yet his interaction with humankind is at the crux of Christian theology.

If this was purely abstract, we might overlook it. Yet YHWH’s demeanor determines our destiny, and it has ongoing, concrete impact on all our relationships.

⇒ {Mt 22:37-40} As for its real-world relevance, recall that **“the second” “greatest commandment”** is to **“Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the prophets hang on”** this and the directive to **“Love the Lord... with all”** our being.

{Mt 5:44-45} What is more, Christ defines **“neighbor”** in broad, inclusive terms: **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

{Jn 2:15} On the other hand the apostle John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, cautions: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you.”**

{Jas 4:4} And James warns: **“don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”**

⇒ In summary, **“love your [neighbors],”** that is, **“the world”** around you. All the same, **“Do not love the world.”** For **“God [loves] the world,”** which is comprised of sinners, but he **“[hates] all who do wrong”!**

? What are we to make of this?

□ Please turn to Nahum 2. It is helpful to read it alongside its companion piece, the book of Jonah. Nahum alludes to love and mercy, but zeroes in on God’s “hatred” and wrath. Jonah does just the opposite: he touches on “hatred” and wrath, but hones in on love and mercy.

■ Nahum 2:1:

**An attacker advances against you, Nineveh.
Guard the fortress,
watch the road,
brace yourselves,
marshal all your strength!**

■ Now verses 5-6:

**Nineveh summons her picked troops,
yet they stumble on their way....
The river gates are thrown open**

and the palace collapses.

■ Next, down to verse 10:

**She is pillaged, plundered, stripped!
hearts melt, knees give way,
bodies tremble, every face grows pale.**

To imperial ears this sounds seditious. To their captives it sounds wonderful. To conqueror and conquered alike it sounds like a fairy tale.

● {Jnh 1:2, 3:4} The situation was dramatically different a century or so ago when Jonah “[preached] against” **“the great city Nineveh,” “proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’”**

Back then the Assyrians were in trouble. They suffered under a series of inept kings. Enemies seized large swaths of territory. There were riots in the major cities. Assyria’s very survival was in question.

Not any more! The Empire has roared back, and with a vengeance. This is its heyday. Everyone “knows” its armies are unbeatable, “knows” its capital is impregnable, “knows” its power is incontestable.

Nahum’s prophecy is counter-intuitive. Given the evidence on the ground, it does not make sense.

And yet he correctly foretells the future destruction of Nineveh, perhaps as many as 51 years early. In the process, he provides highly specific details.

■ For example, in verse 6 he states:

The river gates are thrown open

and the palace collapses.

Nineveh is bisected by the Khoser River, near the place where it feeds into the Tigris. Tall, broad dikes line its banks, protecting the city from high water.

{*Babylonian Chronicle*} However, in 612 B.C. the dams and dikes just outside the city fail. Raging waters undercut the foundations of the palace (which is built into the fortifications) and the wall collapses, allowing the combined forces of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, and Cimmerians to pour into the city.

The coalition is as merciless as the Assyrians have been to their victims. They butcher tens of thousands, from fighting men to nursing infants. The survivors are enslaved, the treasuries are plundered, and the city is literally flattened.

☆ The critical factor is not Assyrian weakness, or the strength of their enemies, or even the floodwaters. The critical factor is God's posture.

■ 2:13:

"I am against you,"
declares the LORD Almighty...."

{Jnh 4:2} This is the same God who sent Jonah to save Nineveh from destruction, and to whom Jonah griped, **"You are... gracious and compassionate... slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."**

{Ezek 33:11; II Pet 3:9; Ro 5:8} This is the same God who repeatedly says, **"I take no pleasure in the death of the**

wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live," who **"is patient ... not wanting anyone to perish,"**

who **"demonstrates his... love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us."**

"God so [loves] the world," and to love someone is to be for them. Yet the Living God says to Nineveh, **"I am against you"!**

■ That is the first phrase in 2:13. The key to understanding is in one of the last phrases: **"I will leave you no prey on the earth."**

The Assyrians have bullied and exploited others for centuries. Their empire is built on the murder of hundreds of thousands and the suffering of millions. The Almighty will end their predation, not because he does not love sinners but because he does.

✚ God is against sinful humans for the sake of sinful humans. He is *Contra Mundum Pro Mundi*, against the world for the world.

Our Father in heaven gets angry, but his wrath is not a permanent disposition. It is temporary anger generated by perfect love in reaction against injustice.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not lose his temper, does not fly off the handle, does not lash out. Wrath is never God's first option; it is always his last resort.

God does not misuse his wrath. He uses it to judge the unjust.

He is never cruel, callous, or casual in his judgments. His verdicts are informed, wise, and

deliberate. When he disciplines or punishes us his means are proportional and his heart is compassionate.

God's intent is to protect the weak, create the possibility of peace and, if possible, save the wicked. This is why God will allow Nineveh to be destroyed. He is against the world, for the sake of the world.

Allow me to make two observations.

☆ First, there is nothing worse than for God to say, "**I am against you.**"

Holy God hates all sins but especially pride, deceit, injustice, and violence. These even more than others prevent human flourishing and destroy community.

They also cause serious disruption in our relationship with God. Everyone who persists in them risks his judgement. This includes those are called Christians.

The same is true of communities. This includes congregations and denominations. Those who do not repent of these sins are liable to hear God say, "**I am against you.... I will leave you no prey.**"

☆ Second, God never stops loving the Assyrians.

He ends their empire, but preserves the people. Assyrians settle in communities all over Mesopotamia.

Fast forward to the first century A.D. The apostles Thomas and Bartholomew journey to those places. Most Assyrians believe and follow Jesus.

{Jn 10:10} Their forebears were a force for death. Yet God "**gave his one and only Son**" for them. Then he sent witnesses so "**they [could] have life, and have it to the full.**"

Take heart! No one is unlovable in the eyes of the LORD. No one is past saving.

Nahum chapter 2 is the word of the Lord.