

WHEN GOD IS YOUR ENEMY – COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF NAHUM

by Paul G. Apple, November 2006

WHEN GOD IS YOUR ENEMY --

THE COMFORTING EXAMPLE OF NINEVEH: WHEN YOUR ENEMIES HAVE
GOD AS THEIR ENEMY, HIS WRATH BRINGS SWIFT AND TERRIBLE
HUMILIATION AND DEVASTATION

"Behold, I am against you"
Nahum 2:13; 3:5

For each section in the Book of Nahum:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF BOOK OF NAHUM

Malick: Assyrian Nineveh's destruction by the mighty warrior-judge, YAHWEH, is imminent because of her self-serving evil and YAHWEH's intent to deliver His people, Judah.

Boice: Babylon emerged as the archetypal secular city. Nineveh became the embodiment of human violence and conquest. Babylon stands for the warfare of man against God. Nineveh stands for the warfare of man against his fellow human beings.

Chisholm: [Chisholm sees a chiasmic structure in 1:12--3:19 with an introduction and conclusion which form an inclusio around 2:1-- 3:17]

Introduction: Judah urged to celebrate the demise of Assyria and its king 1:12-15

A Call to alarm 2:1-10

B Taunt 2:11-12

C Announcement of Judgment 2:13

D Woe Oracle 3:1-4

C' Announcement of Judgment 3:5-7

B' Taunt 3:8-13

A' Call to alarm 3:14

Conclusion: All who hear of the demise of Assyria and its king celebrate 3:18-19

In 2:1--3:17 four types of speeches are employed in a detailed description of Assyria's demise. In the calls to alarm (2:1-10; 3:14-17) the prophet assumes for poetic purposes the role of a watchman on the walls of Nineveh. He excitedly calls upon the city's inhabitants to prepare for an enemy attack, the details of which he then vividly describes. The taunts (2:13-13; 3:8-13), which are introduced by rhetorical questions, allude in a derogatory way to Nineveh's pride. The judgment announcements (2:13; 3:5-7), which include a series of pronouncements by God Himself, are introduced by the formula "*I am against you, declares the Lord Almighty.*" Finally, the woe oracle (3:1-4), which is highlighted by its central position in the chiasmus, summarizes the reasons for judgment (vv. 1, 4) and provides a vivid description of Nineveh's destruction (vv. 2-3).

Constable: This book claims to be an oracle (1:1, an uplifting and or threatening prophecy). While most of the book threatens Nineveh with destruction, there are also words of comfort for the people of Judah (1:12, 15; 2:2). Nahum revealed that Yahweh would destroy Nineveh as punishment for the Assyrians' cruelty to many nations, including the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and Judah. This was a comforting message for the remaining Jews who were presently living under Assyria's shadow in Judah. Assyria had destroyed many Judean cities and had even besieged Jerusalem, unsuccessfully, in 701 B.C. The purpose of Nahum's book, then, was to announce Nineveh's fall and thereby comfort the Judean Jews with the assurance that their God was indeed sovereign and just.

OUTLINE:

I. Heading 1:1

II. Nineveh's destruction declared 1:2-14

- A. The anger and goodness of Yahweh 1:2-8
- B. Yahweh's plans for Nineveh and Judah 1:9-14
 - 1. The consumption of Nineveh 1:9-11
 - 2. The liberation of Judah 1:12-13
 - 3. The termination of Nineveh 1:14

III. Nineveh's destruction described 1:15—3:19

- A. The sovereign justice of Yahweh 1:15—2:2
- B. Four descriptions of Nineveh's fall 2:3—3:19
 - 1. The first description of Nineveh's fall 2:3-7
 - 2. The second description of Nineveh's fall 2:8-13
 - 3. The third description of Nineveh's fall 3:1-7
 - 4. The fourth description of Nineveh's fall 3:8-19

Copeland:

I. NINEVEH'S DOOM DECLARED

A. THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE LORD...

- 1. God's vengeance, even though He is slow to anger - **Nah 1:1-3a**
- 2. The fierceness of His anger described - **Nah 1:3b-6**
- 3. The goodness of the Lord, as a stronghold to the faithful - **Nah 1:7**
- 4. The pursuer of His enemies - **Nah 1:8**

B. THE COMPLETE OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH...

- 1. She will not afflict again, despite her plotting against the Lord - **Nah 1:9-11**
- 2. Judah will be delivered from Nineveh's affliction - **Nah 1:12-13**
- 3. Nineveh's destruction has been commanded by the Lord - **Nah 1:14**
- 4. There shall be good tidings in Judah, she can keep her feasts - **Nah 1:15**

[Having "**declared**" Nineveh's doom in the first section, we now find...]

II. NINEVEH'S DOOM DESCRIBED

A. THE SIEGE AND CAPTURE OF THE CITY...

- 1. Furious preparation for the battle is described - **Nah 2:1-4**
- 2. Resistance is futile, captivity has been decreed - **Nah 2:5-7**
 - a. Note verse 6: "**The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved**"
 - b. "**The Babylonian Chronicle tells that Nineveh fell because the flooding rivers made breaches in the city's defenses.**" (Believers' Study Bible)

B. THE UTTER SACK OF THE CITY...

- 1. Her inhabitants flee, the city is plundered - **Nah 2:8-10**
- 2. Her destruction will be complete, Nineveh as a dwelling of

devouring lions will be no more - **Nah 2:11-13**

[Thus far, Nineveh's doom has been "**declared**" and "**described**" by Nahum. In the third and final section, we find him saying...]

III. NINEVEH'S DOOM DESERVED

A. BECAUSE OF HER SINS...

1. Her woe will be due to her sins - **Nah 3:1-4**
2. The Lord will uncover her shame and make her a spectacle - **Nah 3:5-7**

B. SHE IS NO BETTER THAN NO-AMON...

1. Nineveh is no better than No-Amon (Thebes in Egypt) - **Nah 3:8**
2. Who despite her strength, was carried away into captivity - **Nah 3:9-10**
3. So it will be with Nineveh - **Nah 3:11**

C. HER STRENGTH AND WEALTH WILL NOT SAVE HER...

1. Her strongholds will fail - **Nah 3:12-13**
2. All her efforts, her wealth, her army, will be futile - **Nah 3:14-17**

D. HER END HAS COME...

1. Her leaders are dead, her people scattered - **Nah 3:18-19a**
2. Those who hear of her fall will rejoice - **Nah 3:19b**

Keathley:

If you remember, Jonah prophesied to Nineveh about 150 years earlier. It is interesting to compare Jonah's prophesy with Nahum's. I would take the following comparisons with a grain of salt, but there are some interesting things to note:

Jonah: The Mercy of God	Nahum: The Judgment of God
800 B.C.	650 B.C.
Emphasis on the prophet - only one prophecy in the whole book	Emphasis on the prophecy - the only thing we know about the prophet is that he was from Elkosh.
Disobedient prophet	Obedient prophet
Obedient Nation	Disobedient Nation - in only 150 years the nation became so bad that it had to be destroyed. Does that remind you of America in any way? We've degenerated a lot in the last 50 years.
Deliverance from Water	Destruction by water ?
Repentance of Nineveh	Rebellion of Nineveh

Historical Background

Nineveh was founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12) and had a long history. It was located on the east bank of the Tigris river. The river acted as the western and southern boundaries of the city. A wall that extended for eight miles formed the northern and eastern boundaries. The city was about three miles wide and eight miles long inside the walls, but there were suburbs that extended 14 miles north and 20 miles south. When Jonah referred to a three day walk across Nineveh (Jonah 3:3) it was no exaggeration.

The city was destroyed by the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians in 612 BC. According to the ancient historian, Diodorus Siculus, the armies laid siege to the city for over two years. In the third year, the Khosr River, which ran through the city flooded, broke down the floodgates and part of the wall which allowed the enemy to come in. This fulfilled part of Nahum's prophesy in 1:8; 2:6 and 3:13. (Diodorus Siculus tended to exaggerate - the Babylonian chronicles say the siege lasted only a few months. The truth is probably somewhere in between. But I think we can rely on the account of the flood because Nahum predicted it.)

The city was destroyed so completely by the flood and the enemies that when Alexander the Great fought the battle of Arbela nearby in 331 BC, he did not know there had been a city there. Nineveh was never rebuilt, and this confirms Nahum's prediction in 1:9 that "distress will not rise up twice." It wasn't until 1850 that Nineveh was discovered by archaeologists. It is interesting to read liberal commentaries from before 1850 because they had problems with believing the books of Jonah and Nahum because there was no record of Nineveh.

Nineveh was the capitol of Assyria. The destruction of Nineveh and Assyria would be a message of consolation for the nations Assyria had oppressed. Israel and Judah were two of those nations. Israel had been destroyed in 722 BC by the Assyrians, but Judah was still around. We need to remember what the Assyrians were like. They burned cities, cut off heads and stuck people on poles. We talk about taking a head count, the Assyrians really did it.

Herrick:

The structure of the book has been well argued by Patterson and Longman. The book is divided into two main sections, namely, chapter 1 and chapters 2-3. The first verse (1:1) is an introduction to the book. After that, at the beginning of each of these major sections, there is a thematic statement concerning judgment and deliverance (1:2; 2:1-2). These twin themes are then developed in each section (1:3-15; 2:2-3:19). The first chapter is primarily a poem (1:2-10) focusing on God's good and just nature and his certain judgment of those who plot against him (1:11-15). The second and third chapters bring the truths about God highlighted in the first chapter to bear on the situation in Nineveh, predicting both her utter destruction at the hands of a jealous and vengeful God and the restitution of God's people. Throughout the second major section Nahum masterfully uses metaphors, images of all kinds and taunts to paint a vivid picture of events coming upon Nineveh.

Thus the unity of the book is effected through the development of these twin themes throughout. Patterson also makes several other observations about how the unity of the material is affected. The following chart lays out some of the evidence.

Literary Technique	Terms Involved	Citation of Texts
"Bookends"		
sections	"scattering"	2:1; 3:18-19
subsections	"wickedness"	1:11, 15
Individual lines	"Yahweh"	1:3

Stitch Words		
entire units	"Lord/divine wrath"	1:2 with 1:3-10
entire units	"plotting"	1:3-10 with 1:11-15
entire units	"Destroying"	1:11-15 with 2:1-2
entire units	"attacking"	2:1-2 with 2:3-10
entire units	"plundering"	2:3-10 with 2:11-13
entire units	"chariots" and "I am against you"	2:11-13 with 3:1-7
entire units	"death" and "destruction"	3:1-7 with 3:8-19
Refrain		
throughout	"not (again)/no (one)"	1:15; 2:9, 13; 3:3, 19
throughout	"behold"	1:15; 2:13; 3:5, 13
Motif		
	"fire that consumes"	1:6, 10; 2:3, 13; 3:13, 15
Rhetorical Question		
	"Who can stand?" etc.	1:6; 2:11; 3:8, 19

Teaching Outline

IA. Introduction (1:1)

1B. "oracle against Nineveh"

2B. "the book of the vision"

3B. "Elkoshite"

IIA. God's Certain Judgment of Nineveh (1:2-15)

1B. A Hymn to the *Sovereign Warrior God* (1:2-10)

1C. A Thematic Statement: Warning and Promise (1:2)

2C. Who Can Stand Against God's Just and Fierce Anger? (1:3-6)

3C. God's Justice for His People and for Nineveh (1:7-10)

3B. The Certainty and Purpose of Nineveh's Utter Destruction (1:11-15)

IIIA. The Execution of God's Judgment on Nineveh (2:1-3:19)

1B. A Thematic Statement: Warning for Nineveh—Promise for Judah (2:1-2)

2B. The *First* Description of Nineveh's Judgment: Nahum's "Vision" (2:3-13)

1C. The Initial Onslaught (2:3-5)

2C. The City is Pillaged (2:6-10)

3C. The Lion Taunt (2:11-12)

- 4C. The Sovereign Warrior's Resolve to Utterly Destroy Nineveh (2: 13)
- 3B. The *Second* Description of Nineveh's Judgment (3: 1 -7)
 - 1C. The Onslaught (3: 1 -4)
 - 2C. The Harlot-Sorceress Taunt (3: 4)
 - 3C. The Sovereign Warrior's Resolve to Utterly Destroy Nineveh (3: 5-7)
- 4B. The Result of Nineveh's Judgment (3: 8-19)
 - 1C. She Is Like Thebes (3: 8-13)
 - 2C. She Is Finally and Irrevocably Destroyed (3: 14-19)

Patterson:

A critical analysis of the literary features of the book of Nahum reveals the consummate craftsmanship of its author. Although it is obvious that the subject of the book is the judgment of Nineveh, the theme and development are given in a twofold presentation (chaps. 1; 2-3). In the first portion, God is declared to be a just judge of the ungodly (1:2) with whom, though He is patient, He will ultimately deal with equity (1:3-6) and whom, whereas He tenderly cares for the godly, He will destroy with their plotting (1:7-10). These general remarks concerning the character and work of God are then applied directly to the current situation: Nineveh, the plotter and afflicter of God's people, will experience the just judgment of God, whereas a previously punished Judah will know relief from affliction and be restored to peace and joy (1:11-15).

In the second section, Nahum repeats the double theme: God will judge Nineveh and restore His people (2:1-2). All of this is immediately carried forward in a visionary rehearsal of the attack against Nineveh (2:3-10) and is closed by a taunt song in which Assyria is compared to a lion trapped in Nineveh, its own lair (2:11-13). The theme is developed further in a second description of the fall of Nineveh (given in the form of a pronouncement woe) but with emphasis upon the reasons for Nineveh's fall, particularly its lustful rapacity (3:1-7). This section, too, is closed by a taunt song in which Nineveh is declared to be no better than mighty Thebes. Thebes had boastfully counted on her basic defensive features, yet her recent fall is known to all. Accordingly, Nineveh's fate is all the more certain. A sovereign God is about to judge the Assyrians and Nineveh for their endless cruelty (3:8-19).

Thus Nahum's central message concerning the doom and demise of Nineveh proceeds in a bifid structure (1:2-15; 2:1-3:19) that is patterned in accordance with theme (1:2; 2:1-2), development (1:2-10; 2:3-10; 3:1-7), and application (1:11-15; 2:11-13; 3:8-19). Nahum closes each major section (1:15; 3:18-19), as well as two subsections (2:13; 3:7), with a refrain concerning the activity/inactivity of a messenger.

MacArthur: Nahum forms a sequel to the book of Jonah, who prophesied over a century earlier. Jonah recounts the remission of God's promised judgment toward Nineveh, while Nahum depicts the later execution of God's judgment. Nineveh was proud of her invulnerable city, with her walls reaching 100 ft. high and with a moat 150 ft. wide and 60 ft deep; but Nahum established the fact that the sovereign God (1:2-5) would bring vengeance upon those who violated His law (1:8, 14; 3:5-7). The same God had a retributive judgment against evil which is also redemptive, bestowing His loving kindnesses upon the faithful (cf. 1:7, 12, 13, 15; 2:2). The prophecy brought comfort to Judah and all who feared the cruel Assyrians. Nahum said Nineveh would end "with an overflowing flood" (1:8); and it happened when the Tigris River overflowed to destroy enough of the walls to let the Babylonians through. Nahum also predicted that the city would be hidden (3:11). After its destruction in 612 B.C., the site was not rediscovered until 1842 A.D.

Johnson: So the purpose of Nahum's book is to announce the fall of Nineveh and thereby comfort Judah with the assurance that God is in control.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Title (1:1)
- II. The Certainty of God's Judgment on Nineveh (1:2-15)
 - A. God's wrath to be extended to Nineveh and His goodness to His own (1:2-8)
 - B. Nineveh's plotting against the Lord to come to an end (1:9-11)
 - C. Judah's affliction to end because of Nineveh's destruction (1:12-15)
- III. The Description of God's Judgment on Nineveh (chap. 2)
 - A. The attack (2:1-6)
 - B. The defeat and the plundering (2:7-13)
- IV. The Reasons for God's Judgment on Nineveh (chap. 3)
 - A. Her violence and deceit to result in shame (3:1-7)
 - B. Her treatment of Thebes to result in her own defeat (3:8-11)
 - C. Her defense efforts to be useless (3:12-19)

Quattlebaum:

What can we learn from Nahum?

· God is slow to anger.

Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2

· God is our refuge and our strength.

2 Samuel 22:1-4; Psalm 18:1-2, 10; Hebrews 6

· God's wrath will come on those who continually come against Him.

Romans 1:18-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10; Hebrews 3:7-13

<http://michaeleq.home.mindspring.com/HisWord/studies/MinorProphets/Nahum.PDF>

Baxter: Practically throughout it is poetic in form, and it is poetry unsurpassed for power of description. It opens with a description of the attributes and operations of God, and runs in three strophes, answering to the three chapters in our English version. Chapter i. asserts the *certainty* of Nineveh's overthrow. Chapter ii. depicts the *siege and capture* of

the city. Chapter iii. tells of the *wickedness* which provoked the retribution, ending with the words, “*Upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?*”

Beyond all doubt, Nineveh is one of the most remarkable cities in history. Recent discovery has shown that it was really a complex of four cities in one, making a vast quadrangle no less than sixty miles round. The walls were one hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven abreast on them. These walls were fortified with fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high. Based on a trigonometric survey, the full area has been computed as three hundred and fifty square miles – the area of modern London! Of course, greater Nineveh included spacious gardens, orchards, pastures, and grain fields. This need not surprise us. Babylonia’s great walled towns enclosed large spaces for pasturage and produce so that in case of siege they were self-provided for. . .

The name of the prophet Nahum means Comfort; and let us frankly agree that in Nahum’s dirge there is very real comfort for the godly. It is the comfort of knowing that in the righteous government of God, the outrages of impenitent evil-doers against their fellow-humans are Divinely requited. The desire for revenge is not Christian; but the appeal that God Himself shall avenge outraged justice, and vindicate the right against impenitent evil-doers, is fully in accord with Christian principles. Notes the fact that Nahum scarcely mentions his own nation. The reason for this is clear. He does not exult in Nineveh’s downfall merely for Judah’s sake, or for his own. Nineveh had sold whole peoples by her whoredoms and witchcrafts. Nahum voices the outraged conscience of mankind. Other than merely indulging revenge, he identifies himself with the government of God in its guarantee that such wrongs shall not go without redress.

Yes, there is comfort here. As we think of the outrages which are committed with apparent impunity against the godly, as we see how the wicked often flourish and gloatingly grind down the innocent, we find relief in Nahum’s assurance that “Jehovah will not acquit.” There is comfort for the godly in the very anger of God. Nineveh proclaims to us the final vindication of right against wrong; and therein is comfort. That, indeed, is what the elect cry for, day and night (Luke xviii. 7, 8; Rev. vi. 10, 11); and the Almighty has pledged Himself to avenge, in a day which is yet to be (Rom. xii. 19, etc.).

OUTLINE OF NAHUM

WHEN GOD IS YOUR ENEMY

THE COMFORTING EXAMPLE OF NINEVEH: WHEN YOUR ENEMIES HAVE GOD AS THEIR ENEMY, HIS WRATH BRINGS SWIFT AND TERRIBLE HUMILIATION AND DEVASTATION

I. (1:1-5) THE INTENSITY AND FINALITY OF GOD'S AWESOME WRATH

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE AWESOME ALL-CONSUMING WRATH OF THE ANGRY AVENGING GOD (WHO PROVIDES SECURITY ONLY TO HIS OWN PEOPLE)

(:1) INTRODUCTION – NAHUM PROPHECYING AGAINST NINEVEH

- The Target of God's Awesome All-Consuming Wrath
- The Prophet Nahum
- How Do People Tend to Minimize or Underestimate God's Wrath?

A. (:2-6) DESCRIPTION OF THE INTENSITY OF GOD'S AWESOME WRATH – WHO CAN ENDURE THE BURNING OF HIS ANGER?

1. (:2-3A) Intensity of God's Awesome Wrath Consistent With His Character
2. (:3B-5) Intensity of God's Awesome Wrath Displayed in Nature
3. (:6) Intensity of God's Awesome Wrath Overwhelming in its Devastation

(:7) APPLICATION: SECURITY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

- Security Based on the Lord's Paternal Goodness
- Security Based on the Lord's Powerful Protection
- Security Based on the Lord's Personal Shepherding

B. (:8-14) DESCRIPTION OF THE FINALITY OF GOD'S AWESOME WRATH – HE WILL MAKE A COMPLETE END OF IT

1. (:8) Introductory Summary: God Will Make a Complete End of It
2. (:9-13) Detailed Description: God Will Make a Complete End of It
3. (:14) Concluding Summary: God Will Make a Complete End of It

(:15) APPLICATION: SECURITY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

(Good transition verse – could be taken with the beginning of the next section as well.)

- Security Needs to Be Trumpeted Throughout the World
- Security Needs to Be Celebrated From a Heart of Thanksgiving and Obedience
- Security Needs to Be Confident in Eternal Security

II. (2:1-13) THE DIVINE SACKING OF NINEVEH

Key Verse: (:13a) *“Behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord of hosts.”*

**WHEN THE SOVEREIGN LORD TARGETS NINEVEH FOR DESTRUCTION,
THE DEVASTATION IS SWIFT AND TERRIFYING**

A. (2:1-2) THE STRENGTH (OR WEAKNESS) OF NATIONS DOES NOT PROTECT THEM AGAINST THE REVERSAL OF FORTUNES -- TWO DIFFERENT DESTINIES:

1. (:1) Nineveh Under Attack
2. (:2) Judah Restored

B. (2:3-6) THE ATTACKING FORCES QUICKLY BREACH THE WALLS

1. (:3) Attacking Forces Armed to the Teeth
2. (:4) Attacking Forces Rush to Their Staging Positions
3. (:5) Attacking Forces Prepare to Breach the Walls of Nineveh
4. (:6) Flood Gates Opened

C. (2:7-10) THE CITY IS STRIPPED AND THE PEOPLE REDUCED TO TERROR AND ANGUISH

1. (:7) Four-Fold Summary of Defeat and Devastation
2. (:8) Panic-stricken People Fleeing the City
3. (:9) Wealth of City Plundered
4. (:10) Four-Fold Summary of Defeat and Devastation

D. (2:11-13) THE OPPOSITION OF THE LORD DEVOURS THE DEVOURER

1. (:11-12) The Powerful Predator is Nowhere to Be Found
2. (:13) Summary Proclamation of Condemnation

III. (3:1-19) GOD IS A DEVASTATING ENEMY

Key Verse: (:5a) *“Behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord of hosts.”*

THE DIVINE HUMILIATION AND DEVASTATION OF NINEVEH IS DESERVED, INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE

A. (:1-7) NINEVEH DESERVES TO BE COMPLETELY HUMILIATED AND TOTALLY DEVASTATED

1. (:1-4) Her Crimes
2. (:5-6) Her Disgrace
3. (:7) Her Rejection

B. (:8-10) NINEVEH WILL SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS THE SEEMINGLY INVINCIBLE FORMER CAPITAL CITY OF EGYPT = NO-AMON

1. (:8-9) Seemingly Impregnable Defenses of No-Amon
2. (:10) Surprising Humiliation and Devastation

C. (:11-19) NINEVEH HAS NO DEFENSE AGAINST THE OUTPOURING OF THE WRATH OF GOD

1. (:11-13) Easy Target -- Ripe for Plundering
2. (:14-15a) Futile Defense
3. (15b:-18) Collapse of Leadership
4. (:19) Inevitable and Deserved Humiliation and Devastation

TEXT: Nahum 1:1-15

TITLE: *THE INTENSITY AND FINALITY OF GOD'S AWESOME WRATH*

BIG IDEA:

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE AWESOME ALL-CONSUMING WRATH OF THE ANGRY AVENGING GOD (WHO PROVIDES SECURITY ONLY TO HIS OWN PEOPLE)

“The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 9). Make no mistake – the day of judgment is coming for the wicked. The proud Assyrians may have presumed that God was ignoring their unrighteousness (especially since God was actually using them as an instrument to temporarily discipline His own people), but the awesome all-consuming wrath of the angry avenging God was hanging over their heads about to be poured out on them in His timing. There would be no chance to escape or rise back up. God’s destruction would be intense and complete.

But God’s people can look forward to this day with anticipation of the security they will enjoy as they take refuge in the stronghold of the Good Shepherd. Some preachers today promise *“No gloom and doom”* in their popularized messages that have been stripped of the severity of God’s wrath and judgment. But it will be *“a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb. 10:31). Woe to those prophets who bring a message of *“Peace”* and *“Safety”* apart from the good news of the only gospel message that God has promised to honor: *“Repent and turn to God”* (Acts 26:20) for the forgiveness of sins and the escape from the wrath to come.

(:1) INTRODUCTION – NAHUM PROPHECYING AGAINST NINEVEH

A. The Target of God’s Awesome All-Consuming Wrath

“The oracle of Nineveh.”

1. Background of Nineveh = capital of Assyria
2. Message of Book of Jonah
3. One Hundred Year Reprieve due to Repentance
4. Time for Judgment

B. The Prophet Nahum

“The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.”

C. How Do People Tend to Minimize or Underestimate God’s Wrath?

- Falsely dismissing wrath as an attribute only of the God of the OT
- Proudly imagining themselves to be untouchable and secure
- Confusing what seems like Delay in timeframe (from man’s perspective) with Avoidance (as if God will not carry out His promises)
- Assuming that there will always be opportunity to repent

I. (:2-6) DESCRIPTION OF THE INTENSITY OF GOD'S AWESOME WRATH – WHO CAN ENDURE THE BURNING OF HIS ANGER?

A. (:2-3A) Intensity of God's Awesome Wrath Consistent With His Character

1. (:2) Avenging and Wrathful

a. Passionate in the Execution of Vengeance

*“A jealous and avenging God is the Lord;
The Lord is avenging and wrathful.”*

b. Purposeful in the Execution of Vengeance

1) Purposeful in His Targets

“The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries,”

2) Purposeful in His Timing

“And He reserves wrath for His enemies.”

2. (:3A) Patient, Powerful, Punishing

a. Patient

“The Lord is slow to anger”

b. Powerful

“and great in power”

c. Punishing

“And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”

Guzik (quoting Spurgeon): God is not like an unjust judge who simply lets the guilty go out of a false sense of compassion. We can't just figure that God will say, "Let's let bygones be bygones" when we get to heaven. Sin must be accounted for, because He will not acquit the wicked. Every sin will be paid for - either in hell or at the cross - but God will not acquit the wicked. "Never once has he pardoned an unpunished sin; not in all the years of the Most High, not in all the days of his right hand, has he once blotted out sin without punishment." (**Spurgeon**)

B. (:3B-5) Intensity of God's Awesome Wrath Displayed in Nature

1. Images of a Storm

*“In whirlwind and storm is His way,
And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.”*

2. Images of Oceans and Rivers

*“He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
He dries up all the rivers.”*

3. Images of Forests and Fields

*“Bashan and Carmel wither;
The blossoms of Lebanon wither.”*

4. Images of Mountains and Hills
*“Mountains quake because of Him,
And the hills dissolve”*

5. Overall Summary
*“Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence,
The world and all the inhabitants in it.”*

C. (:6) Intensity of God’s Awesome Wrath Overwhelming in its Devastation

1. (:6A) Two Rhetorical Questions

a. *“Who can stand before His indignation?”*

b. *“Who can endure the burning of His anger?”*

2. (:6B) Two Images of Destructive Power

a. Image of Ravaging Fire

“His wrath is poured out like fire.”

b. Image of Blasting Rocks

“And the rocks are broken up by Him.”

(:7) APPLICATION: SECURITY FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

A. Security Based on the Lord’s Paternal Goodness

“The Lord is good”

B. Security Based on the Lord’s Powerful Protection

“a stronghold in the day of trouble”

C. Security Based on the Lord’s Personal Shepherding

“And He knows those who take refuge in Him.”

Cf. John 10; Psalm 23

II. (:8-14) DESCRIPTION OF THE FINALITY OF GOD’S AWESOME WRATH – HE WILL MAKE A COMPLETE END OF IT

Illustration: Watching movies with my kids, whenever the bad guy was knocked down I always made a point to holler “Finish him off!” There’s nothing I hate more than seeing the bad guy inevitably rise up again to make one last attack on the good guy – especially when it would have been so easy to blast him with another couple of rounds. Here we see that God makes certain that he finishes off the wicked and allows no possibility for a second chance.

A. (:8) Introductory Summary: God Will Make a Complete End of It

1. Inescapable Destruction

*“But with an overflowing flood
He will make a complete end of its site.”*

Boice: i. The **overflowing flood** was fulfilled both figuratively and literally. “According to secular accounts, during the final siege of Niveh by a rebel army of Persians, Medes, Arabians, and Babylonians, unusually heavy rains caused the rivers to flood and to undermine the city’s walls, which then collapsed . . . the invading armies entered the city through this breach in its defenses.”

ii. The **utter end of its place** was also literally fulfilled. “Not only were these people lost from history, even the city was lost until it was discovered by archaeologists, beginning in the 1840’s.”

2. Unrelenting Darkness

“And will pursue His enemies into darkness.”

B. (:9-13) Detailed Description: God Will Make a Complete End of It

1. (:9) No Second Chance for the Wicked to Rise Up and Attack

*“Whatever you devise against the Lord,
He will make a complete end of it.
Distress will not rise up twice.”*

2. (:10) Images of Destruction of the Worthless

a. Worthless Thorns

“Like tangled thorns,”

b. Worthless Drunks

“And like those who are drunken with their drink,”

c. Worthless Stubble

“They are consumed as stubble completely withered.”

Constable: Tangled (Heb. *sebukim*) thorns are tough to penetrate, but they are no match for fire. Likewise the Ninevites, as confused as they would be when their city was under attack, would be no match for the consuming fire of Yahweh's wrath (cf. v. 6). Many of the Ninevites were confused because they were drunk (Heb. *sebu'im*). Yahweh would destroy them as easily and quickly as fire burned up the dead stalks left in fields after harvest.

Matthew Henry: v. 10. (1.) They are as thorns that entangle one another, and are folded together. They make one another worse, and more inveterate against God and his Israel, harden one another’s hearts, and strengthen one another’s hands, in their impiety; and therefore God will do with them as the husbandman does with a bush of thorns when he cannot part them: he puts them all into the fire together. (2.) They are as drunken men, intoxicated with pride and rage; and such as they shall be irrecoverably overthrown and destroyed. They shall be as drunkards, besotted to their own ruin, and shall stumble and fall, and make themselves a reproach, and be justly laughed at. (3.) They shall be

devoured as stubble fully dry, which is irresistibly and irrecoverably consumed by the flame. The judgments of God are as devouring fire to those that make themselves as stubble to them.

3. (:11-13) Deliverance of God's People by the Destruction of Their Enemies

a. (:11) Perversity of Wicked Adversary

*"From you has gone forth one who plotted evil against the Lord,
A wicked counselor."*

Contrast: Wonderful Counselor – Is. 9:6

b. (:12A) Impotence of Their Strength and Numbers

*"Thus says the Lord,
Though they are at full strength and likewise many,
Even so, they will be cut off and pass away."*

Stedman: God's anger was all directed against this pagan king who deliberately plotted to destroy the people, after God had visited his city with grace and had saved them from his anger. Verse 12 refers to the visit of the angel of death when Sennacherib came down with his armies before Jerusalem. In Isaiah, chapters 36 and 37, you have the description of how the Assyrian armies came down and spread out before the city of Jerusalem. Then with taunting challenges to King Hezekiah, they told him they were going to take the city and that there was no strength that could stand against them. Isaiah tells us how Hezekiah took these messages and spread them before the Lord and asked God to save the city, even with the armies of Assyria surrounding it. And that night, we are told, the angel of death went through the Assyrian hosts and slew 185,000 soldiers. (Is. 37:36) That is referred to in verses 12-13:

c. (:12B) Reversal of Lord's Discipline of His People

*"Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no longer."*

c. (:13) Complete Deliverance from Captivity and Bondage

*"So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you,
And I will tear off your shackles."*

C. (:14) Concluding Summary: God Will Make a Complete End of It

1. Divine Decree

"The Lord has issued a command concerning you:"

2. Stripping Away Any Legacy

"Your name will no longer be perpetuated."

3. Smashing All False Idols

"I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods."

4. Dooming Their Destiny

“I will prepare your grave,”

5. Despising Their Depravity

“For you are contemptible.”

Constable: The Lord also promised to destroy Nineveh's idols and remove them from their temples. The Assyrians often carried off the idols of the nations they conquered to demonstrate the superiority of their gods over those of the conquered, as did other ancient Near Eastern nations (cf. 1 Sam. 5). The conquering Medes, however, despised idolatry and did away with multitudes of images that existed in Nineveh. Yahweh would prepare Nineveh's grave since He would bury the contemptible city. It was a great curse in the ancient Near East to have no descendants, and it was a great humiliation to have no gods, but both fates would befall Nineveh.

(:15) APPLICATION: SECURITY FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

(Good transition verse – could be taken with the beginning of the next section as well.)

A. Security Needs to Be Trumpeted Throughout the World

“Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news.

Who announces peace?”

Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15

Guzik: Isaiah 52:7 uses a similar expression, but Isaiah marvels at the *beauty* of the *feet of him who brings good news*. Nahum would certainly agree, because those who bring **good tidings** have beautiful feet; they partner with God for the salvation of men. The **feet** speak of activity, motion, and progress, and those who are active and moving in the work of preaching the gospel have *beautiful feet*.

B. Security Needs to Be Celebrated From a Heart of Thanksgiving and Obedience

“Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows.”

C. Security Needs to Be Confident in Eternal Security

“For never again will the wicked one pass through you;

He is cut off completely.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What attributes does the Lord possess and manifest (like jealous and avenging and wrathful) that we as believers do not possess . . . even though we are growing into Christlikeness?
- 2) How am I doing at loving my enemies and praying for them?
- 3) In what ways do people tend to minimize or underestimate the wrath of God?

4) Am I secure in taking refuge in the Lord as my stronghold? Am I eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord and the good news of His triumph over all enemies in the last day?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: Now the attribute which the prophet Nahum was given to reveal was God's anger. There is no doctrine quite as repugnant to people today as that of the anger of God. This is one doctrine which many would like to forget. There are some who picture God as a kindly gentleman with a merry twinkle in his eye who cannot bear the thought of punishing anyone or judging anyone. Nevertheless, it was Nahum's task to unfold the anger of God and in this prophecy the God of Sinai flashes forth in awful fury, a God before whom man must stand silent and trembling. You cannot read this prophecy without sensing something of the solemnity of this tremendous picture of God. . .

The book of Nahum comes some one hundred years after the prophecy of Jonah. During this time, Nineveh had repented of its repentance, and had begun to do the same things again that called forth the threat of judgment through the prophet Jonah. The prophet Nahum was sent to minister to the southern kingdom of Judah at the time of the invasion of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. King Sennacherib who came from the capital city of Syria, Nineveh, invaded Israel at the time of the prophet Isaiah, and it was from this great city in the north that the armies of the Syrians frequently came against the land of Judah and of Israel. But God moved to protect his people and met and destroyed these enemies of the king overnight.

Nahum means "consolation," or "comfort," and as the Assyrian army was spread out around the city of Jerusalem, the prophet was given a message of consolation. You can imagine how consoling it was when the armies were right there with their terrible reputation as ruthless warriors, burning and destroying, raping and pillaging, killing the children and sparing no one, to have this prophet stand up in Jerusalem and declare to them that God would destroy Nineveh, the capital city of their enemies. . .

Jealousy, that burning zeal for a cause felt so deeply in the heart. This is not the selfish, petty jealousy we exhibit sometimes, but God's overwhelming concern for what he loves. His vengeance, or retribution; his wrath, that towering anger, the blackness of it, the darkness of it, is described here. The word for anger is the word that literally means "heavy breathing," or "hot breathing." And the word for indignation literally means "foaming at the mouth"! You can see how picturesque these words are. The word fierceness in Hebrew literally means "heat," and the word fury means "burning." And all this to describe a God who is terrible in his wrath, moved at last to the point of pouring out his wrath upon that which has awakened it. God in a white-hot passion, burning with a terrible, blistering rage.

Boice: There are three reasons why God was going to destroy Nineveh, according to

this prophecy. Two have already been suggested: first, God is a jealous God (He will have no other gods before Him, Exod. 20:3-6), and second, He is an avenging God (the God of all the earth will do right, Gen. 18:25). The prophet gives another reason in the second half of chapter 1 (vv. 7-15); God's goodness to His people. They have been abused by Nineveh. Now God is going to rise up and make an end to the oppressor.

Constable: However, Yahweh was not out of control in His anger. His anger was slow in coming to the boiling point (cf. Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18). He waited as long as possible to pour out His judgment (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).²¹ This accounts for His allowing the Assyrians to abuse the Israelites for so long. Patience is sometimes a sign of weakness, but not so with the Lord. He is also great in power, which makes the prospect of His releasing His anger terrifying (cf. Deut. 8:17-18). He will not pass over any guilty person and leave him or her unpunished but will bring them to judgment eventually. Whirlwinds and storms manifest this angry aspect of God's character and His power (cf. Job 9:17). He is so great that the clouds are for Him what the dust on the ground is for humans (cf. 2 Sam. 22:10; Ps. 18:9). The great clouds overhead are like dust to the great God who resides in the heavens.

Copeland:

I. NINEVEH'S DOOM DECLARED

A. THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE LORD...

1. God's vengeance, even though He is slow to anger - **Nah 1:1-3a**
2. The fierceness of His anger described - **Nah 1:3b-6**
3. The goodness of the Lord, as a stronghold to the faithful - **Nah 1:7**
4. The pursuer of His enemies - **Nah 1:8**

B. THE COMPLETE OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH...

1. She will not afflict again, despite her plotting against the Lord - **Nah 1:9-11**
2. Judah will be delivered from Nineveh's affliction - **Nah 1:12-13**
3. Nineveh's destruction has been commanded by the Lord - **Nah 1:14**
4. There shall be good tidings in Judah, she can keep her feasts - **Nah 1:15**

Matthew Henry: Nineveh knows not God, that God that contends with her, and therefore is here told what a God he is; and it is good for us all to mix faith with that which is here said concerning him, which speaks a great deal of terror to the wicked and comfort to good people; for this glorious description of the Sovereign of the world, like the pillar of cloud and fire, has a bright side towards Israel and a dark side towards the Egyptians. Let each take his portion from it; let sinners read it and tremble; let saints read it and triumph. The wrath of God is here revealed from heaven against him enemies, his favour and mercy are here assured to his faithful loyal subjects, and his almighty power in both, making his wrath very terrible and his favour very desirable.

Herrick:

IA. Introduction (1:1)

- 1B. “oracle against Nineveh”
- 2B. “the book of the vision”
- 3B. “Elkoshite”
- IIA. God’s Certain Judgment of Nineveh (1:2-15)
 - 1B. A Hymn to the Sovereign Warrior God (1:2-10)
 - 1C. A Thematic Statement: Warning and Promise (1:2)
 - 2C. Who Can Stand Against God’s Just and Fierce Anger? (1:3-6)
 - 3C. God’s Justice for His People and for Nineveh (1:7-10)
 - 3B. The Certainty and Purpose of Nineveh’s Utter Destruction (1:11-15)

Keathley: God's vengeance (justice) and omnipotence are stressed by the complete devastation that is coming. His power is demonstrated by tornadoes and hurricanes and earthquakes. He can dry up the sea, wither the vegetation, and destroy everything on the earth. God has the power to do whatever He wants. No one can stand in His way.

Patterson: In a dramatic structural shift from hymnic to narrative style, Nahum turns to Nineveh in application of the teaching of his hymn. Nineveh/Assyria is identified as a plotter*, an identification that seems obvious in the light of the military exploits of its most prominent kings. The primary reference may well be to Sennacherib, who launched his infamous third campaign against the western countries of the Fertile Crescent in general and Judah in particular. According to his own records, having subdued the northern lands, he took Eltekeh, Timnah, and Ekron on the Philistine coast and some 46 cities of Judah. Although he failed to subdue Jerusalem, the booty that he carried away from the campaigning was enormous. The scriptural record likewise indicates that the Judahite king paid a huge tribute to Sennacherib and that the Assyrian king spent considerable time in taking the key towns of Lachish and Libnah in the western Shephelah (2 Kings 18:13-19:8). The writer of Kings also records something of Sennacherib’s own secret plottings against the Lord at that time (2 Kings 19:21-28). Because of the viciousness of the plotter’s thoughts, he is aptly termed “one who counsels wickedness.” The word translated in v. 11 as “wickedness” (NIV) is often translated “worthlessness.” It speaks of a character of life so totally reprobate that the term came ultimately to be applied to Satan himself (2 Cor. 6:15). Whether or not directly applicable to Sennacherib, Nahum’s words would doubtless be welcomed by God’s people, many of whom had been alive during Sennacherib’s campaigns and in whose memories the horror of those earlier days was etched indelibly.

TEXT: Nahum 2:1-13

TITLE: THE DIVINE SACKING OF NINEVEH

BIG IDEA:

WHEN THE SOVEREIGN LORD TARGETS NINEVEH FOR DESTRUCTION, THE DEVASTATION IS SWIFT AND TERRIFYING

INTRODUCTION:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God when He is unleashing the power of His wrath. Those who imagine themselves to be untouchable are the very ones whom God will bring crashing down. There is no strength or defense that can stand up against the Almighty. Nineveh was fortunate enough to receive the opportunity to repent under the preaching of Jonah; but here we see nothing but decreed devastation. There comes a time when God's patience has been exhausted. But likewise the Lord encourages His people that He will restore the afflicted to splendor in His good time.

I. (2:1-2) THE STRENGTH (OR WEAKNESS) OF NATIONS DOES NOT PROTECT THEM AGAINST THE REVERSAL OF FORTUNES -- TWO DIFFERENT DESTINIES:

A. (:1) Nineveh Under Attack

1. The Wheel Has Turned – Sovereign Control of History

The Enemy is at the Gate / Defeat and Captivity are Imminent

“The one who scatters has come up against you.”

Contrast how believers are called to ministry of edification

2. The Futile Call to Arms – 4 Rapid-Fire Commands

a. Call to Battle Stations

“Man the fortress”

b. Call to Watchtower Alertness

“watch the road;”

c. Call to Courage

“Strengthen your back,”

d. Call to Fight Strong

“summon all your strength.”

B. (:2) Judah Restored

1. The Wheel Has Turned – Sovereign Control of History

“For the Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob

Like the splendor of Israel”

2. The Devastation Will be Reversed
*“Even though devastators have devastated them
And destroyed their vine branches.”*

II. (2:3-6) THE ATTACKING FORCES QUICKLY BREACH THE WALLS

Note: The interpretation of the details in this section greatly differ – especially which phrases refer to the attacking army of the Chaldeans and which might have reference to the defending troops within the city walls of Nineveh. I take this section as descriptive of the attacking forces under the direction of the “*one who scatters*” (vs. 1).

- A. (:3) Attacking Forces Armed to the Teeth
 1. Impressive Shields
“The shields of his mighty men are colored red”
 2. Impressive Armor
“The warriors are dressed in scarlet”
 3. Impressive Chariots
“The chariots are enveloped in flashing steel”
 4. Impressive Spears
“And the cypress spears are brandished.”
- B. (:4) Attacking Forces Rush to Their Staging Positions
*“The chariots race madly in the streets,
They rush wildly in the squares,
Their appearance is like torches,
They dash to and fro like lightning flashes.”*

Johnson: The *streets* “may include the avenues and suburban highways about Nineveh and leading to the city, for the context describes an attack that gradually leads to the city’s walls” (Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary*, p. 243).

- C. (:5) Attacking Forces Prepare to Breach the Walls of Nineveh
*“He remembers his nobles;
They stumble in their march,
They hurry to her wall,
And the mantelet is set up.”*
- D. (:6) Flood Gates Opened
*“The gates of the rivers are opened
And the palace is dissolved.”*

III. (2:7-10) THE CITY IS STRIPPED AND THE PEOPLE REDUCED TO

TERROR AND ANGUISH

A. (:7) Four-Fold Summary of Defeat and Devastation

1. Finality of the Decreed Defeat

“It is fixed”

2. City Looted

“She is stripped”

3. People Carried Away to Captivity

“she is carried away”

4. Emotional Trauma and Anguish

*“And her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves,
Beating on their breasts.”*

B. (:8) Panic-stricken People Fleeing the City

*“Though Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days,
Now they are fleeing;*

‘Stop, stop,’

But no one turns back.”

C. (:9) Wealth of City Plundered

“Plunder the silver!

Plunder the gold!

For there is no limit to the treasure –

Wealth from every kind of desirable object.”

D. (:10) Four-Fold Summary of Defeat and Devastation

1. City Emptied

“She is emptied!”

2. City Devastated

“Yes, she is desolate and waste”

3. People are Terrified and Panic-stricken

“Hearts are melting and knees knocking!”

4. People are Traumatized and in Shock

“Also anguish is in the whole body

And all their faces are grown pale!”

III. (2:11-13) THE OPPOSITION OF THE LORD DEVOURS THE DEVOURER

A. (:11-12) The Powerful Predator is Nowhere to Be Found

1. (:11) Former Protected Lair

*“Where is the den of the lions
And the feeding place of the young lions,
Where the lion, lioness and lion’s cub prowled,
With nothing to disturb them?”*

2. (:12) Former Predatory Prosperity
*“The lion tore enough for his cubs,
Killed enough for his lionesses,
And filled his lairs with prey
And his dens with torn flesh.”*

B. (:13) Summary Proclamation of Condemnation

1. Opposition of the Lord
“Behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord of hosts.”
2. Destruction of Military Resources
“I will burn up her chariots in smoke,”
3. Destruction of Fighting Forces
“a sword will devour your young lions;”
4. Elimination of Material Sustenance
“I will cut off your prey from the land,”
5. Elimination of Power and Prestige
“and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard.”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the Lord so often present prophecies in the form of a reversal of fortunes?
What does that teach us about our fragile prosperity?
- 2) Why do people fight against the omnipotent power and resources of the Lord?
- 3) What attitude should nations take towards their temporary prosperity?
- 4) What type of anguish and panic and terror will there be in the last days?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Elliott E. Johnson: [contrasting tone of Chapter 1 with that of Chapter 2] – Associated

with this change in emphasis is a shift in tone – from calmness and dignity to increasing emotion and vivid descriptions. Concerning some of these tense, graphic descriptions of action in battle **Raymond Calkins** wrote, “Nahum portrays [the] siege, reproduces its horrors and its savagery, its cruelties and mercilessness, in language so realistic that one is able to see it and feel it. First comes the fighting in the suburbs. Then the assault upon the walls. Then the capture of the city and its destruction” (*The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947, p. 82).

Chisholm: With a taunting rhetorical question Nahum drew attention to the stark contrast between Assyria’s past and present. In the past the Assyrians had overcome their helpless victims with ease. Just as powerful lions bring back prey for their cubs, so the Assyrians had brought great wealth back from their military conquests. However, now the lions’ lair (Nineveh) would be destroyed.

The application of lion imagery to the Assyrians is appropriate. In their role as warriors Assyrian kings often compared themselves to lions. For example, Esarhaddon (ca. 680-669 B.C.) boasted that he “roared like a lion.” Old Testament prophets also used lion imagery to describe Assyrian military power (Isa. 5:19; Jer. 50:17).

Boice: Ancient sources give a remarkably consistent picture of the destruction of Nineveh. There had been rebellions in the Assyrian empire for some time. Many of them were repulsed by the armies of Nineveh supported by her allies. But in the year 612 B.C. the doom of the city arrived. Combined armies of Babylonians and Scythians marched up the left bank of the Tigris River and surrounded the city. It happened in early spring at the time of the annual rainfalls. Since the rains were especially hard that year, the Tigris and other rivers flooded and apparently washed away a portion of the walls, leaving a breach for the armies to enter the city.

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (c. 20 B.C.) says that the river not only broke down the walls of the city, it also inundated part of it. At this point, the king, Sardanapalus, remembering an oracle to the effect that Nineveh would only fall when the river itself declared war against it, believed that the oracle was fulfilled and abandoned any hope of saving himself. He built a gigantic funeral pyre in the royal precincts, heaped up large quantities of gold and costly clothes, shut his concubines and eunuchs in a chamber he had made in the midst of the pyre, and then burned himself, his family, his concubines and eunuchs, and the palace.

Whatever had not been burned in this conflagration was destroyed by the entering armies. There was a terrible slaughter. Diodorus said, “So great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream, mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance.”

There was unparalleled looting. For centuries the wealth of the ancient world had been pouring into Nineveh as a result of the Assyrian conquests. Now it poured out.

Feinberg: “*I am against Thee*” – These are fearful words when uttered by the living

God against those who have incurred His righteous indignation. Nineveh was entrusted of the Lord with a large measure of sovereignty over the people of her day. Instead of ruling in the fear of the Lord, she employed her power and influence to destroy and dominate the nations for her own profit. This was grievous enough in itself, but Assyria must needs lift her armed hand against the little flock of the Lord's pasture, Israel. With this, God declares its iniquity is full and it is time for judgment.

Paul indicates (Ro 8:31) that if God be for us, no one can successfully be against us. The reverse is true also: if God be against an individual or nation by virtue of sin, then no one can successfully be for that person or nation.

When Assyria touched Israel, God said, "*Behold, I am against thee!*"

TEXT: Nahum 3:1-19

TITLE: GOD IS A DEVASTATING ENEMY

INTRODUCTION:

We like to encourage believers with the assurance that “God is on our side” – with the corresponding benefits of peace and security and blessing. However, we need to be just as diligent to warn unbelievers about the terrible wrath of God. When God stands against you, the ultimate humiliation and devastation will be severe. God is a devastating enemy – as the City of Nineveh can testify. (Cf. description of the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18)

Key Verse: (:5a) “*Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts.*”

BIG IDEA:

THE DIVINE HUMILIATION AND DEVASTATION OF NINEVEH IS DESERVED, INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE

I. (:1-7) NINEVEH DESERVES TO BE COMPLETELY HUMILIATED AND TOTALLY DEVASTATED

A. (:1-4) Her Crimes

1. Wicked Cruelty

1. (:1) The Denunciation

*“Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage;
Her prey never departs.”*

2. (:2-3) The Devastation

*“The noise of the whip,
The noise of the rattling of the wheel,
Galloping horses and bounding chariots!
Horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming,
Many slain, a mass of corpses, and countless dead bodies –
They stumble over the dead bodies.”*

Chisholm: Nahum emphasized the reversal in Nineveh’s fortunes through three subtle wordplays, which are apparent only in the Hebrew text. While Nineveh contained a seemingly “endless” supply of gold and silver (2:9), she would soon be covered with bodies “without number” (3:3). “Piles” of corpses (3:3) would replace her abundant “wealth” (2:9). Because of her “wanton lust,” literally “many harlotries” (3:4; cf. NASB), Nineveh would be filled with “many casualties” (3:3).

2. (:4) Seducing Harlotry

*“All because of the many harlotries of the harlot,
The charming one, the mistress of sorceries,
Who sells nations by her harlotries and families by her sorceries.”*

MacArthur: The nation was likened to a beautiful prostitute who seduced the nations with her illicit enticements.

Boice: Archaeologists have confirmed that the people of Nineveh practiced witchcraft. . The pantheon of hideous, destructive deities was similar to today's Hindu pantheon. Most of these were imagined to hate and persecute human beings.

B. (:5-6) Her Disgrace

1. The Ultimate Enemy = the Lord of Hosts – God is a Devastating Enemy
“Behold, I am against you,’ declares the Lord of hosts;”

2. The Ultimate Humiliation
*“And I will lift up your skirts over your face,
And show to the nations your nakedness
And to the kingdoms your disgrace.”*

3. The Ultimate Desecration
*“I will throw filth on you
And make you vile,
And set you up as a spectacle.”*

Boice: No doubt Nineveh had actually treated others in this fashion: exposing their nakedness, pelting them with filth, mocking them in great public spectacle. Now she is to be treated in like fashion. And none will grieve for her, so great have her atrocities been! She is to vanish from history – friendless and unmourned.

C. (:7) Her Rejection

*“And it will come about that all who see you
Will shrink from you and say,
‘Nineveh is devastated!
Who will grieve for her?’
Where will I seek comforters for you?”*

II. (:8-10) NINEVEH WILL SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS THE SEEMINGLY INVINCIBLE FORMER CAPITAL CITY OF EGYPT = NO-AMON

A. (:8-9) Seemingly Impregnable Defenses of No-Amon

1. Argument from the Greater to the Lesser
“Are you better than No-amon,”

MacArthur: Also known as Thebes, No-amon was the great capital of southern Egypt, 400 mi. S of Cairo. One of the most magnificent ancient civilizations of the world, it was renowned for its 100 gates, a temple measuring 330 ft. long and 170 ft. wide, and its network of canals. It fell to Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 663 B.C. Like No-amon by the Nile, Nineveh was situated by the Tigris River, enjoying the security of conquered

nations around her. However, the end would be like that of No-amon.”

2. Geographical Defenses

*“Which was situated by the waters of the Nile,
With water surrounding her,
Whose rampart was the sea,
Whose wall consisted of the sea?”*

3. Political Alliances

*“Ethiopia was her might,
And Egypt too, without limits.
Put and Lubim were among her helpers.”*

B. (:10) Surprising Humiliation and Devastation

1. Captivity

*“Yet she became an exile,
She went into captivity;”*

2. Slaughter

*“Also her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every
street;”*

3. Humiliation

*“They cast lots for her honorable men,
And all her great men were bound with fetters.”*

III. (:11-19) NINEVEH HAS NO DEFENSE AGAINST THE OUTPOURING OF THE WRATH OF GOD

A. (:11-13) Easy Target -- Ripe for Plundering

1. (:11a) Drunk and Defenseless

“You too will become drunk,

2. (:11b) Destined for Oblivion

You too will be hidden.”

Feinberg: The prophecy that the city would be hidden has been remarkably fulfilled, as is well known. After the destruction of Nineveh it disappeared completely from history. From 1842 on, the Frenchman Botta and the Englishmen Layard and Rawlinson excavated on the site and uncovered remains of this one time magnificent city.

3. (:11c) Vulnerable and Exposed -- No Place to Hide

“You too will search for a refuge from the enemy.”

4. (:12) Inviting Fortifications

*“All your fortifications are fig trees with ripe fruit –
When shaken, they fall into the eater’s mouth.”*

5. (:13a) Powerless Defenders – No Strength, No Courage
“Behold, your people are women in your midst!”

6. (:13b) Open Gates
*“The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies;
Fire consumes your gate bars.”*

B. (:14-15a) Futile Defense

1. (:14) Sarcastic Pleas for Preparation

a. Gather Provisions

“Draw for yourself water for the siege!”

b. Strengthen the Fortifications

“Strengthen your fortifications!

Go into the clay and tread the mortar!

Take hold of the brick mold!”

2. (:15a) Scathing Prophecy of Devastation

“There fire will consume you,

The sword will cut you down;

It will consume you as the locust does.”

C. (15b:-18) Collapse of Leadership

1. (:15b) No Safety in Numbers

*“Multiply yourself like the creeping locust,
Multiply yourself like the swarming locust.”*

Kohlenberger: Nineveh cannot escape locust-like devastation even if they “multiply like grasshoppers!”

2. (:16) No Security in Commerce

*“You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven –
The creeping locust strips and flies away.”*

3. (:17) No Salvation in Government

“Your guardsmen are like the swarming locust.

Your marshals are like hordes of grasshoppers

Settling in the stone walls on a cold day.

The sun rises and they flee,

And the place where they are is not known.”

4. (:18) Sad Summary: No One Left to Rescue the City

“Your shepherds are sleeping, O king of Assyria;

*Your nobles are lying down.
Your people are scattered on the mountains.
And there is no one to regather them.”*

D. (:19) Inevitable and Deserved Humiliation and Devastation

*“There is no relief for your breakdown,
Your wound is incurable.
All who hear about you will clap their hands over you,
For on whom has not your evil passed continually?”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who are we warning about the fearful vengeance of God? Is there urgency in our evangelistic appeals?
- 2) Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right in His time and for His glory?
- 3) What type of false security does the Lord want to expose in the people around us?
- 4) How dangerous is it to presume upon the forbearance of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: at the beginning of chapter 3 the prophet cites Nineveh’s crimes: violence, deception, plunder, and witchcraft. . . . In all the ancient world no single city had matched the Assyrian capital for its calculated cruelty. . . . The utter fiendishness of impaling defeated soldiers on stakes, skinning commanders alive, cutting off limbs, noses and ears, putting out eyes, heaping up skulls in the city squares, and burning vast numbers alive was without parallel in the ancient world.

Chisholm: Once more assuming the role of a watchman on the city’s walls (cf. 2:1), Nahum tauntingly urged the Ninevites to make hasty preparations for a siege (v. 14). Of course, such efforts would be futile, for the city would be destroyed thoroughly, like crops before a horde of locusts (v. 15a).

In verse 15b Nahum applied the locust imagery, used of Nineveh’s enemies in the first half of the verse, to the city itself. He sarcastically challenged the city to multiply like locusts. Verses 16-17 suggest he was alluding to Nineveh’s numerous merchants, guards, and officials. All of these groups, symbols of Nineveh’s wealth and importance, would desert the city in the Day of Judgment. Like locusts that strip the land and then fly away, the merchants, having exploited the ill-fated city’s economic possibilities to the maximum, would move on to greener pastures. The guards and

officials, whose sense of security in Nineveh's prosperity is compared to locusts' settling "*in the walls on a cold day,*" would also disappear.

Feinberg: The prophecy of Nahum, whose chief message is the destruction of wicked Nineveh, closes with the sad word that the people of the city are scattered upon the mountains with none to gather them. This is the sad picture of Israel in the time of our Lord who were as sheep scattered without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). The loving Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, longs for us to gather them to Him through the message of the Cross that there may be one flock, one shepherd.

Kohlenberger: Yahweh is slow to anger – longsuffering. He gives time to consider, time to repent, time to be saved. In the early eighth century B.C., Yahweh moved heaven and earth to save Nineveh and to teach Israel about the nature of His grace and the need for repentance. In the late seventh century, Yahweh again moved heaven and earth to decimate Nineveh and save His people, to teach them of His justice and goodness.

Nahum is a book for our time. As we the living, and the martyrs under the altar (Rev. 6:9), cry out to Yahweh to crush the Hitlers, the Stalins, the Amins and all the others (even those uncomfortably close to home) who crush the peoples of the earth and shake their fists at the God of the universe, we can be strengthened by the message that Yahweh "*cares for those who trust him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end*" of His foes in His time (1:7-8).

Morgan: There are limits to the forbearance of Jehovah. But where are they? Full opportunity is granted to every man and every nation, and God will never destroy a nation or a man until full opportunity has been granted. But the rejection of that full opportunity which expresses itself in direct defiance and challenge of God is the limit of God's patience. Never until a nation challenged God did God sweep a nation away as hopelessly as He swept away Nineveh. There lies the limit of His patience.

Baker: The totality of destruction is compared to that by the grasshopper (see Ps. 78:46; Joel 1:4), which sweeps away all in its path. Assyria is reminded of her merchants (Ezk. 17:4; 27); Rev. 18:11-20), who had multiplied greatly, as is known from the historical records from as far away as Cappadocia in Asia Minor. These merchants are portrayed negatively, comparing in rapacity and transience to the locust swarm.

17. The last mentioned characteristic of the locust, its fleeting presence, is also used to describe Assyria's guards and officials who disappear at the slightest excuse. Thus the economic (v. 16) and military (v. 17) bureaucracy upon which Assyria depended does not provide the expected support, but rather itself leads in the panicked flight from the invaders.

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