

Nahum 2
December 20, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you perceive people who you feel confident have no regard for God getting ahead in life (and I'll let you define what "getting ahead" means to you), how do you process that? Where does your mind go? [Let people engage]

Transition: Why does the wicked prosper? This question keeps rearing its ugly head, not only in Scripture, but even in our own lives. All of us want to see life to be "fair," and we want those who live according to God's commands and principles to be doing better than those who cheat, cut corners, take advantage of the vulnerable, etc. It can be frustrating to focus on those who appear to be getting ahead who have no concern for God or His teachings!

If you share this frustration, then today's study is for you and me!! Let's begin.

BOOK:

Nineveh to Fall

Nineveh Attacked (The attacker was Nabopolassar, the Babylonian who, with Cyaxeres the Mede, conquered Nineveh.)

- 2 An attacker advances against you, Nineveh.
Guard the fortress,
watch the road,
brace yourselves,
marshal all your strength!
- 2 The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob
like the splendor of Israel,
though destroyers have laid them waste
and have ruined their vines.
- 3 The shields of his soldiers are red;
the warriors are clad in scarlet.
The metal on the chariots' flashes
on the day they are made ready;
the spears of pine are brandished.
- 4 The chariots storm through the streets,
rushing back and forth through the squares.
They look like flaming torches;
they dart about like lightning.
- 5 He (Assyrian king) summons his picked troops,
yet they stumble on their way.
They dash to the city wall;
the protective shield is put in place.

- 6 The river gates are thrown open
and the palace collapses.

Nineveh Defeated

- 7 It is decreed that the city
be exiled and carried away.
Its slave girls moan like doves
and beat upon their breasts.
- 8 Nineveh is like a pool,
and its water is draining away.
“Stop! Stop!” they cry,
but no one turns back.

Nineveh Plundered

- 9 Plunder the silver!
Plunder the gold!
The supply is endless,
the wealth from all its treasures!
- 10 She is pillaged, plundered, stripped!
Hearts melt, knees give way,
bodies tremble, every face grows pale.
- 11 Where now is the lions’ den,
the place where they fed their young,
where the lion and lioness went,
and the cubs, with nothing to fear?
- 12 The lion killed enough for his cubs
and strangled the prey for his mate,
filling his lairs with the kill
and his dens with the prey.
- 13 “I am against you,”
declares the LORD Almighty.
“I will burn up your chariots in smoke,
and the sword will devour your young lions.
I will leave you no prey on the earth.
The voices of your messengers
will no longer be heard.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- **God is the judge of all nations**

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about God in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

- Hear the Lord's voice – even above the noise of war!
- The very things the Ninevites trusted in became their downfall. Do you trust in man or in the Lord? Ps 118:8-9 “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Na 2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

II. God Is Judge: Nineveh's Fall Is Great (2)

In the Hebrew text, 1:15 is actually the beginning of the second chapter. It is the joyful announcement that Nineveh has fallen. See also Isa. 52:7 for a similar announcement about the fall of Babylon; and see Paul's use of this for today in Rom. 10:15. The person who brings a message of hope and victory is a person with beautiful feet. As Christians we all ought to have beautiful feet as we carry the message of the Gospel to the lost.

Chapter 2 is a vivid picture of the invasion of the city and its ultimate fall. Assyria had emptied Israel in 721; now God was going to restore His people by punishing the enemy (vv. 1–2). The Medes wore scarlet uniforms and used scarlet shields (v. 3). The armies with their spears and lances looked like a forest of fir trees. Please do not make 2:4 a prophecy of the modern automobile. It only pictures the chariots in the streets of the city. *Huzzab* in v. 7 refers probably to the queen, being led away in great humiliation.

Note the repeated reference to lions in vv. 11–13. The lion was the symbol of the Assyrian empire, as you can see from pictures in history or archaeology books. They built huge statues of lions with the heads of men. “Where are your lions now?” Nahum asks. “Where are your rulers, your champions?”

“I am against you” (v. 13, NKJV). God brought the Medes and Babylonians against Nineveh and permitted them to spoil the city and take its wealth. For 150 years He had waited for Assyria to turn, but she refused. God is Judge among the nations; He must act.

Johnson, E. E. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1499-1502) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

III. The Description of God's Judgment on Nineveh (chap. 2)

Chapter 1 includes more or less general statements about the Lord's judgment on His enemy, but now the book moves to more specific descriptions of the attack and plundering of the city. Nineveh would be attacked (2:1, 3–6), defeated (vv. 7–8), and plundered (vv. 9–13), but Judah's glory will be restored (v. 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).

A. The attack (2:1–6)

2:1. Under attack, Nineveh was called on to defend itself. In an alternating pattern Nahum had addressed Nineveh in 1:11, 14 and now in 2:1; he had addressed Judah in 1:12–13, 15. The advance of **an unnamed attacker** (*mēpîš*, “scatterer or disperser”; cf. 2:8b; 3:18) **against ...**

Nineveh was so certain that Nahum spoke of it in the present tense. The verb **advances** is literally “goes up” (*‘ālāh*), a word used of hostile military operations (e.g., Jud. 1:1, “go up”; 1 Sam. 7:7, “came up”; 1 Kings 20:22, “attack”; Isa. 7:1, “marched up”; Isa. 7:6, “invade”; Isa. 21:2, “attack”). The attacker was Nabopolassar, the Babylonian who, with Cyaxeres the Mede, conquered Nineveh.

Then a series of four terse commands follows. They reflect the Ninevites’ scurry of activity to defend their great city. In bitter irony, a subtle form of ridicule, Nahum urged the city to prepare for the approaching siege by guarding **the fortress**, watching **the road** for invaders, bracing themselves (lit., **brace** “the loins,” i.e., exert strength physically and mentally), and marshaling **all** their **strength** (*kōaḥ*; see comments on Nahum 1:3). The prophet knew that such precautions could not hold back the siege or change its outcome. All Nineveh’s efforts to defend itself would be futile because, as God said (1:15), the city would be destroyed.

2:2. The description of the attack is interrupted by a word about Jacob and Israel. Perhaps **Jacob** and **Israel** are synonyms for the entire nation, though possibly Jacob refers to the Southern Kingdom and Israel the Northern Kingdom. The destruction of Nineveh makes it possible for God’s people to be taken out of their humbled, debased condition and to have their **splendor** (*gā’ōn*, “excellence or majesty”) restored. This will not be fully realized till Israel is in the land in the millennial kingdom which the Messiah will establish. This will contrast with her having been **laid ... waste** by Assyria (the defeat of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.), which included the ruining of her grape **vines**.

2:3–4. Nahum spoke of the equipment and speed of the “attacker” (v. 1) and his soldiers and chariots. **His** in the first line of verse 3 probably refers not to the defending Assyrian king but to the unidentified “attacker.” **The shields** of the Medes and Babylonians were **red** either from blood, or from red-dyed leather over the wooden shields, or by being covered with copper. The warriors’ **scarlet**-colored attire (cf. “red” in Ezek. 23:14) would make them awesome in appearance. (Xenophon wrote about the Persians in Cyrus’ army being dressed in scarlet, *Cyropaedia* 6. 4. 1.) **The metal on the chariots** glistened in the sun, as the soldiers’ wooden **spears** were **brandished** (swung) in their wild attack.

The charging **chariots** of the besieging enemy seemed to bolt furiously in wild frenzy (cf. Jer. 46:9). They moved so quickly that they looked **like lightning**. **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). **The squares** were the wider open spaces within a city (cf. streets and squares in Prov. 5:16; 7:12; Jer. 5:1; 9:21).

2:5–6. **He** in verse 5 probably refers to the Assyrian king because he summoned **his ... troops** to defend **the city wall** and set up **the protective shield**. The exact nature of this protective covering is unknown but somehow it protected the defenders against the attackers’ stones, spears, and arrows.

Several possible interpretations of **the river gates** have been suggested: (a) fortified bridges, (b) city gates near the banks of the Tigris River, (c) sluice gates in dams in the city moats (but no archeological evidence supports this), (d) breaches made in the wall by the torrential rush of water, (e) floodgates to control the flow of the Khosr River that passed through the city.

The fifth view is supported by the most natural sense of the language and by archeological remains. “Sennacherib ... dammed the ... Khosr [River], outside the city, and thus made a reservoir. Thompson and Hutchinson report that the water was restrained by a magnificent double dam with two massive river walls at some distance from Nineveh itself. In the ruins they

found traces of the original dam gates, or sluices, by which the water flow to the city could be increased or reduced” (Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary*, p. 253). So perhaps at the beginning of the siege the enemy closed the floodgates. When the reservoirs were completely full, they threw **open** the gates **and the palace** collapsed. The waters may have also been increased by heavy rains as Diodorus Siculus wrote (see point 5 in the chart “Fulfillments of Nahum’s Prophecies,” in the *Introduction*). The palace may have been Ashurbanipal’s palace in the north part of the city. The nation that had ruined many enemy palaces now found its own palace devastated.

B. The defeat and the plundering (2:7–13)

2:7. Nineveh’s destiny was **decreed** by God: she would be taken into exile. The word translated “decreed” is *ḥūṣṣab*. The KJV renders this “Huzzab” and translates the first part of the verse, “And Huzzab shall be led away captive.” This is supposedly the capture of the queen by that name. However, no queen by this name is known in extrabiblical records. The NIV rendering “It is decreed” is preferred. Though this seemingly interrupts the flow of thought, it does so to affirm that such an event as Nineveh’s exile was established by God. Such words of divine purpose occur repeatedly (1:13–14; 2:2, 13; 3:5–6). The **slave girls** wailed **like doves**, whose cooing resembled lamenting (cf. Isa. 38:14; 59:11), and in sorrow **beat ... their breasts**, knowing they were to **be exiled**.

2:8–10. With their city flooded, the Ninevites would flee, leaving their possessions behind. The word **pool**, perhaps meaning a reservoir, aptly describes Nineveh as an inundated area (cf. comments on v. 6). The people, like **water** flowing out of a tank, would flee rapidly from the city. As they would leave in panic, some would shout for them to **stop ... but no one** would turn **back**. Who shouted **stop** is not stated. Perhaps they were the city leaders, or army officers, or perhaps even the attacking enemy.

Nahum now encouraged the victorious invaders to gather the spoils. For many years Nineveh had exacted huge booties from her foes, so that her **supply** of **silver** and **gold** was almost limitless. She also acquired **wealth** by tribute and by trading. In his annals Ashurbanipal mentioned silver and gold together 27 times in his inventories of booty taken from other nations. Luckenbill records the reports of vast amounts of wealth acquired by several Assyrian kings, including *Ashurnasirpal*, Shalmaneser III, Adad-nirari, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon (*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1:181, 211, 263, 276; 2:20, 133, 205). The words **pillaged**, **plundered**, and **stripped** render three similar-sounding Hebrew words: *bûqâh*, *meḥûqâh*, and *meḥûllâqâh*. Because their wealth was being plundered and their lives were endangered, the Ninevites were frightened and terror-stricken.

2:11–12. Nahum responded to the envisioned destruction of the city with a taunt, **Where now is the lions’ den?** His rhetorical question implied that the capital no longer existed. The symbolism of the lions’ den (and the **lion ... lioness**, and **cubs**; cf. “young lions,” v. 13) is uniquely appropriate. Like a **lion** hunting for his lioness and **cubs**, Assyria had plundered other nations. Assyrian kings prided themselves in their ability to kill lions in lion hunts. And the kings likened their own ferocity and fearlessness to that of lions. For example, Sennacherib boasted of his military fury by saying, “Like a lion I raged.” Lions were frequently pictured in Assyrian reliefs and decorations. No wonder Nahum likened Nineveh to a lions’ den! But now the **lair**s would be empty. No longer would there be lions, cubs, and ripped carcasses.

2:13. God’s hostility against Nineveh is stated in forceful words: **I am against you** (cf. 3:5; Jer. 21:13; 50:31; 51:25; Ezek. 5:8; 13:8; 26:3; 28:22; 39:1). Fire would destroy her **chariots**; the

sword would cut down her soldiers (**young lions**); and Nineveh would **no longer** be permitted to pounce on defenseless nations (**prey**) and helpless vassals. Nor would the haughty city be able to send any more **messengers** or heralds (as Sennacherib's field commander, 2 Kings 18:17–25) to demand submission, or to exact tribute (or to blaspheme the Lord; cf. 2 Kings 19:22; Isa. 37:4, 6).

Clendenen, E. R. (1998). The Minor Prophets. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman concise Bible commentary (p. 371). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

First Description (2:1–13). This section comprises a vision of Nineveh's fall. It is introduced by an ironic call to arms with a parenthetical explanation and concluded by a taunt song. The prophet has been transported in a vision to Nineveh's watchtower, where he witnesses the armies of the Babylonians (who wore red; see v. 3; Ezek. 23:14) and Medes attacking, invading, and sacking the city of Nineveh. In a very real sense, however, the "attacker" (or "scatterer") is the Lord.

Nahum vividly portrays the confusion and panic of a city under attack. According to an ancient Greek historical account, Nineveh fell when the Tigris river overflowed and tore down the city walls, flooding the city, an event that may be reflected in verse 6 (also 1:8).

The concluding taunt compares Assyria to a ravenous lion and Nineveh to its lair, both of which have been destroyed. Assyrian kings often compared themselves to lions and so decorated their palaces. The image of the ravaging lion appears elsewhere in the prophets for the nations whom God used to punish Israel (see Isa. 5:26–29; Jer. 2:15; 4:7; 5:6; 50:17; 51:38; Joel 1:6; Amos 3:12). The section ends with the ultimate condemnation from God: "I am against you" (also 3:5; see Jer. 21:13; 50:31; 51:25).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Na 2:1-13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.