***Nahum***

Chapter 3

*Woe to Nineveh*

**Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! 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— 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. 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. 6 I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. 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?” 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 were 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. 11 You too will become drunk; you will go into hiding and seek refuge from the enemy. 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. 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. 14 Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defenses! Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork! 15 There the fire will devour you; the sword will cut you down and, like grasshoppers, consume you. Multiply like grasshoppers, multiply like locusts! 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. and then fly away. 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. 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. 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?**

**3:1** *city of blood.* Nineveh’s bloody massacres of her conquered rivals were well known. (CSB)

 *never without victims.* The Assyrians were noted for their ruthlessness, brutality and terrible atrocities. Many of their victims were beheaded, impaled or burned. (CSB)

**3:2** CRACK OF WHIPS – Nineveh: the threatenings against which are continued in a strain of invective, astonishing for its richness, variety, and energy. One may hear and see the whip crack, the horses prancing, the wheels rumbling, the chariots bounding after the galloping steeds; the reflection from the drawn and highly polished swords; and the hurled spears, like gashes of lightning, dazzling the eyes; the slain lying in heaps, and horses and chariots stumbling over them! O what a picture, and a true representation of a battle, when one side is broken, and all the cavalry of the conqueror fall in upon them, hewing them down with their swords, and trampling them to pieces under the hoofs of their horses! (ACC)

**3:3** *piles of dead.* The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III boasted of erecting a pyramid of chopped-off heads in front of an enemy’s city. Other Assyrian kings stacked corpses like cordwood by the gates of defeated cities. Nahum’s description of the cruel Assyrians is apropos. (CSB)

Three different Hebrew words are used to describe fallen corpses. These gruesome details dramatize the fierceness of God’s wrath against the evil that filled Nineveh. (TLSB)

**3:4** *harlot.* Probably a reference to the chief love goddess of Nineveh and, by extension, to the city as a whole. The lure of luxury and wealth brought multitudes to Nineveh. (CSB)

Nahum may be alluding to the cult of Ishtar, the special goodness of Nineveh, whose rituals contained explicit references to sexual activity. (TLSB)

 *sorceries … witchcraft.* See Dt 18:10. (CSB)

Namely, by her political schemes and intrigues. For this reason the Lord will plunge Nineveh into a shameful destruction. (Kretzmann)

Using every means to excite to idolatry; and being, by menace or wiles, successful in all. (ACC)

**3:5** *lift your skirts over your face.* The punishment of prostitutes and adulteresses. (CSB)

It was an ancient, though not a laudable custom, to strip prostitutes naked, or throw their clothes over their heads, and expose them to public view, and public execration. This verse alludes to such a custom. (ACC)

**3:6** Nineveh will be humiliated. (CSB)

ESV has “throw filth.” Throwing detestable, unclean objects evidences God’s total contempt for Nineveh. Such objects were readily found on foul city streets. (TLSB)

**3:7** *who … ? Where … ?* Rhetorical questions. Nineveh will receive no sympathy. (CSB)

No one would have the slightest sympathy with the stricken city, because she had so thoroughly deserved her punishment. (Kretzmann)

**3:8** *Thebes.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

 *No Amon* means “city of (the god) Amon.” Thebes was the great capital of Upper Egypt. Its site is occupied today by the towns of Luxor and Karnak. It was destroyed by the Assyrians in 663 b.c. (CSB)

 WATER AROUND – Being situated in the Delta, it had the fork of two branches of the Nile to defend it by land; and its barrier or wall was the sea, the Mediterranean, into which these branches emptied themselves: so that this city, and the place it stood on, were wholly surrounded by the waters. (ACC)

**3:9** *Put.* A neighbor of Egypt, but its location is uncertain. (CSB)

Exact location of Put is uncertain, though possibly it is an alternative name for Libya, the region west of Egypt. (TLSB)

 HER ALLIES – Combined power of Thebes’s allies made the city seem invincible. (TLSB)

**3:10** CAPTIVE…EXILE – Despite her seemingly impregnable position, Thebes was unable to withstand the bloody onslaught of the Assyrian army in 663 BC and was captured, her people deported. Nahum makes the point that if Thebes fell, so would Nineveh. (TLSB)

 INFANTS WERE DASHED – Brutality against children, not uncommon in ancient conquests, was intended to terrorize the populace into submission and to ensure its complete destruction (cf Ps 137:9; Hos 13:16). (TLSB)

 LOST CAST FOR NOBLES – Perhaps this selected which honored men should be executed and which were to bound in chains. (TLSB)

 *her great men were put in chains.* Assyrian kings often did this; e.g., King Ashurbanipal gave this description of his treatment of a captured leader: “I … put a dog chain on him and made him occupy a kennel at the eastern gate of Nineveh.” (CSB)

**3:11** *will become drunk.* Probably from the cup of God’s wrath. (CSB)

Nineveh is so helpless that she is compared to a drunken person who has lost his senses and is powerless to defend himself. (TLSB)

**3:12** *like fig trees with their first ripe fruit.* A simile for the eagerness with which the victors gather the rich loot of Nineveh. (CSB)

The effects of the consternation into which the Ninevites were cast by the assault on their city are here pointed out by a very expressive metaphor; the first-ripe figs, when at full maturity, fell from the tree with the least shake; and so, at the first shake or consternation, all the fortresses of Nineveh were abandoned; and the king, in despair, burnt himself and household in his own palace. (ACC)

 *figs fall into the mouth of the eater.* Nineveh’s fortresses will finally fall just as easily. (CSB)

**3:13** *your troops … are all women!* They are weak and unable to stand against the invading armies. (CSB)

 *their bars.* The bars of the gates. (CSB)

These were those which held the great gates of the city shut. (Kretzmann)

**3:14** *Draw water.* A normal preparation for siege. (CSB)

The Tigris ran near to Nineveh, and here they are exhorted to lay in plenty of fresh water, lest the siege should last long, and lest the enemy should cut off this supply. (ACC)

 *strengthen your defenses!* Irony, the point being that it will do no good (see note on 2:1). (CSB)

This refers to the manner of forming bricks anciently in those countries; they digged up the clay, kneaded it properly by treading, mixed it with straw or coarse grass, moulded the bricks, and dried them in the sun. I have now some of the identical bricks, that were brought from this country, lying before me, and they show all these appearances. They are compact and very hard, but wholly soluble in water. There were however others without straw, that seem to have been burnt in a kiln as ours are. I have also some fragments or bats of these from Babylon. (ACC)

This was to strengthen the city fortifications my making sun-baked bricks. The circumference of Nineveh’s city walls, built by Sennacherib, was c 71/2 mi. (TLSB)

**3:15** *There.* Inside your strong fortifications. (CSB)

 *fire will devour you.* Confirmed by history and archaeology. Assyria’s king died in the flames of his palace. (CSB)

 MULTIPLY LIKE LOCUSTS – Taunting command suggesting that Nineveh increase its population like rapidly multiplying locusts. Of course, all these defensive efforts would be to no avail. (TLSB)

**3:16** *your merchants … are more than the stars.* Speaks of Assyria’s vast trading and commercial enterprises. (CSB)

 *they strip the land.* In the time of Nineveh’s adversity the merchants stripped the land of its treasures, and the trade network was destroyed. (CSB)

**3:17** *locusts.* Feared by the farmers of the ancient Near East, because they came in huge swarms and devoured everything in their path. Their activity provided an apt simile for the exploitative actions of Nineveh’s officials during her destruction. (CSB)

 *no one knows where.* Thus will Nineveh’s officials disappear, without a trace. Interestingly, for centuries no one knew where Nineveh itself lay buried; in 1845 it was finally uncovered by archaeologists. (CSB)

**3:18** *O king.* The reigning king at the time of Nineveh’s fall was Sin-Shar-Ishkun; so these words are prophetically addressed to him. (CSB)

 *shepherds.* Leaders. (CSB)

Slovenly neglect of the rulers’ assigned roles has caused their kingdom to collapse. (TLSB)

 *lie down to rest.* Die. (CSB)

 *people are scattered.* The age-old scene of refugees fleeing a place of destruction is repeated at Nineveh. (CSB)

No one assumes the leadership over them, and so their identity as an Assyrian nation is lost. (Kretzmann)

**3:19** *your injury is fatal.* Nineveh was so totally destroyed that it was never rebuilt, and within a few centuries it was covered with windblown sand. So that “great city” (Jnh 1:2; cf. 3:2) fell in 612 b.c., never to rise again—all in fulfillment of God’s word through his prophet Nahum. (CSB)

The Lord indeed used Assyria as His scourge, but He, at the same time, wanted Assyria to acknowledge His sovereignty. When Nineveh and the entire country, therefore, persisted in its wickedness, His punishment came upon the land with crushing force. (Kretzmann)

 CLAP HIS HANDS – Assyria’s brutal tyranny over surrounding nations was widespread and well known. When news of the city’s downfall is received, applause erupts everywhere as an expression of profound relief and joy. (TLSB)