

Nahum

Chapter 3

Woe to Nineveh

Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder—no end to the prey! 2 The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! 3 Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies! 4 And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms. 5 Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. 6 I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. 7 And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, “Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?” Where shall I seek comforters for you? 8 Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall? 9 Cush was her strength; Egypt too, and that without limit; Put and the Libyans were her helpers. 10 Yet she became an exile; she went into captivity; her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street; for her honored men lots were cast, and all her great men were bound in chains. 11 You also will be drunken; you will go into hiding; you will seek a refuge from the enemy. 12 All your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe figs—if shaken they fall into the mouth of the eater. 13 Behold, your troops are women in your midst. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has devoured your bars. 14 Draw water for the siege; strengthen your forts; go into the clay; tread the mortar; take hold of the brick mold! 15 There will the fire devour you; the sword will cut you off. It will devour you like the locust. Multiply yourselves like the locust; multiply like the grasshopper! 16 You increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens. The locust spreads its wings and flies away. 17 Your princes are like grasshoppers, your scribes like clouds of locusts settling on the fences in a day of cold—when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they are. 18 Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber. Your people are scattered on the mountains with none to gather them. 19 There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?

3:1 *Woe.* Expression of warning (cf Hab 2:6, 9, 12); also used in lamentations. (TLSB)

bloody city. Nineveh’s bloody massacres of her conquered rivals were well known. (CSB)

Assyrian cuneiform tablets record such fiendish practices as the amputation of heads, hands, feet, ears, and noses, the gouging of eyes, and the flaying alive of conquered victims. (TLSB)

no end to the prey. The Assyrians were noted for their ruthlessness, brutality and terrible atrocities. Many of their victims were beheaded, impaled or burned. (CSB)

3:2 Readers can imagine themselves in the midst of a battle, so vividly portrayed are the cracking of whips and the thunderous roar of chariots. (TLSB)

3:3 *heaps of corpses.* 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 *prostitute*. 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)

Nineveh's victimization of other nations is compared to harlotry and sorcery (Ezk 16:15–22). Nahum may be alluding to the cult of Ishtar, the special goddess of Nineveh, whose rituals contained explicit references to sexual activity. (TLSB)

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

God will punish Nineveh by subjecting the city and its inhabitants to public disgrace, just as a prostitute's or unfaithful wife's nakedness is exposed to her shame. (TLSB)

3:6 *I will throw filth at you*. Throwing detestable, unclean objects evidences God's total contempt for Nineveh. Such objects were readily found on foul city streets. (TLSB)

3:7 Nineveh will experience the ultimate degradation: even her former lovers and friends will not stop to mourn her or comfort her. (TLSB)

who ... ? Where ... ? Rhetorical questions. Nineveh will receive no sympathy. (CSB)

3:8 *Thebes. Thebes*. Hbr *no' amon*, "the city of Amon," the Egyptian god. This magnificent capital city was located on the Nile River c 330 mi S of modern Cairo. It fell to the Assyrians in c 663 BC, helping us date Nahum's prophecy. (TLSB)

water around her. System of canals, lakes, and rivers surrounded the city and provided fortification against invaders. (TLSB)

3:9 *Cush*. Nation located c 800 mi S of Egypt, ruled by the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Nubia (716–663 BC). (TLSB)

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 helpers – Combined power of Thebes's allies made the city seem invincible. (TLSB)

3:10 *exile...captivity* – 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 in pieces – 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)

honored men lots were cast – Perhaps this selected which honored men should be executed and which were to bound in chains. (TLSB)

her great men were bound 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 be drunken.* 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 first-ripe figs.* A simile for the eagerness with which the victors gather the rich loot of Nineveh. (CSB)

Appearing in April, figs are a delicacy for those who have not had fresh fruit since the fall harvest. (TLSB)

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

Nineveh’s fortifications are “ripe for the taking” and will fall with relatively little effort. (TLSB)

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

Figuratively implying that the defenders lack strength, courage, and the will to resist. (TLSB)

your bars. The bars of the gates. (CSB)

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

Through the mouth of Nahum, the Lord mockingly commands Nineveh’s defenders to store up water in preparation for the severe deprivation soon to follow. (TLSB)

strengthen your forts! Irony, the point being that it will do no good. (CSB)

This was to strengthen the city fortifications by making sun-baked bricks. The circumference of Nineveh’s city walls, built by Sennacherib, was c 7 1/2 mi. (TLSB)

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

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

multiply you 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 ... more than the stars.* Speaks of Assyria’s vast trading and commercial enterprises. (CSB)

Through its conquests and power, Assyria had become a center of commerce. (TLSB)

3:17 *princes ... scribes.* Military and civic officials with leadership responsibilities in the city. (TLSB)

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)

they fly away. Nineveh's cowardly ruling class, like the merchants (v 16), take flight from the city in the heat of battle like a swarm of locusts that have been enlivened by the warm sun. (TLSB)

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)

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

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)

Addressed to the king of Assyria (*your* is masculine in Hbr), who suffered a fatal injury as the result of the destructive attack leveled against the city. In 612 BC, Nineveh fell to the combined armies of the Babylonians and the Medes. Her proud temples, palaces, and engineering wonders crumbled and were soon forgotten. (TLSB)

clap their 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)

Ch 3 For Nineveh, God's patience came to an end. The evil nation of Assyria that had tyrannized surrounding peoples, acquiring wealth and power at their expense, was overthrown, and it disappeared from the annals of history. God's wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness (Rm 1:18). Because of our sins, we also deserve His wrath and displeasure. Yet "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Th 5:9). God's wrath was poured out on Christ, and by faith in Him we have pardon and peace. • Lord, give us contrite hearts so that, trusting in Your mercy, we may know Your forgiving love. Amen. (TLSB)