

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

city of blood. 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)

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 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 *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)

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)

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)

3:5 *lift 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 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 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)

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

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)

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 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 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)

first-ripe figs. 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 all 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)

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)

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 defenses! 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)

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)

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

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 *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)

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)

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)

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)

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)