

## *Major Messages from the Minor Prophets*

Studies in the Minor Prophets

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

Jersey Shore Baptist Church

Pastor Phil Erickson

Began October 11, 2017

### **Message Seven – Nahum**

Key Verses

*"God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies." - (Nahum 1:2)*

*"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." (Nahum 1:7)*

### **Theme – The Judgment of God Upon His Enemies**

#### **Introduction**

This book is the prophecy of the judgment of God upon Nineveh, which was fulfilled in 612 BC.

You will remember that Jonah had previously been called upon to preach to the people of Nineveh. His message, though very short, was basically the same thing that Nahum preached in much greater detail:

*"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." - (Jonah 3:4)*

Jonah didn't cry out to the people of Nineveh to repent, he just told them that judgment was on its way. However, the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah; but apparently, they did not repent at the preaching of Nahum, though Nahum's actual message regarding the judgment of Nineveh was much longer. Though the pronouncement of judgment was against Nineveh, the actual message was given to Judah.

J. Vernon McGee compares the Book of Nahum to the revival that took place after the preaching of Jonah:

The question naturally arises: How did it work out? Did it last? Did this nation become a godly nation? And the answer is no—they didn't. In time, the revival wore off. In time, they went back to their paganism. In time, they became as brutal as they had been before. This nation had had a message from God, but now here comes Nahum with another message. I do not think that Nahum actually went to Nineveh. I believe that this man lived in the southern kingdom of Israel, and I don't think he left there. But if God sent Jonah to Nineveh, why did He not send Nahum? Well, God's methods vary. God certainly is immutable—He never changes—but He does change His methods at times. He sent Jonah to Nineveh because Nineveh was a great, wicked city, but they were totally ignorant of God. When the message was brought, the city turned to God, all the way from the king on the throne to the peasant in the hovel. As a result, God spared the city. Now 100 to 150 years have gone by, and the city has relapsed and returned back to its old way. Why doesn't Nahum go? Because they have already had the light, and they've rejected it.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Prophet**

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<sup>1</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). Thru the Bible commentary (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 813). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We do not know a great deal about Nahum, whose name means “comfort” or “compassion”, except that he was an Elkoshite. We really are not sure where Elkosh is located. Some have stated that there was a town called Elkosh (Al Qosh) in Assyria, just to the north of Nineveh, which could mean that Nahum was one of the exiles from the northern kingdom. Others have claimed that Elkosh was located in what was left of the northern kingdom of Israel, near Capernaum, though by this time, Israel was no more. Most are convinced that whether or not Nahum was originally from the Elkosh of Galilee in the northern kingdom, he lived in Judah during the time of his prophecy. Some even claim that there was also a village called Elkosh in the southern kingdom.

Note – MacArthur states that the name Nahum is a short form of Nehemiah, which means “comfort of Yahweh”.<sup>2</sup>

## The Prophecy

The time of the writing is a little easier to figure out. Nahum refers in the past tense to the destruction and captivity of the city of No (Hebrew – No Amon, Egyptian name - Thebes), which the historians tell us took place in 663 BC. The actual fall of Nineveh is recorded to have taken place in 612 BC; so, it is safe to assume that Nahum wrote in-between these two events (663 – 612 BC), during the reigns of wicked kings Manasseh and Amon, and good King Josiah. More than likely, it was written earlier in that period when Assyria was still strong and Judah was very weak. During King Josiah’s reign Assyria was weakening and Judah was strong (at least spiritually) If the earlier date is right, Nahum may have personally witnessed the fall of Samaria and Sennacherib’s attempted siege on Jerusalem, which would make him contemporary with Isaiah and Micah. If Nahum lived closer to the time of Josiah he would have been contemporary with the prophets Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

MacArthur states regarding the date:

With no mention of any kings in the introduction, the date of Nahum’s prophecy must be implied by historical data. The message of judgment against Nineveh portrays a nation of strength, intimating a time not only prior to her fall in 612 b.c. but probably before the death of Ashurbanipal in 626 b.c., after which Assyria’s power fell rapidly. Nahum’s mention of the fall of No Amon, also called Thebes (3:8–10), in 663 b.c. (at the hands of Ashurbanipal) appears to be fresh in their minds and there is no mention of the rekindling that occurred ten years later, suggesting a mid-seventh century b.c. date during the reign of Manasseh (ca. 695–642 b.c.; cf. 2 Kin. 21:1–18).<sup>3</sup>

## The Place

Ninevah is first mentioned in the Book of Genesis as being built by Ninrod:

*"And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded **Nineveh**, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city."*  
(Genesis 10:8-12)

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 1309). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## The People

Nineveh had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but had quickly reverted back to their cruelty toward the people of God, along with the committing of immorality and idolatry.

The Bible Knowledge commentary points out some of the Assyrian acts of barbarism and cruelty:

Nineveh was the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the world. For example, writing of one of his conquests, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859) boasted, “I stormed the mountain peaks and took them. In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool.... The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire” (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1:148). Regarding one captured leader, he wrote, “I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city ...” (ibid., 1:146). He also wrote of mutilating the bodies of live captives and stacking their corpses in piles.

Shalmaneser II (859–824) boasted of his cruelties after one of his campaigns: “A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames” (ibid., 1:213). Sennacherib (705–681) wrote of his enemies, “I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives [as one cuts] a string. Like the many waters of a storm I made [the contents of] their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth.... Their hands I cut off” (ibid., 2:127).

Ashurbanipal (669–626) described his treatment of a captured leader in these words: “I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw ... I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy ... a kennel” (ibid., 2:319). In his campaign against Egypt, Ashurbanipal also boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses “on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city wall(s) with them” (ibid., 2:295).

No wonder Nahum called Nineveh “the city of blood” (3:1), a city noted for its “cruelty”! (3:19)<sup>4</sup>

The religious idolatry in Nineveh and Assyria had negatively influenced both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. King Manasseh of Judah erected altars for Baal, made an Asherah, and worshiped the host of heaven (2 Kgs 21:3).<sup>5</sup>

*“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)*

Nineveh was a very proud nation that was about to be brought low by God. The downfall of Assyria would bring great comfort to the people of Judah as Assyria had been harassing them for quite some time. Judah never felt safe as long as the threat of Assyria was looming over them. Some would wish that this Book of Judgment was not part of the Canon because it seems to go against the message of love, but this Book paints a wonderful picture of God’s final removal of evil in a sin-cursed world. The city of Nineveh was destroyed by King Nabopolassar and his son, Nubuchadnezzar, of Babylon in 612 BC. Nineveh was thought to be impenetrable with walls 100 feet high, and a surrounding moat that was 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep.<sup>6</sup>

Warren Wiersbe points out that Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem that referenced Nineveh, and warned the Great Britain that their pride might also bring them down.

Far-called, our navies melt away;

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, E. E. (1985). *Nahum*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1494). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>5</sup> Barker, K. L. (1999). *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Vol. 20, p. 141). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, p. 1309.

On dune and headland sinks the fire:  
 Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
 Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
 Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
 Lest we forget—lest we forget!<sup>7</sup>

**Timeline of Events Regarding Nineveh**

760 BC – Jonah preaches to Nineveh

722 BC – Assyria conquers the northern kingdom (Israel)

701 BC – Assyria threatens Jerusalem but is turned back (Isaiah 36 – 37; 2 Kings 18:13 – 19; 2 Chronicles 32:1 – 23)

700 BC – Nineveh becomes the official capitol of the Assyrian Empire

663 BC – Assyria conquers Thebes (No – Nahum 3:18 – 20)

612 BC – Nineveh is conquered by the Babylonians and Medes. Though Assyria survived as a nation for a few more years, the destruction of Nineveh marked the beginning of the end.

**Prophecies in Nahum**

The Bible Knowledge Commentary list 12 specific prophecies given in this Book that have been literally fulfilled:<sup>8</sup>

Fulfillments of Nahum’s Prophecies	
Nahum’s Prophecies	Historical Fulfillments
1.The Assyrian fortresses surrounding the city would be easily captured (3:12).	1.According to the Babylonian Chronicle the fortified towns in Nineveh’s environs began to fall in 614 B.C. including Tabris, present-day Sharif-Khan, a few miles northwest of Nineveh.
2.The besieged Ninevites would prepare bricks and mortar for emergency defense walls (3:14).	2.A.T. Olmstead reported: “To the south of the gate, the moat is still filled with fragments of stone and of mud bricks from the walls, heaped up when they were breached” (History of Assyria. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 637).
3.The city gates would be destroyed (3:13).	3.Olmstead noted: “The main attack was directed from the northwest and the brunt fell upon the Hatamti gate at this corner ... Within the gate are traces of the counter wall raised by the inhabitants in their last extremity” (History of Assyria, p. 637).
4.In the final hours of the attack the Ninevites would be drunk (1:10; 3:11)	4.Diodorus Siculus (ca. 20 B.C.) wrote, “The Assyrian king ... distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions ... While the whole army was thus carousing, the friends of Arbakes learned from some deserters of the slackness and drunkenness which prevailed in the enemy’s camp and

<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be amazed* (p. 97). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, E. E. (1985). *Nahum*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1495). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

	made an unexpected attack by night” (Bibliotheca Historica 2. 26. 4)
5.Nineveh would be destroyed by a flood (1:8; 2:6, 8).	5.Diodorus wrote that in the third year of the siege heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood part of the city and break part of the walls (Bibliotheca Historica 2. 26. 9; 2. 27.3). Xenophon referred to terrifying thunder (presumably with a storm) associated with the city’s capture (Anabasis, 3. 4. 12). Also the Khosr River, entering the city from the northwest at the Ninlil Gate and running through the city in a southwesterly direction, may have flooded because of heavy rains, or the enemy may have destroyed its sluice gate.
6.Nineveh would be destroyed by fire (1:10; 2:13; 3:15).	6.Archeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood, charcoal, and ashes. “There was no question about the clear traces of burning of the temple (as also in the palace of Sennacherib), for a layer of ash about two inches thick lay clearly defined in places on the southeast side about the level of the Sargon pavement” (R. Campbell Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson, A Century of Exploration at Nineveh. London: Luzac, 1929, pp. 45, 77).
7.The city’s capture would be attended by a great massacre of people (3:3).	7.“In two battles fought on the plain before the city the rebels defeated the Assyrians ... so great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream, mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance” (Diodorus, Bibliotheca Historica 2. 26. 6–7).
8.Plundering and pillaging would accompany the overthrow of the city (2:9–10).	8.According to the Babylonian Chronicle, “Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off. The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap” (Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, 2:420).
9.When Nineveh would be captured its people would try to escape (2:8)	9.“Sardanapalus [another name for king Sin-shar-ishkun] sent away his three sons and two daughters with much treasure into Paphlagonia, to the governor of Kattos, the most loyal of his subjects” (Diodorus, Bibliotheca Historica, 2. 26. 8
10. The Ninevite officers would weaken and flee (3:17).	10. The Babylonian Chronicle states that “[The army] of Assyria deserted [lit., ran away before] the king” (Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, 2:420).
11. Nineveh’s images and idols would be destroyed (1:14).	11. R. Campbell Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson reported that the statue of the goddess Ishtar lay headless in the debris of Nineveh’s ruins (“The British Museum Excavations on the Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh, 1930–1,” Annals of Archeology and Anthropology. 19, pp. 55–6).
12. Nineveh’s destruction would be final (1:9, 14).	12. Many cities of the ancient Near East were rebuilt after being destroyed (e.g., Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon) but not Nineveh.

God called Nineveh, “*that great city*”, but in less than 150 years after he made that statement, He brought Nineveh down.

I wonder how long it will take for our proud and strong nation to be brought down low?

Someone has stated that the average life of the great civilizations of the world has been about 200 years. He goes on to say that these civilizations have progressed (if that's the right word) through the following stages:

from bondage to spiritual faith

from spiritual faith to courage

from courage to liberty

from liberty to abundance

from abundance to selfishness

from selfishness to complacency

from complacency to apathy

from apathy back to bondage<sup>9</sup>

(Note – this quote has been attributed to many people, and is unverifiable)

## I God's Message Against Nineveh (Chapter 1)

### A Nahum's Announcement (v. 1)

Nahum calls his message both a burden (Hebrew – *massa*) and a vision (Hebrew – *chazown*). A burden is simply something that is heavy to lift or carry. God showed Nahum a vision of what He was about to do to the people of Nineveh, and it would become something that was heavy for him to carry, until he delivered the message. Nahum not only saw what God was going to do, he also was aware, through this vision, of what the people of Assyria had done and were still doing. Nahum also had knowledge about Assyria from the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah (2 Kings), and Ezra (2 Chronicles).

It is interesting that this burden or judgment against Nineveh was not going to be pardoned or even postponed as it was when Jonah delivered his message more than 100 years previously. God knew that this time Nineveh was beyond hope. It's not that Nineveh couldn't repent again, God knew that they wouldn't. Any warning would go unheeded. That is why this burden of Nineveh was not given to the Ninevites, it was given to the people of Judah, who would be comforted by the message. Only God knows when a nation or even a person passes the point of no return. Pharaoh's heart was hardened, but only after he had initially hardened it himself against God (Exodus 8:15 and 32), and only after he willfully and stubbornly rejected the word and will of God by refusing to let the people of God leave Egypt. The Book of Romans speaks of a reprobate mind in people, which God "gave them over to", which seems to indicate that their consciences are seared (1 Timothy 4:2) to the point where they have no desire to repent. Again, only God can judge when a person or nation gets to that point, because He alone knows peoples' hearts. We cannot see people's hearts, and we should never give up trying to pray for them or sow the seeds of the gospel to them.

### B God's Attributes (vs. 2 – 8)

These verses clearly declare:

#### 1 God's Punishment to His Enemies

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<sup>9</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). Thru the Bible commentary (electronic ed., Vol. 3, pp. 813–814). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*"God is jealous, and revengeth;...and is furious"*

*"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a **jealous** God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" - (Exodus 20:5)*

*"Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a **jealous** God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth."*  
(Deuteronomy 6:13-15)

God's jealousy is also an indication of his personality. He is a person. He also grieves, he gets angry, he loves, and he hates.

It is important to note that God's enemy, in this case, the Nation of Assyria, particularly the City of Nineveh. But, is it possible that there were some individuals within Nineveh who were righteous? What would happen to them? God told Abraham that He would not destroy them if He found ten righteous within the city. He did not find ten righteous, but He did spare the few righteous that He found. (genesis 18:22 – 33; 19:22)

## 2 God's Patience for His People (slow to anger)

Paul spoke of God's goodness and severity (Romans 11:22). Here also, Nahum speaks of God's hatred for sin, and His fury toward unrepentant sinners; but he also mentions God's patience with His people. God was also patient with the Ninevites. He gave them an opportunity to repent, which they heeded for a while, but later forsook.

*"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." (Psalm 103:8)*

*"And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." (Jonah 4:2)*

If God is longsuffering, we ought to be longsuffering also and slow to anger:

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)*

*"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Colossians 3:12-13)*

## 3 God's Power over His Creation

God created nature, and He is sovereign over it. (Job 38 – 39; 41)

From Bible Doctrines I, in our study of Theology, we learn that God's attributes also include:

### **Natural Attributes**

Omniscience

Omnipotence

Omnipresence

Eternality

Self-Existence

Immutability

### **Moral Attributes**

Justice

Righteousness

Wrath

Holiness – His Emphatic Attribute – the one which God emphasizes the most.

Mercy

Grace

Patience

Goodness

Love

Truth

Wisdom

### **C God's Anger toward Nineveh (vs. 9 – 12a, 14)**

Verse 11 could surely be a reference to Sennacherib who challenged Hezekiah (see Isaiah 36:1 – 10)

### **D God's Answer to Judah (vs. 1:12b, 13, 15)**

The good tidings in verse 15 were that Nineveh was finally destroyed. However, the people of Judah would soon realize that a new enemy (Babylon) would soon replace the Assyrians. This verse was very similar to Isaiah 52:7 where it referred to the defeat of Babylon.

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah 52:7)*

This verse was also quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15 in reference to those who preach the gospel.

*"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15)*

Read Romans 10: 5 – 17 – It is interesting that the context of Romans is radically different from both the contexts of Isaiah and Nahum, though his practical application of the verse is spot on.

## **II God's Movement Against Nineveh (Chapter 2)**

Chapter two will describe in vivid language the destruction of Nineveh, which would be accomplished at the hands of Nabopolassar of Babylon and his son Nubuchadnezzar in 612 BC. The Medes also assisted the Babylonians. In the distant future, it will be the Medes and Persians destroying the Babylonians.

McGee states:

What we have, therefore, in the Book of Nahum is a very vivid prophecy of the total annihilation of this city. The city was so completely destroyed that it was not until 1850 that the site of Nineveh was located and excavated. A great deal has been learned about the city of Nineveh and the Assyrian civilization through that excavation.<sup>10</sup>

Nahum was not alone in prophesying the destruction of Assyria. (See Isaiah 10:24 – 27; Isaiah 14:24 – 25; Isaiah 30:31 – 33; Isaiah 31:8 - 9; Zephaniah 2:13 – 15) Jeremiah wrote about the destruction of Assyria from the vantage point of history:

*"Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria." (Jeremiah 50:17-18)*

#### **A The Sight of the Attackers (vs. 1 – 4)**

These verses describe what the people of Nineveh saw when the armies of the Babylonians and Medes appeared at their gates.

V. 1 – *"He that dasheth in pieces"* is a reference to Babylon, the conquering army:

*"Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." (Psalm 137:7-9)*

The second part of the verse (after the colon) could be the report of the watchers on the wall of the city as they saw the advancing enemy. They would vainly attempt to muster the courage and strength of the people.

V. 2 – Jacob is a reference to the northern kingdom, which had been destroyed at least 60 years prior to this prophecy by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Israel is probably a reference to what was left of the northern and southern kingdoms, which remained in Judah. God was going to restore both of these kingdoms in the future. Interestingly, Assyria was the tool that God used to judge Israel in the past, and in the future, God would use Babylon. However, both these nations would be judged by God for their treatment of Israel.

*"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:7)*

God will allow bad people to do bad things to God's people at times, but God will judge those that harm his people. Satan was permitted to afflict Job, but he will be judged for it.

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<sup>10</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 826). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The “emptiers” are the Assyrians, and the vine branches are the people of God. (See Psalm 80:8 – 16; Isaiah 5:1 - 7) God allowed the Assyrians to empty Israel, and God will allow (in Nahum’s future) the Babylonians to “empty” the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Vs. 3 – 4 describe what the people of Nineveh saw as the army of Babylon gathered outside of the city, destroying the surrounding woods and suburbs. Then, as they entered the city these same chariots are wreaking havoc and destruction in the city streets. No doubt, the Assyrians were using their chariots as well, and they were clashing with the enemy in the streets.

One of the first thoughts that come to my mind as we study this prophecy is Galatians 6:7:

*"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* (Galatians 6:7-8)

Assyria was a very brutal nation, and she was finally going to reap what she had sown. McGee says this about Assyria’s brutality:

Assyria had been a very brutal nation, one of the most brutal nations the world has ever seen. For example, one of the things which the Assyrians did to an enemy was to bury him out in the desert sand right up to his chin. Then they would put a thong through his tongue and leave him out in the hot blazing sun, first to go mad, and then to die. That was one of the “nice little things” the Assyrians came up with. They also had several other little surprises for their enemies. It is said that when the Assyrians were on the march, in many places an entire community which lay in the line of their march would commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of brutal Assyrians. They were dreaded and feared in the ancient world. We find here in the Book of Nahum that Assyria is again beginning to move, but now their movement is in retreat. They are no longer the aggressor, but the Medes and the Babylonians are coming up against them.<sup>11</sup>

Practical thought. Unmerciful and brutal people who reject Christ will reap for all eternity the evil that they have sown on the earth. God’s people, however, will receive correction for the things we do here that hurt others, but we will also reap eternal rewards for the good things that we do here on earth. The passage that we just quoted from in Galatians goes on to encourage believers to do right.

*"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 6:9-10)

Note – some have erroneously misinterpreted v. 4, claiming that Nahum was prophesying here of automobiles. I can see how they could get that, but it does not fit at all with the historical context.

## **B The Spoil of the City (vs. 5 – 10)**

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<sup>11</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). Thru the Bible commentary (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 824). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

V. 5 describes the fearful leaders of the Army of Assyria as they prepared to meet the attack of the Babylonians and Medes. Ironside believes the stumbling was caused by drunkenness.<sup>12</sup>

V. 6 describes the flooding that was responsible for destroying at least part of the city.

The Khoser River, which ran through the city was dammed up initially, and then the waters were released, which destroyed the palace. The attackers enjoyed a simple victory, not because of their superior might, but because it was decreed by God. God raises them up, and God brings them down.

MacArthur says that Nineveh was located at a place where three rivers came together, the Tigris and two smaller rivers.<sup>13</sup>

McGee states:

Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian, tells us that Nineveh had fifteen hundred towers, each of which was two hundred feet high. But at the time of the siege, the Tigris River rose up and flooded, and it took out an entire section of the wall of the city. The river did what the enemy could not do—it breached the walls of Nineveh. Then the enemy was able to come in and penetrate the city itself. They opened the canals used for irrigation and thus flooded the palace. This is the way in which the enemy was able to take the city. The breach in the wall was so great that the chariots of the enemy could get in, and what is described in verse 4 is nothing in the world but the chariot battle which took place at that time.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible Knowledge Commentary states:

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 Khoser 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 ... Khoser [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<sup>15</sup>

I believe that the flooding of these rivers enabled the Babylonians and Medes. It seems that God was assisting them.

Ironside states:

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<sup>12</sup> Ironside, H. A. (1909). *Notes on the Minor Prophets*. (p. 265). Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 1313). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

<sup>14</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 825). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>15</sup> 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. 1500–1501). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Diodorus Siculus describes the end of the siege in the following language: "There was an old prophecy that Nineveh should not be taken till the river became an enemy to the city. And in the third year of the siege, the river being swollen with continual rains, overflowed every part of the city, and broke down the wall for twenty furlongs; then the king, thinking that the oracle was fulfilled, and the river become an enemy to the city, built a large funeral pile in the palace, and collecting together all his wealth and his concubines and eunuchs, burnt himself and the palace with them all; and the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made and took the city."<sup>16</sup>

V. 7 – There are two schools of thought on the meaning of this verse. "Huzzab" has been stated by some to be the queen of Nineveh, though the name does not appear elsewhere in history. MacArthur believes that Huzzab is a reference to Ishtar, the goddess of the Nineveh, which was taken by the attackers to demoralize them.<sup>17</sup>

The other thought has to do with the meaning of the word. "Huzzab" means, "it is appointed" or "it is decreed", which would send the message to the defending Ninevites that their efforts were totally in vain. They were not just resisting an advancing human army, they were resisting God.

V. 8 – Between the flood of water and the flood of soldiers, there is no hope for Nineveh. She wants to stand, but the onslaught is overwhelming. The retreat from the city cannot be stopped.

Vs. 9 – 10 describe the looting and plunder that take place after the battle is over. Assyria had the largest supply of silver and gold in the world. They had been extracting whatever they wanted from other nations for a long time, and Nineveh was no doubt loaded with wealth of all kinds. The people of Nineveh were terror stricken, and were losing everything.

Rabshakeh would take money from the cities they threatened before he conquered them:

*"Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, **Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern;"** (Isa 36:16)*

The blackness may be a reference to sackcloth and ashes. The Assyrians knew that they were despised by their enemies, and justifiably so. They knew that they could expect no quarter from their enemies, as they gave no mercy to those that they conquered.

### **C The Slaughter of the Leaders (vs. 11 – 13)**

Nahum uses the illustration of a lion that mercilessly destroys its prey for the benefit of his lioness and his cubs. However, here the lion will be devoured, and all of his children destroyed.

Notice v. 13 – "*I am against thee*". This is about as strong a rebuke as God will give.

How sad. Nineveh once had great light, but they turned away from it.

Jesus said:

*"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"* (Matthew 6:23)

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<sup>16</sup> Ironside, H. A. (1909). Notes on the Minor Prophets. (pp. 265–266). Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.

<sup>17</sup> Mac Arthur, J., (p. 1313).

### III God's Motives Against Nineveh (Chapter 3)

God will now give the reasons for the destruction of Nineveh.

#### A Because of their Ruthlessness (vs. 1 – 3)

Nineveh was known for being heartless toward those they conquered. They slaughtered young and old, men and women. Those that did survive were turned into slaves, and were brutally treated. The shedding of the blood of innocent people was a very serious offence in the sight of God.

Notice in v. 1 that the Assyrians were guilty of lies. They used falsehood to give their enemies a sense of safety, but eventually they would completely ravage them. They took everything that they could get their hands on.

It is a matter of debate as to who vs. 2 and 3 refer to. Is it a reference to Assyria's treatment of her enemies, or is it referring to the conquering of the Ninevites by the Babylonians and Medes. I think both interpretations would be accurate as the Assyrians certainly did behave this way, and they also would reap in judgment what they sowed.

#### B Because of their Religion (Idolatry - vs. 4 – 7)

Idolatry is often closely associated with prostitution. The goddess Ishtar was the chief idol of Nineveh. Ishtar was the goddess of passion, fertility, and war. "What we believe determines how we behave." (Warren Wiersbe) Assyria spread this immoral, and idolatrous worship system all over its empire.

In ancient times, prostitutes were often humiliated publically by the lifting up of their skirts over their heads. God was going to publically humiliate Nineveh.

Notice in v. 7 that no comforters could be found because even the pagan nations hated the Assyrians.

#### C Because of their Self-Regard (Pride - vs. 8 – 19)

These verses describe a once powerful nation, with an abundance of possessions that they had plundered from their victims. They were on top of the world, they were full of pride, they feared no one; but now they are being brought low by an omnipotent God; a God who they once knew, but had long since forsaken.

Vs. 8 – 10 describe the destruction of the City of Thebes (No Amon), which, interestingly enough, was destroyed by the Assyrians. MacArthur states:

Nahum sets forth the third and final charge against Nineveh: they hadn't learned from No Amon. 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, her end would be like that of No Amon.<sup>18</sup>

Vs. 11 – 19 describe the utter inability of Nineveh to turn back the enemy.

Notice v. 11 – They will be like drunken men, whether literally or figuratively. A drunken man might be bold, but he cannot fight or defend himself effectively.

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<sup>18</sup> MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 1314). Nashville, TN: Word Pub

Notice v. 12 – When a fig tree is ripe, the fruit just falls off of the tree. The defenses of Nineveh will be like the fruit on the fig tree.

V. 13 – Notice the reference to women. God is mocking the men of Nineveh, calling them women who will not be able to keep the fortifications of the city intact. The enemy will storm in almost unopposed.

In v. 14, God continues to taunt them. He challenges them to try to form a defense, though He states that it will be futile.

Vs. 15 – 17 – Cankerworms, locusts, and grasshoppers are all synonymous or, at the very least similar. They travel in bands devouring whatever they want, but they leave as soon as the food runs out. God states that the leaders of Nineveh are like these locusts who leave quickly when it does not advantage them.

**Practical truth:** Jesus talks about hirelings who leave the flock unprotected when there is danger:

*"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." (John 10:11-13)*

Notice v. 18 – “shepherds” and “nobles”

Nineveh will literally dissolve quickly because there is no strong leadership. America is dissolving today, not because of an enemy without but rather, the enemy within. We have few strong, godly men in positions of leadership today. The homes are failing today also because there are few godly dads assuming their responsibilities.

V. 19 – the people around them will be cheering, especially those who were oppressed by the Assyrians.

## **Conclusion**

The City of Nineveh once had proportionately more saved people in it than any other city in history. They had all repented at the preaching of Jonah, but within 150 years, they had rejected God to such an extent that God had to bring total destruction. I wonder what God is going to have to do to America?

*"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." - (Proverbs 14:34)*