

D&D&D

Nahum 2:1-10 April 3, 2024

The opening 24 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan* changed movies forever. Spielberg's epic set a new standard for brutality and intensity that filmmakers have been imitating ever since.

Nahum chapter 2 is like the opening of *Saving Private Ryan*. It depicts the fall of Nineveh in shocking, visceral terms. There's no question who is going to win this battle. In fact, the scene is depicted as if *all* the casualties are on Assyria's side.

As the smoke of the battle clears, Nahum describes what he sees with three words: "Desolation, decimation, devastation." The Lord God was coming, and hell on earth was coming with Him.

Nahum 2:1 - One who scatters is coming up against you. Man the fortifications! Watch the road! Brace yourself! Summon all your strength!

We're going to move in and out of the city - one instant hearing Nahum talk to the Ninevites, in another instant we hear shouts from the soldiers. Suddenly we sweep down onto the Babylonian siege ramp, then to the rushing rivers flowing through the city. One commentary described the passage as a kaleidoscope of destruction.¹ It's an explosion of chaos and violence.

Nahum's calls for them to prepare themselves aren't serious - this is ironic satire, maybe even sarcasm.² He's *mockingly* cheering them on.³ There was no way to prepare because this was history written in advance. Nahum uses what is sometimes called the "prophetic perfect" tense - he talks about these things as if they're already done, because *that's* how sure it was to happen.⁴ Your version may not say "One...*is coming* against you," but, "*has come up*" - past tense.

The Assyrians also had no hope in this fight because of *Who* they were fighting. Their eyes told them that it was a coalition of Medes and Babylonians (the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar's father), but in reality it was Someone else Who was coming to crush them: The Scatterer. The title means the One Who overflows and disperses.⁵

For centuries the Assyrians inhaled cities and peoples, gathering them under her control through savage atrocities. Now, the Lord was going to break this empire into pieces and scatter them.

It's hard to overestimate Assyria's prominence was when Nahum wrote. They were the superpower. They had the dominant military. They were the first to make war a science.⁶ King Sennacherib spent

¹ David Gunn, John Roberson, Anthony Gelston *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*

² *The New American Commentary Volume 20: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, And Zephaniah*

³ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁴ Walter Kaiser *The Preachers Commentary, Volume 23*

⁵ *The Lexham Theological Wordbook*

⁶ *The Assyrians: The History of the Most Prominent Empire of the Ancient Near East*

six years building an armory in Nineveh that covered 40 acres. His son, Esarhaddon, enlarged it. They widened the royal road inside the city so that it could facilitate troop movements. They were all about war and conquest and violence. But now, the *Smasher*⁷ was coming with His war club.⁸

Nahum 2:2 - ²For the Lord will restore the majesty of Jacob, yes, the majesty of Israel, though ravagers have ravaged them and ruined their vine branches.

One of the main reasons why God was going to judge them was because they ravaged His people, Israel. The northern kingdom was totally destroyed by Assyria back in 721 BC. The southern kingdom was also terribly oppressed by this empire for many decades.

The question is: *Why* did God allow these things to happen to His chosen people? His people had turned their backs on Yahweh. In fact, they were largely going along with the Assyrian culture, worshiping Assyrian gods, and so, God raised up these merciless people to discipline them.

The testimony of the Minor Prophets is that God's people cannot live in sin and expect no consequences. That's not the case. In fact, judgment *begins* in the house of God.⁹ That's why Assyria had the power they had. That's why Judah was a vassal state in constant danger.

If you're a Christian and you're living in habitual sin - you're ignoring God's commands or overstepping the boundaries He's given you, you're devoting yourself to the idols of the world or refusing to obey Him in some way, you should expect consequences from God. He loves you too much to allow you to destroy your life and He will not be mocked.

In the end, God's would reconcile His people to Himself. Yes, we fall short and make mistakes, but our God is a *reconciler*. He says that after all Israel did, after all their unfaithfulness, "I will restore the majesty of Jacob and Israel." How could He possibly do that when "Israel," as far as the 10 northern tribes, no longer existed? With God it was possible. Here's what God said through Isaiah:

Isaiah 27:13 - ¹³On that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those lost in the land of Assyria will come, as well as those dispersed in the land of Egypt; and they will worship the Lord at Jerusalem on the holy mountain.

The people of Israel were *wayward*, but they weren't *lost*. That's still God's plan for Israel, by the way. He will restore His people, not just to life, but to *splendor* and *majesty* by His grace and power.

Nahum 2:3-4 - ³The shields of his warriors are dyed red; the valiant men are dressed in scarlet. The fittings of the chariot flash like fire on the day of its battle preparations, and the spears are brandished. ⁴The chariots dash madly through the streets; they rush around in the plazas. They look like torches; they dart back and forth like lightning.

⁷ James Smith *The Minor Prophets*

⁸ Ralph Smith *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 32: Micah-Malachi*

⁹ 1 Peter 4:17

These invaders were quite fond of red in their militaries.¹⁰ They wore scarlet tunics. Their shields were either covered in skins dyed red or plated in copper which gave off a red glow in the sunlight.

There's another possibility here, though. Some scholars say that Nahum means that the shields have *been reddened*, and the soldiers are *stained* in crimson.¹¹ Meaning that, as the Ninevite watchmen looked down the road, they saw the enemies advancing, covered in the bloody gore of the Assyrians they already slaughtered in the cities along the way.

The chariots of the day were the weapons of mass destruction. They were often fitted with scythes on the wheels, maybe 3 feet in each direction.¹² Think *Ben Hur's* chariot race. Greek historians talk about heads rolling in their wake, rib cages torn open, limbs shorn from bodies. Here's a quote: "*Everything arms and men was horribly mangled.*"¹³ Even if you killed the driver of the chariot, the horses would keep running, and the chariot would continue it's gruesome work.

In a battle in 395 BC, just two Persian chariots caught hundreds of Greek soldiers in the open, charged, and scattered the Greeks who were then finished by the cavalry.¹⁴

These sort of chariots were now racing through Nineveh - Nineveh which had widened their streets so that troops and chariots could move easily through. Now the people were trapped in a cage with these highly maneuverable death wagons.¹⁵

Nahum 2:5 - ⁵ He gives orders to his officers; they stumble as they advance. They race to its wall; the protective shield is set in place.

In a few of these verses, scholars have a hard time determining if we're looking at the invaders or the defenders.¹⁶ But that adds to the chaotic frenzy of the scene.

The Babylonians and Medes came against Nineveh for a three year period. At first, the Assyrians won a few victories. But then, at the end, there was a three-month siege and we're seeing the breach here. The ramp is built, and this "siege mantel" would be put in place to protect the attackers from arrows or other items that the Ninevites would drop from the top of the wall.¹⁷

Archaeologists have found an old Assyrian siege ramp. It was 230 feet wide at its base and was made of 14,000-21,000 tons of stone.¹⁸ This was ferocious war. Both sides going all out.

¹⁰ Charles Lee Feinberg *Jonah, Micah And Nahum*

¹¹ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

¹² Xenophon *Cyropaedia*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 7: Daniel And The Minor Prophets*

¹⁶ James Smith *The Minor Prophets*

¹⁷ James Bruckner *The NIV Application Commentary: Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*

¹⁸ Eckart Frahm *Assyria: The Rise And Fall Of The World's First Empire*

There are two reasons why troops stumbled. If it's the invaders, it's because there are so many dead bodies, they're literally tripping over the corpses. If it's the defenders, it's because when the breach happened, most of the army was drunk! That's something Nahum prophesied and it's attested in ancient history. The Assyrians had a small victory, so the king distributed a bunch of meat and wine and everyone started carousing and getting hammered. Some of the wiser soldiers deserted to the enemy, who heard the city was undefended and started attacking at night.¹⁹

Nahum 2:6 - ⁶The river gates are opened, and the palace erodes away.

Nahum gives at least 12 specific prophecies about the fall of Nineveh that were literally fulfilled.²⁰ This is a big one - that a river would suddenly flood, and bring down the wall and palace.

Nineveh was built on the bank of the Tigris river. Two tributaries ran *through* the city. They had an elaborate system of sluice gates to control the flow of water.²¹ This helped make Nineveh strong and prosperous, but it was also a concern for the leaders of the city. Sennacherib specifically fortified the palace foundations with "mighty slabs of limestone" in the decades prior, just in case the river flooded.²² But, during the siege, multiple ancient historians record that sudden downpours flooded the river which then brought down more than 2 miles of the wall and part of the palace. Archaeology also backs up this account.²³

When the flood came and the wall came down and the palace started to crumble, the Assyrian king *"resolved not to fall into the hands of his enemies, he prepared a gigantic pyre in the royal precincts, heaped up all his gold and silver and his kingly raiment as well upon it, shut up his concubines and eunuchs in the chamber he had made in the midst of the pyre, and burnt himself and the palace together with all of them."*²⁴

The Assyrians had flooded cities in conquest, showing no mercy. Sennacherib called this palace the "palace with no rival."²⁵ They were reaping what they sowed.

Nahum 2:7 - ⁷Beauty is stripped; she is carried away; her ladies-in-waiting moan like the sound of doves and beat their breasts.

Linguists struggle with this verse. Your version may say something like "it is decreed," or it may refer to some feminine figure like my translation does. It could mean the queen of the city, the goddess Ishtar, or the city itself. It doesn't really matter. *All* would be destroyed and carried off. One commentary notes that "carried away" carries with it the sense of "being led up to sacrifice."²⁶

¹⁹ C.J. Gadd *The Fall Of Nineveh*

²⁰ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

²¹ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

²² D.D. Luckenbill *Ancient Records Of Assyria And Babylon*

²³ *NET*

²⁴ Gadd

²⁵ *EBC*

²⁶ W.A. Maier *The Book Of Nahum*

Nahum 2:8 - ⁸Nineveh has been like a pool of water from her first days, but they are fleeing. "Stop! Stop!" they cry, but no one turns back.

This great metropolis had amazing reservoirs of strength and power and treasure and resources and population. But they didn't have the *one* thing that makes a society strong: a relationship with the God of the Bible. All that other stuff didn't matter one bit when judgment came. It was every man for himself. No one helping anyone, everyone just running and dying and despairing. History records that people fled the city, casting themselves into the river rather than face the invaders.²⁷

Nahum 2:9 - ⁹"Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold!" There is no end to the treasure, an abundance of every precious thing.

Assyria had plundered nations for *hundreds* of years. Nahum says they stripped the world like locusts in a field. Breaking into the vaults of Nineveh would've been like the end of *National Treasure*. It was the richest city in the Ancient Near East.²⁸ But their wealth could not save them.

Nahum 2:10 - ¹⁰Desolation, decimation, devastation! Hearts melt, knees tremble, insides churn, every face grows pale!

Your version may use other words like, "empty, desolate, and waste," but in the Hebrew, Nahum uses rhyming, assonant, alliterative words. One linguist calls it intense sound play.²⁹ Another says it imitates the sound of a bottle being emptied of liquid.³⁰

Assyria's reign of terror would end in terror. They would be hollowed out, emptied of everything they had. Everything they thought made them great. Everything they thought made them safe. It would all be taken because God was against them.

A consistent theme in this little book is how what was *bad* news for Assyria was *good* news for Judah. That idea continues in our time. The Scatterer is coming again! Some will mourn at His return, because for them He's coming with judgment. But if you're a *believer*, then the coming of the King is our blessed hope. He's coming to us with a *reward* in His hand. Which group are you a part of? If you're not a Christian, nothing will save you from the wrath of God. If you *are* a Christian, there is nothing that can separate you from His covenant of love.

James 5:7-8 - ⁷Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near.

²⁷ Gadd

²⁸ EBC

²⁹ Alter

³⁰ Feinberg