



## Nahum - Chapter Two

### Summary of Chapter Two

In this next major section of the book, the focus falls on Nineveh. Nahum's prediction reads like an eyewitness account of the city being attacked, overrun by the enemy, and plundered.

### **IV**      **Nahum 2:1-13 - The Destruction of the Wicked City**

Refer to the summary above.

#### **IV.a**      **Nahum 2:1 - The Beginning of the Attack on Nineveh**

This word for the enemy (viewed here as a collective whole) foretells the outcome of the siege. Nineveh will be taken, and any Ninevites not slaughtered will flee before the conquerors (Nahum 3:17-18) or be taken into exile. Ultimately, it is God who 'scatters.'

- <sup>1</sup>      A shatterer has come up against you.  
Guard the ramparts;  
watch the road;  
gird your loins;  
collect all your strength.

#### **Nahum 2:1**

**A shatterer.** In his vision the prophet now sees a mighty army coming against the city of Nineveh.

**Has come up against you.** A technical phrase signifying impending hostile military action, e.g. Judges 1:1, 1 Samuel 7:7, 1 Kings 15:17 and 2 Kings 18:13.

Guard the ramparts. Nineveh is told to get ready for battle. Nahum writes as if he were at Nineveh in 612 BC, speaking to the Ninevites with underlying sarcasm.

#### IV.b Nahum 2:2 - Reasons for Judgement

Here Nahum gives one reason for the fall of Nineveh: God had used the Assyrians as his scourge of discipline on unfaithful Judah, but this scourge would no longer be needed because the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob.

The true majesty of Judah, basically what was left of the nation Israel - the northern tribes having been 'lost' in the Assyrian exile - was spiritual, not secular or political.

<sup>2</sup> (For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob,  
as well as the majesty of Israel,  
though ravagers have ravaged them  
and ruined their branches.)

#### Nahum 2:2

For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob. In this case, part of God's restoration for his people is connected to judgement and destruction on their enemies, those who have emptied them out and ruined their vine branches. They now will face destruction from the shatterer.

God separated Israel from the nations to be devoted to him; with them he made his covenants; from them would come the Messiah: <<*They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen*>> (Romans 9:4-5). This majesty, then, involved having a covenant relationship with the Lord and giving evidence of that relationship in godly living.

Ravagers. The Assyrians plundered Judah (v.13).

Their branches are the individual clans, families, or members of the southern kingdom, likened to a vineyard; refer also to Isaiah 5:1-7.

#### IV.c Nahum 2:3-5 - Military Action at Nineveh

Nahum describes how the invading army closes in on the city.

<sup>3</sup> The shields of his warriors are red;  
his soldiers are clothed in crimson.  
The metal on the chariots flashes

on the day when he musters them;  
the chargers prance.

- <sup>4</sup> The chariots race madly through the streets,  
they rush to and fro through the squares;  
their appearance is like torches,  
they dart like lightning.

#### Nahum 2:3-4

The shields of his warriors are red. Nahum can see it all in his vision. The battle for Nineveh is fierce and bloody, and although the defence is prepared they will be conquered. Either their shields were painted red, or they were permanently stained with the blood of defeated foes from previous military campaigns. Ezekiel describes the Babylonian troops as being dressed in red: <<***But she carried her whorings further; she saw male figures carved on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, with belts around their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers – a picture of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea***>> (Ezekiel 23:14-15).

His and he are references to the ‘scatterer’ mentioned in v.1. The attacking army was a coalition made up of Medes, Persians and Babylonians, and possibly Scythians. Cyaxares (625-585 BC) was the leader of the Medes and he played the dominant role in the destruction of Nineveh, while Nabopolassar (626-605 BC) led the Babylonians.

The streets and the squares are those of the suburbs surrounding Nineveh, the first areas to be overrun by the attacking armies.

The metal on the chariots flashes, their appearance is like torches. The sunlight reflects off of the metal pieces of the chariots adding to the fearsome appearance.

They dart like lightning. This could refer again to the light reflecting, or indicate the swift movement of the chariots which were fast and highly manoeuvrable.

- <sup>5</sup> He calls his officers;  
they stumble as they come forward;  
they hasten to the wall,  
and the mantelet is set up.

#### Nahum 2:5

The attacking army now reaches the wall of Nineveh proper.

He calls his officers. He, the attacking armies (v.3), may be so eager to be involved in the attack that he almost forgets to delegate parts of the operation to his officers. These officers, eager both to join in the attack themselves and to please their superior(s), so rush into the action that they practically stumble over one another. Or, as they move toward Nineveh's wall, they may stumble over the wreckage in the devastated suburbs as well as the dead and wounded who had fought to protect the city: <<*The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for warrior has stumbled against warrior; both have fallen together*>> (Jeremiah 46:12).

The mantelet is set up. This could also be rendered as 'siege tower', a covering that protects the attacking soldiers from arrows, spears, and other objects thrown down on them by the defenders on the wall.

#### IV.d Nahum 2:6-9 - The Fall and Plundering of Nineveh

Now Nahum takes the reader into the city as it falls to the invaders.

<sup>6</sup> The river gates are opened,  
the palace trembles.

#### Nahum 2:6

The river gates are opened. The Khoser River flowed through Nineveh; north of the city were dams, most likely with gates to regulate the flow of this river. The besieging coalition could easily have closed the gates thus cutting off this water supply, waited until a considerable quantity of water collected, and then opened the gates. The resulting mass of water crashing against and through Nineveh would have done much damage to portions of the city's wall, system of gates, and internal structures, thus greatly aiding the besiegers. Another river that probably flowed through Nineveh was the Tebiltu, which could have been used by the coalition in the same manner. The destruction caused by the waters no doubt was a factor contributing to the short length of the siege – only three months. The palace trembles and melts away because of the floodwaters.

The scenario painted above assumes an actual flood of the city. However, there are many that believe the language is symbolic of a tide of soldiers descending on the fated city, swamping the defenders like a flood: <<*Terrors overtake them like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries them off*>> (Job 27:20), <<*They surround me like a flood all day long; from all sides they close in on me*>> (Psalm 88:17), and: <<*His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall advance like a flood and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress*>> (Daniel 11:10).

7 It is decreed that the city be exiled,  
its slave-women led away,  
moaning like doves  
and beating their breasts.

### Nahum 2:7

It is decreed that the city be exiled. It was quite common for the victors either to take away spoil after destroying the cities they conquered, or they might make them into vassal states, taking regular tribute payments from them: <<*King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute*>> (2 Kings 17:3), and: <<*How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal*>> (Lamentations 1:1). However, the fate of Nineveh is sealed by God's decree that all the inhabitants will be taken away. This was a similar action to that which the Assyrians themselves did with their captive states, including the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Its slave-women led away. This is the part of the vision where the prophet sees the conquerors taking the women and their children, and dispersing them to other parts of the empire as slaves.

Moaning like doves and beating their breasts was a sign of their distress and mourning over their fate, and the fate of their city: <<*But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*>> (Luke 18:13), and those following Jesus to the Cross: <<*A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him*>> (Luke 23:37).

8 Nineveh is like a pool  
whose waters run away.  
'Halt! Halt!' –  
but no one turns back.

### Nahum 2:8

Nineveh is like a pool as a result of the analogy of flood water swamping the city then draining away leaving only devastation. In reality it may have been a tide of soldiers bearing down on the city.

**‘Halt! Halt!’** Nahum places the reader in Nineveh as the city is being entered and overrun by the coalition forces. The reader ‘sees’ the fleeing inhabitants and ‘hears’ some of the Assyrian commanders crying out, “Halt! Stand and fight,” **but no one turns back** to do so. The Assyrians had terrified many, but now they themselves are filled with terror.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Plunder the silver,  
plunder the gold!  
There is no end of treasure!  
An abundance of every precious thing!’

#### **Nahum 2:9**

**Plunder the silver, plunder the gold!** Nineveh was filled with tremendous wealth, due to the plunder seized during numerous military campaigns and the tribute received over the many years Assyria ruled the Near East.

#### **IV.e Nahum 2:10-12 - A Taunting Song Portraying Nineveh’s Destruction**

These verses figuratively portray the obliteration of Nineveh, the extinction of Assyrian nobility, and the termination of Assyrian power.

<sup>10</sup> Devastation, desolation, and destruction!  
Hearts faint and knees tremble,  
all loins quake,  
all faces grow pale!

#### **Nahum 2:10**

**Devastation, desolation, and destruction** are a description of Nineveh emptied of inhabitants due to their fleeing, slaughter, or captivity, and destroyed by the victorious invaders after they have finished their plundering.

**Hearts faint and knees tremble, all loins quake, all faces grow pale!** The Assyrians, who previously had been proud of how they terrorised other peoples, now experience extreme terror for themselves: <<*Terrors frighten them on every side, and chase them at their heels. Their strength is consumed by hunger, and calamity is ready for their stumbling. By disease their skin is consumed, the firstborn of Death consumes their limbs. They are torn from the tent in which they trusted, and are brought to the king of terrors*>> (Job 18:11-14), and: <<*How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!*>> (Psalm 73:19).

- 11 What became of the lions' den,  
the cave of the young lions,  
where the lion goes,  
and the lion's cubs, with no one to disturb them?
- 12 The lion has torn enough for his whelps  
and strangled prey for his lionesses;  
he has filled his caves with prey  
and his dens with torn flesh.

### Nahum 2:11-12

**Lions** is a reference to members of the Assyrian royal house and perhaps its aristocracy, headed by the king. The lion was a symbol for kingship in the ancient Near East: <<*Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness – who dares rouse him up?*>> (Genesis 49:9); the Assyrian kings exhibited ferocity in their attacking and 'devouring' other lands, and called themselves lions. Reliefs on palace walls depicted lions being hunted by the Assyrian rulers.



**Assyrian Lion Relief**

**No one to disturb them.** During the time of Assyrian might, no other nation dared to, or could, attack Nineveh. There was none to terrify those in the city, and particularly the household of the king.

**Enough, prey, torn flesh** describe the vast amounts of plunder taken by the ravenous Assyrians from their brutal, bloody conquest of numerous lands.

#### **IV.f Nahum 2:13 - The Lord speaks a Word of Judgement**

Nahum closes the fourth major portion of the book (vv.1-13) by quoting God's proclamation of judgement against Nineveh. The city will fall because this is the will of the Lord. In v.1 and v.13 Nineveh is addressed as 'you' and 'your,' and both verses express the thought 'against you.'

- 13 See, I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.

## Nahum 2:13

The Lord of hosts. The title is used in Samuel several times and very frequently in the psalms and the prophets. Hosts, Hebrew *tseba'ot*, is probably the plural of an abstract noun meaning something like 'plentifulness' or 'numberlessness'. Hence, it refers to numerous entities such as heavenly bodies in Isaiah 40:26, angelic beings, i.e. the army of the Lord (Joshua 5:14), the armies of Israel (1 Samuel 17:45), or all creatures (Genesis 2:1).

I will burn your chariots is a striking contrast to the swift chariots of the conquering coalition (vv.3-4).

The sword shall devour your young lions. The devouring pride of lions (vv.11-12), the Assyrian warriors, shall now themselves be devoured by the enemy.

The voice of your messengers shall be heard no more. The end of the Assyrian messengers brings about the messenger of peace coming to Judah: <<**Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off**>> (Nahum 1:15).