



## Nahum - Chapter Three

### Summary of Chapter Three

This last major section of the book repeats most of the themes of the preceding section (2:1-13). Absent in Chapter 3 is a reference to the plundering of Nineveh (2:9), although its destruction is assured, and new in this section is the comparison of Nineveh's downfall to the destruction of Thebes (vv.8-11).

### **V**      **Nahum 3:1-19 - Ruin Imminent and Inevitable**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

#### **V.a**      **Nahum 3:1 - Reasons for Judgement**

God provides a summary statement for the reason why Nineveh faced destruction.

<sup>1</sup>      Ah! City of bloodshed,  
         utterly deceitful, full of booty —  
         no end to the plunder!

#### **Nahum 3:1**

**City of bloodshed.** The Assyrians were notorious for the atrocities they committed.

**Utterly deceitful.** Second Kings 18:31-32 is an example of lying ultimately being traced back to the king who ruled from Nineveh (2 Chronicles 28:20). Not only where the rulers of Assyria terribly cruel, they boasted of the cruelty on monuments that exist in museums to this day.

**No end to the plunder!** This was discussed in comments made on Nahum 2:11-13.

## V.b Nahum 3:2-3 - The Slaughter of the Assyrians

Nahum quickly flashes to a vivid picture of the coalition forces attacking and entering Nineveh and slaughtering the Assyrians (Nahum 2:3-5). Again, the details seem to come from an eyewitness.

- <sup>2</sup> The crack of whip and rumble of wheel,  
galloping horse and bounding chariot!
- <sup>3</sup> Horsemen charging,  
flashing sword and glittering spear,  
piles of dead,  
heaps of corpses,  
dead bodies without end –  
they stumble over the bodies!

### Nahum 3:2-3

The crack of whip and rumble of wheel. Nahum portrays what it is like to be in the heart of a battle. There is chaos and death all around.

Dead bodies without end – they stumble over the bodies! This pictures the tragedy of battle and also points to the fate of all humankind who oppose God when the final battle is fought: *<<And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh>>* (Revelation 19:21).

## V.c Nahum 3:4 - The Wickedness of Nineveh

This verse uses figurative language to present reasons for the destruction of Nineveh.

- <sup>4</sup> Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute,  
gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery,  
who enslaves nations through her debaucheries,  
and peoples through her sorcery,

### Nahum 3:4

Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute. As the capital of idolatrous Assyria, Nineveh continually engaged in many violations of God's will. It was bad enough that the people of Nineveh indulged in this sin for themselves; it

was worse that they led the nations into violence, deception, and idolatry. For this, the judgement of God was coming.

Gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery. Nineveh, with its power and wealth, exerted a corrupting influence throughout the Near East: <<*The covered portal for use on the sabbath that had been built inside the palace, and the outer entrance for the king, he removed from the house of the Lord. He did this because of the king of Assyria*>> (2 Kings 16:18).

Who enslaves nations through her debaucheries. The monarchy based in Nineveh did not hesitate to use treachery and deceit to achieve its aims of capturing the people of their opponents and taking them into slavery.

#### V.d Nahum 3:5-7 - The Lord speaks a Word of Judgement

The seductive prostitute Nineveh will receive a punishment befitting her shameful trade. The figurative language dramatically conveys the message that God will bring Nineveh's wicked activity to an end and utterly humiliate the city by having it conquered and devastated. Its disgrace would be internationally known.

<sup>5</sup> I am against you,  
says the Lord of hosts,  
and will lift up your skirts over your face;  
and I will let nations look on your nakedness  
and kingdoms on your shame.

#### Nahum 3:5

I am against you. This repetition from Nahum 2:13 emphasises the certainty of Nineveh's doom. In the first mention, the emphasis was on the military defeat of Nineveh. Now, the emphasis is on the humbling of the city. This is a reminder of the principle of: <<*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (1 Peter 5:5). Nineveh walked in pride, and as a result had the Lord against them. How much better to be humble and receive the grace of God!

<sup>6</sup> I will throw filth at you  
and treat you with contempt,  
and make you a spectacle.

### Nahum 3:6

I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle. The strength of the Word of the Lord is almost a surprise here. He will take the idols of Nineveh and throw them back in their face. Filth, the Hebrew word *shiqquts*, is often translated as ‘abomination’. A similar prophecy was later issued against the land of Philistia: *<<I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites>>* (Zechariah 9:7).

7 Then all who see you will shrink from you and say,  
‘Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?’  
Where shall I seek comforters for you?

### Nahum 3:7

Who will bemoan her? The answer to the rhetorical question is that no one will grieve or comfort, not even some of those who gave in to the enticements of the alluring prostitute but had no real love for her. People will shrink back, or flee, in horror at the sight of what will happen to Nineveh. The prophet warned the people of Jerusalem that they would share a similar fate if they did not repent: *<<Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem, or who will bemoan you? Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare?>>* (Jeremiah 15:5)

The idea behind the Hebrew word for contempt, *nabel*, in v.6 is that something is made weak, foolish, and vile. Nineveh walked high in their pride, but will certainly be brought low, with no one to comfort them, i.e. where shall I seek comforters for you? Although written in a different context, Isaiah spoke a similar statement: *<<These two things have befallen you –who will grieve with you? – devastation and destruction, famine and sword – who will comfort you?>>* (Isaiah 51:19)

### V.e Nahum 3:8-11 - Comparison with the Conquest of Thebes

The prophet now recalls an event that was well known in the Near East, especially to the Assyrians, at the time of his writing: the capture and destruction of the Egyptian city of Thebes by the Assyrians in 664/663 BC. To all who think it is impossible that Nineveh would fall, Nahum says, “Look at what happened to Thebes! This will happen to you as well.”

8 Are you better than Thebes  
that sat by the Nile,  
with water around her,

her rampart a sea,  
water her wall?

### Nahum 3:8

Are you better than Thebes? Nineveh was not better fortified and did not appear more invincible than Thebes, a very important, powerful city located in southern Egypt, about 400 miles or 644 km from the Mediterranean Sea coast.

That sat by the Nile, with water around her. This mighty river, along with canals and channels from the Nile that surrounded most of Thebes, was an aspect of the city's strong defence system and its seeming invulnerability.

Her rampart a sea is a poetic reference to the Nile, which was about half a mile wide at Thebes. The Nile, canals, and channels formed a natural outer wall for the city. Nineveh did not have similar protection. Even if Nineveh had such natural defences, Isaiah points out that God can still breach them: <<*The waters of the Nile will be dried up, and the river will be parched and dry*>> (Isaiah 19:5).

<sup>9</sup> Ethiopia was her strength,  
Egypt too, and that without limit;  
Put and the Libyans were her helpers.

### Nahum 3:9

Ethiopia, Hebrew *Cush*, was the region just south of Egypt.

Egypt refers to military aid coming from northern Egypt.

The location of Put is not certain; perhaps it was situated along the North African coastline, just to the west of Libya, which was just to the west of the Nile delta region of Egypt. While Thebes could count on military assistance from these different areas, Assyria could not rely on help from any region.

<sup>10</sup> Yet she became an exile,  
she went into captivity;  
even her infants were dashed in pieces  
at the head of every street;  
lots were cast for her nobles,  
all her dignitaries were bound in fetters.

### Nahum 3:10

Despite these strategic advantages, Thebes was taken by the Assyrians, sacked, and destroyed, and its inhabitants either slaughtered or taken off as exiles.

Lots were cast. The Assyrian soldiers cast lots to determine who would get the more highly prized men, i.e. those with a good education and quality skills, as slaves. Casting lots for people or their possessions was common practice in the region and remained so for a long time: <<*So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.'* This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots'>> (John 19:24).

<sup>11</sup> You also will be drunken,  
you will go into hiding;  
you will seek  
a refuge from the enemy.

### Nahum 3:11

This verse directly applies vv.8-10: 'Nineveh, you can expect the same!' Just as a drunken man cannot effectively defend himself against an attacker, so Nineveh will not be able to turn back its enemies.

You also. Today's generation are like the Ninevites. They see empires and nations judged in their own day and in history, just like the Assyrians saw Thebes destroyed. Yet they, like the Ninevites, somehow think that they will be spared, despite their sinful arrogance and rebellion. Yet all have a chance of redemption: <<*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*>> (Romans 6:23).

You will go into hiding. Figuratively, Nineveh will be conquered and humiliated such that, if it could, the city would go into hiding from fear and shame: <<*Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'*>> (Revelation 6:15-17). More literally, this could refer to the remnant band of Assyrians who fled to the west and temporarily had their base at Haran. Nineveh will find no refuge from the enemy, unlike those who put their trust in the Lord: <<*The Lord is good, a stronghold on a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him*>> (Nahum 1:7).

V.f Nahum 3:12-19 -  
A Taunting Song Portraying Nineveh's Inevitable Destruction

After finishing the analogy with Thebes, the book concludes with a taunting song presenting Nineveh's total defeat because of the city's ceaseless evil.

<sup>12</sup> All your fortresses are like fig trees  
with first-ripe figs –  
if shaken they fall  
into the mouth of the eater.

<sup>13</sup> Look at your troops:  
they are women in your midst.  
The gates of your land  
are wide open to your foes;  
fire has devoured the bars of your gates.

Nahum 3:12-13

All your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe figs – if shaken they fall into the mouth of the eater. As easily as ripe fruit falls from a shaken tree, so will the strongholds of Nineveh fall before the judgement of God. The Assyrian fortresses surrounding Nineveh will be the first to encounter the advancing enemy army. The coalition forces will easily and quickly take these strongholds, with two results: First, the gates of Assyria will be wide open to their foes since the fortresses which guarded those entrances have been destroyed. Second, the troops, i.e. the soldiers within Nineveh, will be demoralised and filled with fear so that they cannot acquit themselves as men in the coming siege.

Fire has devoured the bars of your gates. The crossbars of the wooden gates provided strength and security, allowing the doors to be firmly locked against an enemy. Once these were destroyed by fire then the gates to the city would simply collapse, allowing the enemy easy access to the city: <<*I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron*>> (Isaiah 45:2).

<sup>14</sup> Draw water for the siege,  
strengthen your forts;  
trample the clay,  
tread the mortar,

take hold of the brick-mould!

### Nahum 3:14

As the enemy draws close, Nahum tells the city to get ready for the siege: <<A shatterer has come up against you. Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your loins; collect all your strength>> (Nahum 2:1). However, any preparations they make will be useless.

Draw water for the siege. The Ninevites can anticipate that the enemy will shut off the city's water supply by closing the river gates, refer to Nahum 2:6, and blocking the aqueduct system built by Sennacherib. Water could be stored inside the city in vessels and cisterns.

Strengthen your forts. The fortresses and other fortifications at the walls and within the city would be strengthened or repaired with bricks, which were made from clay, shaped by moulds, and held together with mortar.

<sup>15</sup> There the fire will devour you,  
the sword will cut you off.  
It will devour you like the locust.  
Multiply yourselves like the locust,  
multiply like the grasshopper!

### Nahum 3:15

No matter how well supplied and fortified Nineveh is, there the inhabitants will either die or be taken away as slaves.

There the fire will devour you. Archæologists have found evidence of a devastating fire at Nineveh. This again adds to the argument that the description of devastation by flood in Chapter 2 was probably symbolic for the swarms of armed men that sacked the city.

The sword will cut you off. There will be mass extermination of the Ninevites, as when a locust plague strips the countryside of all vegetation, e.g. Joel 1:4-10.

Multiply yourselves like the locust, multiply like the grasshopper! Nahum, perhaps sarcastically, tells the Ninevites, in preparation for the siege, to multiply themselves greatly and thus increase their strength. It would not affect the outcome even if they were able to increase their fighting strength: <<They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply; because they have forsaken the Lord to devote themselves to whoredom>> (Hosea 4:10-11).

16 You increased your merchants  
more than the stars of the heavens.  
The locust sheds its skin and flies away.

### Nahum 3:16

You increased your merchants. When Nineveh was the proud capital of a vast empire, her merchants brought enormous wealth to the city. Now, however, these merchants, and the huge treasure in Nineveh, will do the city no good.

The locust sheds its skin and flies away. The enemy, having devoured all that there was in Nineveh through plundering and slaughter and destruction will quickly leave the scene.

17 Your guards are like grasshoppers,  
your scribes like swarms of locusts  
settling on the fences  
on a cold day —  
when the sun rises, they fly away;  
no one knows where they have gone.

### Nahum 3:17

Like swarms of grasshoppers or locusts that quickly fly away and disappear, some of the leading men of Nineveh, who for a while had been very prominent, will flee at the appearance of the enemy overrunning the city.

Scribes were probably a type of official, perhaps secretaries and official recorders.

18 Your shepherds are asleep,  
O king of Assyria;  
your nobles slumber.  
Your people are scattered on the mountains  
with no one to gather them.

19 There is no assuaging your hurt,  
your wound is mortal.  
All who hear the news about you  
clap their hands over you.

For who has ever escaped  
your endless cruelty?

### Nahum 3:18-19

O king of Assyria. Nahum, surveying the wreckage of Nineveh, addresses its monarchy with sarcastic language.

Many of Nineveh's shepherds and nobles are sleeping the slumber of death. Many of the people are forever dispersed: <<'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,' says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones>> (Zechariah 13:7). This verse may imply, since the king is alive to see the aftermath, that a shadow of the Assyrian monarchy would continue briefly after the fall of Nineveh.

The wound that is mortal is a fatal injury. The Assyrian monarchy has received a mortal blow, and the absolute end is imminent. It will not recover in the way of the beast: <<One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast>> (Revelation 13:3).

All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. Nahum ends his prophecy with a view of the righteous and their triumph over the unrighteous. This is something that the people of God need to be frequently reminded of, because it often goes against present appearances. Because Nineveh was so well known, even renowned, for its violence and cruelty, it is no wonder Nahum sees the nations applauding when the city is judged and destroyed.

In Psalm 73, Asaph dealt with this same problem. It seemed to him that the wicked constantly prospered and lived at ease. It troubled him so much that he doubted his own walk with God: <<But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!>> (Psalm 73:17-19).

For Nahum, Asaph, and for Christians today, they can take comfort in knowing that the judgements of the Lord are faithful and true. They do not need to envy the unrighteous or seek vengeance against them. Nahum and Asaph each show that God is more than able to take care of them and his people, each according to God's promise.

Your endless cruelty. The reign of the Assyrian emperors from Nineveh had continually caused terror and suffering. Nahum foretells that the Assyrian monarchy, and Nineveh, will experience this same evil that it meted out to other

peoples of the Near East. Nahum ends his book with a rhetorical question, joining Jonah as the only other biblical writer to do so: <<*And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?*>> (Jonah 4:11).