

The Explanation of Nineveh's Destruction

Nahum 1:15-2:13

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Introduction: We noted last week that Nahum is the companion book to the Book of Jonah. In the words of Paul Harvey, we now have “the rest of the story.” Both books center upon Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. In Jonah’s day (760 B.C.), the Ninevites repented after hearing the short, strange, & sobering message, “*Yet forty days, & Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” By Nahum’s day (660-630 B.C.), the next generation of Ninevites have returned to their old ways & even increased in their cruel & barbaric treatment of enemies. Nahum now declares their doom in these 3 chapters which emphasize the majestic person & the manifested power of God. Both prophets (Jonah & Nahum) reference Exodus 34:6-7, as can be seen in Jonah 4:2 & Nahum 1:3. The overriding theme of Nahum is the doom of Nineveh, supported by the evidence of God’s righteous judgment, His sovereign power, & His reassuring comfort. Note with me tonight the explanation of Nineveh’s doom where we see God’s judgment prophesied (1:15-2:2), His judgment visualized (2:3-10), & His judgment personalized (2:11-13).

II. Nineveh’s doom explained (1:15 - 2:13)

A. Judgment **prophesied** (1:15 - 2:2)

1. The **proclamation** of peace (1:15)

a. The **announcement**:

- (1) Assyria’s defeat > so certain in the prophet’s mind & in the Lord’s decree that it is spoken of in the past tense - A messenger comes to the city proclaiming Nineveh’s fall.
- (2) Assyria’s description > “*the wicked*” (“Belial” - the worthless one).

b. The **encouragement**:

- (1) “*Keep thy solemn feasts.*”
- (2) “*Perform thy vows.*”

2. The **preparation** for invasion (2:1-2)

a. The “**disperser**” (“*He that dasheth in pieces*”) or “scatterer”:

- (1) Medes (under Cyaxeres) and Babylonian (under Napolassar)?
- (2) God Himself? - Ezekiel 29:12.

b. The **defense**:

- (1) Four-fold warning to prepare themselves for war – “*keep, watch, make, fortify.*”
- (2) Futile warning - ironic words of Nahum, knowing Nineveh’s defense is in vain.

B. Judgment **visualized** (2:3-10)

1. The **warriors** and their **weapons** (:3-6)

a. **Depiction** of the battle (:3-5):

- (1) Reddening shields - either overlaid with copper to reflect the sunlight or dyed red to minimize blood stains (same for garments).
- (2) Raging chariots - flashing with steel, scythes attached to the axles; their swiftness gives the appearance as lightening (“*fir trees*” - cypress spears).
- (3) Rushing defenders - vainly seeking to amount a defense (“*worthies*” - officers).

b. **Destruction** of the battlements (:6):

- (1) Location of the city - 3 rivers (or branches of the Tigris) converged on the site.
- (2) Loosening of the waters - flood gates opened (year 3 of the siege?).
- (3) Losing of the walls - destroyed by the flood.

[“The vivid description and lively style of the prophet almost give the impression that the events mentioned were actually happening before his eyes, instead of being predictions of events to occur long afterwards” (Tatford). City destroyed in 612 B.C.]

2. The victor and their vanquished (:7-10)
 - a. To the **vanquished** > “It is decreed” (*“Huzzab”*) (:7-8).
 - (1) Mourning because of her defeat - people of the city represented by handmaids.
 - (2) Fleeing though summoned to fight - Nineveh *“like a pool of water”*
 - (a) Once a place of safety, an oasis - now destroyed?
 - (b) Appears as an inundated area - flooded? (cf. 6).
 - b. To the **victors** > “go the spoils” (:9-10).
 - (1) Looting of the city - *“She is empty, void, and waste”* - there is desolation & devastation, both chaos & confusion.
 - (2) Languishing of the citizens - A barren city; a helpless, dispirited, & fear-filled people.

C. Judgment **personalized** (2:11-13)

1. The penetrating inquiry > *“Where is the dwelling of the lions...”* (:11-12)

[*“Where?”* - compare II Kgs. 18:34, Assyria’s taunt now comes back to haunt? - The prophet is convinced of Nineveh’s ultimate destruction & therefore envisions its loss of grandeur.]

 - a. The **imagery** employed:
 - (1) The lions’ habits -
 - (a) Stalking its prey - feared no one (*“King of the Jungle”*).
 - (b) Killing its prey - *“tear in pieces”* (fierce and cruel).
 - (2) The lions’ habitat -
 - (a) *“Filled his holes with prey.”*
 - (b) Filled *“his dens with ravin.”*
 - b. The **analogy** intended:
 - (1) Assyria was depicted by lions.
 - (a) *“...lions of every form, with wings and at times with a man’s head, are found frequently in the Assyrian sculptures”* (Feinberg).
 - (b) Assyrian kings called themselves “lions”- Sennacherib: *“Like a lion I raged.”*
 - (2) Assyria was described as a lion.
 - (a) Assyrians were lion-like in their ravenous lust and rapacious ways.
 - (b) Citizens of Nineveh were supplied with the spoils from war - just like the cubs in their den were brought food by the lioness.
2. The devastating indictment (:13)
 - a. God’s **decree** > *“Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.”*
 - (1) Consider: “It expresses God’s unrelieved hostility toward the overbearing city; and with Yahweh of Hosts on one side and Nineveh on the other, the outcome of the conflict cannot remain in doubt” (Maier).
 - (2) Contrast: Romans 8:31, *“...If God be for us, who can be against us?”* - the opposite truth is found here (and again in 3:5) [fulfilled promise to Abraham, Gen. 12:3].
 - (3) Compare: God was also against Pharaoh (Ezk. 29:3) & Gog (Ezk. 38:3, 39:1).
 - (4) Challenge: “Whose side are you on?”
 - b. Nineveh’s **destruction** > *“I will burn her chariots in the smoke...”*
 - (1) Chariots burned - just as Assyria had ransacked and burned other cities.
 - (2) Young lions devoured - her people killed.
 - (3) Prey cut off - no longer able to “spoil” other nations.
 - (4) Messengers silenced - those who previously issued commands and demanding tribute (cf. II Kgs. 18:17ff, 19:1ff, and Isa. 37:9ff).

Conclusion: What lessons can we learn from this passage of Scripture? The question I asked last week applies here as well, “How well do you know God?” We saw in chapter one that God is jealous as well as just; He is longsuffering & yet powerful; & He is good & therefore trustworthy. The key aspect of God’s character in this chapter is revealed in verse 13, “*Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.*” It has been said that this should be the most feared words a nation could receive from God. The underlying theme is that not only Nineveh but that all mankind must stand & give an account before the God of heaven, the ruler & sovereign Lord over heaven & earth. The consoling contrast to this verse is Romans 8:31, describing the believer’s delight, “*...If God be for us, who can be against us?*” The convicting challenge to each of you tonight is the question, “Whose side are you on?” Have you experienced the goodness of God, leading you to repentance (Rom. 2:4) & to find that He is trustworthy? Are you being directed by God’s Word, with the assurance that your way is pleasing in His sight (Ps. 37:23)? Is it your desire to love what God loves & to hate what God hates (Ps. 97:10)? Or are you on the other side, with those of whom the Scriptures say, “*...God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Ps. 7:11), whose sacrifice (or offer of worship) is an abomination unto God (Pro. 21:27) because they bring it with an unbelieving & unrepentant heart? Again I would ask, “Whose side are you on?”