

Minor Prophets: Nahum

Introduction

The book of Nahum fits into the beginning of the seventh century prophets who saw shortly before in the eighth century the fall of Samaria and northern Israel to Assyria (721 BC). Assyria in the seventh century BC was strong for the most part, but would end up falling to the Babylonian empire. In its strength, Assyria would travel through Israel and Judah as the quickest way to get to Egypt, where the empire fought with Egypt. Assyria had almost no allies and was the giant bully of the world of nations. No nation was left untouched by its evil and violence. Nahum, like Jonah, is solely about Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and while Jonah saw repentance and revival, Nahum predicts the great city's fall about 38 years before it does fall. His prophecy almost seems like Judah's propaganda machine, but it is the will of the Lord to humble the great empire of Assyria, and all the earth of nations will benefit.

About Nahum the Prophet

Little is known for sure about the prophet Nahum. We know that he lived in the height of the Assyrian empire in the seventh century BC and that like all other nations who had been touched by Assyria, he had no love for them. The Assyrians were known for their ruthless and violent, over-the-top military strategies and tactics that after winning a battle would then destroy whatever was left. They had zero military ethics and they took pride in that.

Nahum's name means "Comfort." It comes from the Hebrew verb for comfort and mercy that bears the image of a mother's womb. Although his name suggests comfort, the book that he wrote is a surging and flaming indignation against Nineveh. His graphic poetry and spine-tingling analogies show no hope of compassion for the violent enemies of the world. In fact, the senses join in the image as the imagination is taken to vivid images of death and destruction when Babylon takes Nineveh. With great accuracy Nahum describes the fall of the great city.

The first verse of his book tells us that he was from a town called Elkosh. We don't know where this town was. One later tradition places it near Nineveh, although that is most unlikely. Scholars would love to link his hometown to Capernaum, the town in the New Testament Gospels, because its name means, "Town of Nahum." There has been little supportive evidence for this. Most likely, as some of the early church fathers, including Jerome who lived in Israel while he translated the Vulgate from the original Hebrew and Greek, place the town as a village near Galilee. This is most likely the best evidence for his hometown.

Nahum in History

Internal evidence helps us very much in dating this book accurately. We cannot be completely sure, but with a great accuracy between about 50 years, we can guarantee this book was written. The best internal evidence is two-fold. First, one event that we have an exact historical date for is mentioned in the book as a past event. In 3:8-10, Nahum mentions the fall of

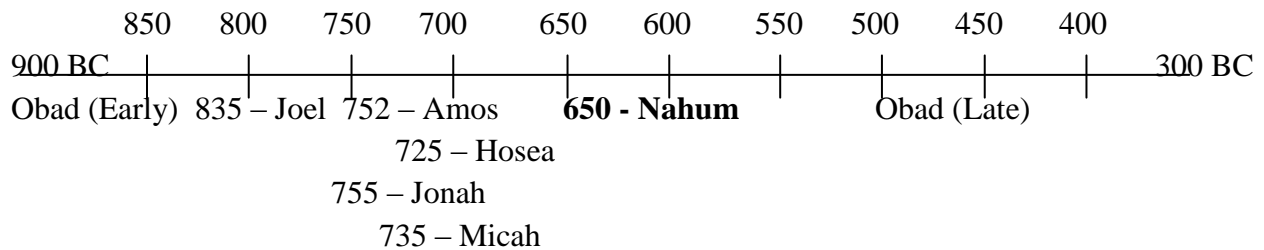
No-Amon (Hebrew name), the Egyptian city of Thebes, which occurred in 663 BC. That gives us our starting point. So the book had to be written after this event.

The second piece of internal evidence is the constant reference to the future destruction of the city of Nineveh, although at the moment of writing, the city and empire are in their prime. The city of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in the year 612 BC. This means that the book had to be dated between these two dates. A span of 50 years gives us plenty of time. Anyone who does not believe in predictive prophecy would date the book extremely close to the actual fall of Nineveh around 615-612 BC. But we have no issue with God calling His shots way before He shoots.

We will place this book around 650 BC, giving time for the account of Thebes' fall to become common public knowledge, and also to explain why King Manasseh would rebel against such a powerful enemy in 2 Chronicles 33:10-13. It is the suggestion of one scholar, Duane Christensen, that because of this prophecy, Manasseh thought he could get away with going against Assyria, but he was sadly mistaken and humbled. He thought that the prophecy pointed to a weakness in Assyria, but it was a future weakness the prophecy expounds. Anywhere between these two dates of 663-612 BC would fit this book.

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Nahum

- I. God will no longer allow Nineveh to exist or Assyria to ravage the nations (1:1-2:13).
 - A. The Lord is righteous and His wrath comes for Nineveh (1:1-8).
 - B. The Lord will keep Judah from the mighty Assyrians (1:9-15).
 - C. The Lord will utterly destroy Nineveh and Assyria through another rising empire (2:1-13).
- II. The Lord will smite the Ninevites and bring their empire down (3:1-19).
 - A. The Lord will make the city of Nineveh fall in its prime (3:1-10).
 - B. The city will not escape God's full cup of wrath (3:11-15).
 - C. The king will be dismayed as his empire crumbles before him (3:16-19).

The Prophetic Message of Nahum

Chapter 1

1:1 An oracle concerning Nineveh, the book of the vision of Nahum, from Elkosh.

This is a pretty standard opening to prophetic writing. The word oracle speaks to the idea that this is a word from the Lord, having His authoritative backing to what is said. Then we are immediately given the subject matter of the prophetic writing. It concerns Nineveh, the capital city of the empire of Assyria, the strongest empire in the world at the time of writing.

The Assyrians were infamously brutal and cruel in their treatment of the nations, not just Israel. Suffice it to say, what the Lord has to say about Assyria through Nahum's mouth is less than comforting, the meaning of his name, to the empire, and much more comforting to the nations the empire has heinously abused. If it is true that this writing happens around 650 BC, a great reason I believe would be that this king had decided to stand against Assyria, which would be a foolish thing to do unless prompted that they were not as strong as they let on, then Assyria will not fall for 38 years.

The word for book here means writings, and it is most likely that while all of the message came through Nahum, the school of prophets or one of his assistants did at least some of the cataloging of the message. It is a short and bitterly blistering reaction to Assyria, which had taken Samaria, the capital city of northern Israel in 721 BC, roughly 70 years before this oracle. That would make sense that even in the height of Assyria's power, the Lord would become disgusted with their treatment of their captors and choose to back another nation or empire, which is exactly what happens. Babylon becomes the up-and-coming empire that defeats Nineveh and the Assyrians.

We must remember our own cultural moorings as we read through the prophecy of Nahum. Many commentators are uncomfortable with the great joy the "prophet of comfort" has in graphically detailing Nineveh's pitiful fall. But we must remember how grotesque and violent and horrid the empire treated the other nations. There is as much reason to bock at Nahum's joyful reaction to Assyria's bloody downfall as there is to bock at evil being repaid by a righteous God.

This book, or collection of writings, was of the vision of Nahum, what the Lord gave Nahum. I would liken this vision, which from his perspective has not yet happened for close to 40 years yet, to the book of Revelation, where John is given visions of what will become reality. Here, the prophet is detailed and graphic, and yet quite accurate to the account of Nineveh's fall, according to what records we have.

Finally in this verse, we are given his home city, which we are not sure to locate on a map. You can read the introduction for that information. Suffice it to say, it is obvious that Nahum was from the southern kingdom of Judah, because it is after the fall of the northern

kingdom, and that his message may or may not have been received by the king of Assyria. It is most likely because we are told that Jonah was told to go to the Ninevites and nothing is said here about Nahum also going, that his vision was proclaimed in Judah, which gave the king reason to stand up to Assyria, but the prophecy was 40 years in the making, not immediate. And that king paid dearly for his mistake of interpretation (2 Chronicles 33:10-13).

One more point of interest must be mentioned historically to completely understand God's lashing out against the empire of Assyria for its grave and great wickedness against other nations. There is a common theme that YHWH is not just Israel's God, but the God of the whole earth, the God of all the nations, despite what idol those nations worship. Here, we see a common Old Testament prophets theological point that God controls all the nations and He raises up and demolishes those nations He sees fit, and that His word is final in the matters. God raised up Assyria to take out northern Israel with a more vile wickedness than Israel was pronouncing and practicing. And now, the time has come for another empire to rise up against Assyria. It is part of God's plan, because He ultimately rules all the nations. He rocks at foreign affairs.

The nations of Israel and Judah sat right between the Egyptian empire to its south and Assyria to its north and west. The Babylonian empire sat farther east. For Assyria to fight with Egypt, they had to pass through Israel. This is the reason that they finally took Israel, so they would not have to deal with the Israelites every time they wanted to attack Egypt, and vice versa. So they simply took the northern kingdom so they would not have to deal with them politically. This situation puts Israel right in the center of historic ancient powers battling at one another. And it is the backdrop for our understanding of the Minor Prophets in this time between the fall of Samaria (721 BC) and the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC).

1:2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God, the Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord avenges against His enemies and guards against His enemies.

The book opens after that introduction of our prophet, his place of origin, and the Lord's authority in his oracle and writings, to a poetic section setting the stage for the book. This poetic section speaks of YHWH, the Lord of Israel, and some of His mighty attributes. It is a beautiful and poetic section. Some see in it what is called an acrostic, where Nahum has taken God's attributes from A-Z, so to speak, and put them in alphabetical order, except that in Hebrew, it's aleph to Tav, and there is no Tav representation. We will attempt to show the acrostic as we travel through verses 2-10 as much as possible. To see a completed acrostic, you can look at M. Powis Smith's *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* published in New York by C. Scribner's Sons in 1911.

This first verse and part of the second belong to the idea started by the first Hebrew letter, aleph. Aleph is the first letter of the short form name for God, elohim. This verse and part of verse 3 speak of His wrath and vengeance, His jealousy. These are all tied together. God is a jealous God, as He points out in the Ten Commandments when He tells the Israelites to not have

other gods before Him. His jealousy for them could be seen throughout Hosea as God disciplines His beloved wife Israel for her idolatry. God's jealousy is borne out of His love for us. He wants no other to influence us but Him. God loves us with His whole being, and expects that we love Him with our whole being back.

So in this context, the Lord is jealous because His people have been taken captive by the Assyrians and exposed to their idols and forced to worship them. The word for vengeance is the action caused by such heated jealousy. He must make things right by wiping out the enemies of Israel that have taken advantage of her. The word for vengeance shows up three times in this verse alone! His reaction is decided and will be swift and as brutal as the Assyrians. For God to avenge Israel is for Him to take out His wrath upon Assyria for its overextension of His command to take Israel captive. The Assyrians have gone above and beyond God's call and brutally over-mistreated the Israelites. That was not part of God's command.

So He will exact vengeance in His rageful wrath, the tempest of His anger will be kindled, as we will see. The most interesting wording in this verse are the images of a husband and of venom or heat. It is how almost every English translation has to translate the words for wrath here in this verse. The first word is baal. Look familiar? It's the word for the Baals, the false gods around Israel. But the word means more than lord or master; it is also a word for a husband or a possessor or an owner. Now let's not get upset about the combined ideas of a husband and an owner. It could only mean one of those things in each context.

The other word is the word for dangerous heat or poison or venom. The Lord is like a scorned husband who can release poison into his adversaries. He is a husband of hot anger that will blow up at his enemies. The Lord is not to be trifled with. Messing with YHWH will get the Assyrians burned to a crisp! We often speak of God's jealousy and anger as emotions we can't quite square with his love and mercy. But it is because God loves us that He is jealous. Think about it. If you don't love someone, why would you be jealous if a competitor loved them? You wouldn't. In fact, that person would not be your competitor. It is when you love that you are jealous. And wrath comes shortly after jealousy because the person you are pledged to is unjustly being pursued by another. God is the same way against idols.

Take just a moment to think about how deeply God loves you, that He would stake His power and reputation on destroying anything or anyone that would ever hold your sway and your passion and desire more than Him. Isn't it nice to be loved so deeply and completely? God's jealousy has a softer side in the case of the one for whom He demonstrates that jealousy. It shows how much He loves you and me, that He would meet our enemies on their ground and vanquish them just because they've tried to grab our attention away from His. Don't mess with God's people. He gets wrathfully and hotly angry about it.

The word avenge shows up for the third time as the word enemy shows up twice at the end of this verse. The point is getting across through repetition. The first word for an enemy speaks to the idea of an adversary or an oppressor, like the Egyptians in Egypt who oppressed Israel. The second image of an enemy is one who is hated or is hostile to someone. There are then two actions God takes. First, He avenges those who oppress His people. Then He keeps His

wrath, or guards His people against the ones who are hostile or hateful toward them. He protects His people in every way!

1:3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in strength. The Lord will surely never leave unpunished. His path is in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.

The image of God being slow to anger is one of the funniest idioms to us today. An idiom is a phrase that means something different than its literal meaning. For instance, the boss is called the big fish in English, but it's a human whose size does not matter to the idiom. Or take for instance, "The man upstairs" referring to God. God is not a man or a human, and He does not live upstairs. But we know who that refers to. Well here in this verse, the literal of slow to anger in Hebrew is to have a long nostril!

The image of anger is one of the flaring nostril, but here that flaring nostril is longer, so the flares coming out of the nostril take longer to get there. That's the literal image of God being slow to anger. He waits to fulfill the vengeance He promised in the last verse. He has long nostrils. He keeps the anger in hopes that we would turn the emotion before its effects are irreversible. This is still part of the aleph in the acrostic.

Along with those images is the great in strength image. This image conveys the image of strength in the form of violent power, a blowout kind of power that is forceful and mighty. If God is going to avenge a wrong, He must have the force to avenge, or it is an empty threat. But the Lord's vengeance is backed up by His power to make the vengeance real and felt. The final idea before our next letter in the Hebrew acrostic is the idea of God not letting the matter go. He's not going to forget about the problem with the Assyrians. He's not going to forgive and forget at all. He's going to bring the violence in retribution for their insolence because they've stepped over the line with His cherished people and His jealousy will lead to a boiling anger.

The next image that we have starts our second letter in Hebrew, the bet. The bet is the word for in or with here before the words whirlwind and storm. God works through storms of all kinds, literal and military and political and in any other form He so desires. He will command the nations, the weather, the armies of the earth. It doesn't matter what the materials of the storm are, except that He will make a storm out of them.

These cosmic images show us God's great power that was mentioned earlier. He can control things we can't even get a handle on. God is in the midst of the whirlwind and the storm, like He was in the midst of the burning bush and like the prophet Elijah searched for God in the fire and the whirlwind, but He was in the still small voice. The imagery is of retribution here. God is coming with stuff the Assyrians won't be able to stop from terrorizing and demolishing their precious city. My favorite part of our second line in the acrostic is the image of God's foot prints being the clouds that He walks on. That's one big God! His dust is these giant clouds that we cannot touch or manipulate, and He walks on them. He can handle the storms if He walks on the clouds that form the storms. That's the God of Israel. That's your God and my God.

1:4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and all the rivers He makes desolate. Bashan and Carmel wither and the bud of Lebanon dwindles.

Not only is God the cosmic rock star of the over-world or the skies, but He also plumbs the depths of the earth as well, and is Master over all of the seas. He is also Lord of the under-world. Our next letter, Gimmel, is the first letter of the verb rebuke. A rebuke is in this case a command to disappear or to shrink or dry up. He commands the sea and even if that command is to be no more, it does what He says.

Not only the larger seas heed to God's sovereignty and mighty power, but also the rivers. He controls the larger and the smaller bodies of water. Speaking from the idea of power to move and manipulate things, larger things are easier to move than smaller things. God's control over both the large and the small prove not only His power, but also His skill. Both are given the same command to become dry and both Heed His power. This may also be a reference to the city of Nineveh, not that God will evaporate all the water, but that He can control water. Later, Nahum describes a deluge, a flood of water. The city is surrounded by aqueducts that are part of its downfall in the attack, but we'll get to that later.

The next letter in our acrostic is Dallet. however, it is absent from any of the words in this section. The acrostic is not a perfect acrostic, but it is very distinct. We will pick right up with the next letter in the next phrase. But even though this phrase does not have a dallet, it speaks of three different geographical locations. Some postulate that these locations are on far corners of direction, such as the extreme north, east and west, conveying that God's command extends to all the water, not just locally, but in the extreme locations as well.

Others suggest that these places were the most well-watered places so that when the Lord commands, His command for the water to disappear causes not just a drought in the places where droughts are common, but even in the places where droughts are rare. Either way you take it, we know for sure that Lebanon was known for its cedars that grew high and tall. You need a lot of water to make those trees so reknown. This seems to be showing that even these well-watered places suffer and languish and dwindle in the aftermath of God's command for the seas and rivers to dry up.

1:5 The mountains quake before Him and the hills melt, and the earth heaves before His face, even the world and all who dwell in it!

All of creation surrenders to God's presence. The prophets routinely refer to the mountains and hills reacting to God's presence. When He is angry, the reaction of the earth coincides with His anger and wrath, violently quaking and erupting. When He is pleased, the earth dances and prospers before Him and reacts with joy to His presence. The next letter of our acronym, is the beginning of the word for mountain. This acronym shows the completeness of God's awesome power. It is much like the poem *How much do I love you? Let me count the*

ways. How powerful is God, so powerful that the whole alphabet is just the beginning to His attributes.

The verbs used here to show the reaction of the earth to God's anger and vengeance are vivid word pictures. The word for quake speaks of a giant shudder, like a huge sigh when the Lord comes. The hills melt before the Lord. The word for melt can be translated positively and negatively. In a prosperity context, the word means to dance or sway from side to side. But in this context, it means that they sway like a melting wax tower.

The *vav* in our Hebrew acronym is next because it points to the earth itself reacting to God by heaving or being laid waste. The image of heaving makes me think of the earthquakes and volcanoes that can be set off and erupt at a moment's notice. The whole earth from the skies to the seas to the land is demonstrating God's anger as He comes to earth to duel out justice to Nineveh. Before God's face is an idiom in Hebrew. The idiom means to be in His presence or simply stand before Him.

Finally, you have all the peoples of the earth, everyone and everything that dwells on the earth capitulating to God's anger. It's not just natural creation, but human creation that responds to God's anger. They share the verb heave with the earth. The people are huffing and puffing with the coming doom from the Lord's hand earned by their wickedness. Much like a child that knows discipline is coming and braces for its impact, so the people and the land and the whole of creation are bracing for the impact of God's fury.

We rarely discuss the awesome power of God and the jealousy and anger of the Lord anymore in our culture. We're so stuck on the love and grace that we think we understand, but the love and the grace are causing this anger and jealousy. I've shown already how God's love plays into the factor of His jealousy, but we forget that God's grace could be to eradicate sin around us as well as within us. That is part of His grace, that He rescues the people He loves from evil. We must embrace all of the revelation of God's character, not just the parts we feel close to and warm and fuzzy understanding toward.

1:6 Who can stand against His indignation, and who can rise in His burning anger? His rage gushes forth like fire and the rocks are pulled down by Him

The word for indignation gives us our next letter going in acrostic order of the Hebrew alphabet. It is the next image of God we receive from this poetic revelation of Him. There is a question of two parts in this verse. Who can stand against God's indignation. The word for indignation speaks of a curse from or against God. In this context, it is a curse from God, for He is on the offensive against the horrid atrocities of the Assyrians.

The word for stand talks about a brazen attempt to stand up to God, to match His fury and indignation, to match His ability in battle. This same word is used in Psalm 2 when the psalmist sings of the kings of the earth taking their stand against the Anointed One, and God laughs at them. No human being, indeed, no created thing in all of the universe can stand up against God. His power is much too great for that. This poem exults to the heights the transcendence of God.

He is not in the place of the friend, but in the place of the powerful and sovereign ruler over all creation.

The second part of the question is much like the first. This time, however, the verb is not to stand against and offer challenge against God, but to arise to His level, to meet Him at some point. No one can ascend even to meet God at His level. Not only can no one stand toe to toe with God in ability and power, but no one can even rise to His challenge. He is the ultimate in all things! His burning anger speaks of His nostrils literally, once again. But this time, instead of long nostrils, or being slow to anger, the poet asks who can arise when God is red-hot flaming rage. The words speak of the heat or poison of His full fury.

That same word for the heat or poison or rage of God is used to give us our next letter chet. The poet describes God's red-hot rage as an unquenchable fire that ignites even the base elements of the rocks. Picture a molten lava volcano and that's a start! Imagine the Hulk, and you're barely able to start corresponding to God's wrath and vengeance as He pulls rocks down in fury. His might is seen in His rage and the rocks are hurled in anger. The image is not only of the rocks being pulled down by His strength, but being smashed and demolished as they are pulled.

1:7 The Lord is good, a refuge in the day of distress, and He knows those who seek refuge in Him.

The tet, the next letter in the acrostic poem, describes the goodness of God. It doesn't seem to mesh with the images of Him breaking stuff and His red-hot rage gushing like lava, but this speaks from the perspective of the people of God, for whom He fights. His goodness is also in punishing evil where it is, in this case, in Nineveh. We can't worship God only when His ways make sense to us. We must worship Him in the things that are not as familiar about His nature, like His full-fledged war on sin and the devil. It is hard for us to see God's vengeance, fury, killing unbelievers, because we are in a mission at this moment to see them saved. But there will come a day when the saints will rejoice in God's red-hot vengeance and judgment in the end.

We seem to think of God's goodness on our perspective anyway. When do we agree that the Lord is good? Usually when He does something in our favor. How many times have we told Him He is good when part of His will is not our will and we are disciplined? But here, Nahum rejoices that God is good enough to protect His people by returning retribution upon Nineveh for their disgraceful conduct in taking northern Israel and their violence toward other nations. When will we get sick enough of wickedness and sin to thank God when He purges it from us and others around us?

The next section of this verse talks about the Lord as a refuge. The word refuge speaks of a fort, a stronghold that is perfectly guarded. The refuge is a rock, an impenetrable place of peace and safety. God is the refuge of His people. They flock to His fortress for defense. He protects all of His people from the dangers of battle against His foes. What I love most about this verse is

hat God's goodness is in providing the refuge as He takes on His enemies. He is on the offense attacking them, and at the same time, providing defense for His people.

Also, God knows those who seek refuge in Him. The word for knowing here is the important and famed yada, which speaks more of an intimate and personal knowledge rather than a factual knowledge. It is also the spark of the next letter in the poetic acrostic, the Hebrew letter yod. The difference would be that instead of having a list of names of the people in God's refuge, He walks among them greeting them by name without looking at a list and asks them about their families, and knows intimate details about each one. The word for distress speaks of any kind of trouble or need or anxiety. The Lord is indeed our refuge in times of distress, and He intimately knows all things about us. He knows us so personally that just knowing Him provides a sense of refuge. We can be ourselves with Him and nothing can destroy that intimacy.

1:8 But with a flood crossing over, He will bring annihilation to her place, and His enemies He will pursue into darkness.

This is an interesting part of the prophecy for Nineveh. We know from archaeological discovery that Nineveh was surrounded by water ducts and that its fall probably involved floods of water by the Babylonians as they sieged the city. The flood of waters from broken aqueducts would have flowed through the city and crossed over the protective walls and gates.

God vows to bring a complete end. The next letter, the koph, is the first letter in the word destruction. This word I translated as annihilation, because it speaks of a complete destruction, where nothing is left. Indeed, until recently, archaeologists did not believe that Nineveh existed because they could not find it. God wiped it off the face of the earth. But they have recently discovered its probable location.

Pursing enemies into darkness may speak of the night not able to stop God's onslaught. When the Lord is this furious, there is nothing that will stop His wrath from being realized. Of course, if that was the idea that Nahum wished to give us, he could have used the Hebrew word for night. This word for darkness is more about obscurity than a literal night. It is the obscurity of history, as I mentioned earlier that Nineveh literally disappeared from history and the map. The Lord's devastation was complete and total.

1:9 Whatever you scheme against the Lord He will make annihilation; distress will not rise twice.

Some commentaries post this as a new section, but there is a samek at the end of verse 11, as well as a continuing of the acrostic, as Powis shows in his commentary. The acrostic poem, however, does not complete the alphabet as is the norm. But I usually prefer to go the section of the samek divisions, although in the outline of the book I saw a distinctive break in perspective, there is still more to link these two together. The perspective shifts from God's attributes and actions to the human perspective of these actions.

The perspective changes to the Assyrians devising a way out of their own annihilation. They raise up a schemer, someone who is tactically skilled and they think they can get the upper hand over the stronger Babylonian empire. The acrostic is a bit harder to pick up in this verse. It actually works backwards, with our next letter being derived from the image of distress not ascending twice.

The next letter is found in the image of the schemer or the person who is devising against YHWH. Some scholars, like Powis, decide that the text needs rearranged and amended to fit the acrostic genre. I disagree. The text is not changed to fit a scholar's opinion of an acrostic poem. The text stands for itself, and if it doesn't fit the framework of an acrostic poem, then that is the scholar's fault, not the text's. The acrostic is still visible and useful to us.

The Lord can handle anything we throw at Him in our fear of annihilation. The schemes and plans of humanity are no good when facing the Lord of the universe. We can devise plans all we want, but the Lord will prevail over us if it is His will. The Assyrians have no choice. God has desired that they be utterly devastated and so shall they be. No scheme will ever change that. And this is the warning of the prophet, that their plans and schemes will change nothing.

The final phrase is of interest because some commentators believe the prophet speaks of the trouble that Nineveh has caused not happening a second time, for the Lord annihilates the Assyrians in one fell swoop. This is a good interpretation of the phrase. I will offer though, that since we still seem to be focused on the Assyrians, and specifically the Ninevites, that this is a promise to them that their trouble in facing the armies of the Lord will not happen a second time. In other words, it is the same message as already mentioned, that God will devastate them in one action, not more than one. He will bring their distress, let it rise up against the Ninevites, and they will not have a second battle.

1:10 Thus as much as thorns, they are intertwined, and as much as liquor they are inebriated, they are consumed. Like stubble, they are fully withered.

By this time the acrostic breaks down and is never finished. We do not really have a placement for the letter nun, but the samek is found in the word for intertwined or twisted in reference to the thorns. This verse seems to show the confusion in the city as God brings their devastation to their front gates. They are like tangled thorns, running into one another in fear and trembling, embracing one another at the end of the world.

They are confused and look like drunkards in the streets, falling over themselves and one another in fear. But the Lord consumes them as one downs a bottle of liquor. He destroys them with no hope of a second chance. Indeed, they have already had their second chance after Jonah. Now their end comes to them and they wither like the stubble after it is separated from the wheat. They will wither into history and not be remembered.

1:11 From among you came one who schemed evil against the Lord, a useless advisor.

We get the full accusation of the prophet, the reason for God's vengeance and anger, that the nation has been scheming against the Lord. They have not just played a passive role in His plan. They have been subverting the Lord's plan, not following the path He has chosen for them to play. Instead, they have actively schemed against God, and for their insolent behavior, He will wipe them off the face of the earth for good.

They had an advisor or counselor that provided them with the ability to be more violent and insolent than the Lord commanded. They reached the bounds of God's use for them. He used them to bring Israel low, but now they were beyond the point of acceptable depravity to Him. It was to shame Israel that He allowed them to take His people to other lands, but just as Israel's grace period ran out because they did not return to Him, so also the Assyrians have played their part in history and must now be absorbed into the next empire that is part of God's plans. He uses people and entire nations to bring about His salvation and His revelation. He is using you and me today to do the very same thing! You are part of God's plan. He has at least one task for you to do. It is our job to find out what that task is and to carry it out with excellence.

The samek ends the section here, but we have gotten a taste of the next section as God continues to elaborate on their destruction and judgment, but also speaks kindness to Judah. Judah did not fall to the Assyrians. It was awfully close, but the city of Jerusalem was not sacked by Sennacherib. So the Lord will condemn Assyria and comfort Israel in this next section.

1:12 Thus says the Lord, "Though they are untouched and also numerous, yet likewise they will be cut down and will pass away. Now I will humiliate you, but no more will I humiliate you."

The new section opens up with a statement of God's authority, of quoting the Lord Himself. The prophet is literally speaking and writing the very words of God to Nineveh. He speaks in a strange manner, first about Assyria in the third person, and then in the second person. The first thing he calls the city of Nineveh is "untouched." The image of untouched actually comes from the word for peace in Hebrew, shalom. Most people know that word, but few understand that shalom is very much about a complete and total wellness, not just about peace from war. The city of Nineveh is safe and protected, completely in peace, although it is the center of the empire that is at war with everyone and their brother.

They are not only described as untouched or well, but also as numerous or great. In the peace or wellness that the city enjoys on the home front, the city has become great. Jonah also describes the city as great or large. It had many people. In Jonah's day it was a city of 120,000 but it has probably grown in Nahum's time, being at the height of its success. The peace they have experienced, the complete wellness, has allowed them to grow and provided an environment for population growth and other developments.

But despite their relative peace and greatness, the Lord will send armies to cut them down like one cuts down the harvest fields. He will cut them down like one is cut off from his people. The Lord will use sword and other means to literally cut the people down where they stand, as

their punishment warrants. They will not survive or thrive any longer. Instead, their destiny will be to pass away.

The third person turns into second person as the observation about Nineveh's current thriving environment is turned into a warning of finality. It is a temporal warning. The Lord says that He will humiliate the people of Nineveh now, meaning in this era or when this one event takes place. In agreement with the former prophecy that the Lord's destruction will not come twice, but that He only needs one shot, the rest of the phrase tells the Ninevites that they will not be humiliated again. It is a once done deed. The word humiliate here is a very graphic word, and English cannot do it justice. The images of the word range from afflictions of ailments to rape and to being wretched, emaciated, to be pitiful and bent down in surrender and allegiance. This is the word of humiliation that is used here twice.

1:13 Now I will smash his yoke over you and I will tear to pieces your fetters.

The switch from third person to second person makes interpretation of this section hard, because there are two persons being spoken of or to. The first is the city of Nineveh and the other is Judah. Judah is getting worse in its idolatry and closer to its time of exile. And Nineveh also became a vile stench in God's nostrils at this moment, so it is hard to tell who is being spoken of and who the "you" is here. But I will present both possibilities to the best of my ability. Most translations will choose for you and smooth over the issues presented by the original text.

One way you could interpret this verse is that the second person pronoun "you" is referring to Judah, and the yoke is Nineveh's yoke. This is most likely the case here, because the context is Nineveh's destruction. Nineveh is the sworn enemy of Judah at this moment in history. However, if we interpret these second person pronouns as speaking directly to Judah, then the last verse pronouns should also be speaking to Judah, which would change our interpretation of those words.

If that were true, we must interpret verse 12 as the Lord speaking about Nineveh in the first sentence, and then referring to Judah as the ones to be humiliated, but that does not fit the overall context of this entire book. One interpretation possibility in this case is that God is referring to the humiliation of Israel that came at the hands of the Assyrians in taking the northern kingdom. But then verse 14 does not fit Judah at this time, I believe.

So we are left with a dilemma. Does God switch the second person pronoun between these two verses? I don't think that is a very good interpretational model. Also, it is clear in the next verse that the "you" is Nineveh. So how does verse 13 fit into Nineveh's prophecy? It may be that there is a switch in the pronoun here, referring to Nineveh in verse 12, Judah in 13, and then Nineveh again in 14. One possibility that may work is taking the "and now" to be a marker of significant transition, so that the Lord was referring to Judah with the second person pronoun in both verses 12 and 13, and then there is a change in address for verse 14. That seems to be the best fit.

1:14 The Lord has given an order concerning you, “Your name will not be sown any longer. From the house of your gods I will cut off the carved idol and the cast idol. I will lay you down in your grave, because you are insignificant.

It is most definite that the second person pronoun in this verse refers to Nineveh. God promises a command that He has sent, like a military general of many armies. He has commanded that Nineveh will no longer be an issue for Judah. The name of the city and the reputation of the empire of Assyria will no longer be propagated among the nations. The verb used speaks of sowing, like in sowing a field. The seed of the nation will be no more among other nations. Their fame will be curtailed.

Some translate because of that verb for sowing that the descendants of Nineveh will no longer exist. That's a possibility, but it is inferred from how they interpret the verb. I interpret it as that the city's reputation and name will no longer be spoken of and its influence and fame will be demolished. Its vitality among the nations will become a page in history.

The next promise from God is that the house of the city's idols will be cut off or destroyed. This probably refers to a temple where the idols are kept. God mentions both types of idols, those that are carved from wood and those that are cast from metals. It doesn't matter what the material of the idol is. God will destroy them all. There will be no fame for their gods as much as there is no fame for them. Nothing they strived for will last in the annals of history.

The final promise is that God will lay them down in their graves. The people will die and never be noticed again. The reason that God will do this is because they are small or insignificant. This is the same word used in Isaiah when God asks of the suffering servant if it is too small a task for him. The word connotes smallness, the opposite of greatness mentioned earlier concerning the city. It speaks of insignificance and not worth mentioning, a trifle and of little account. This great nation that has built its reputation will just as quickly be considered to have never touched the pages of history. The word vile does not give the full understanding because this word is not necessarily tied to morality as it is to the opposite of greatness.

We must all be sure that we do not waste our lives, our influence, and the gifts that God has given us. God's final judgment about Nineveh is that it was small and insignificant. All the years of making itself great among the nations meant nothing when the Lord decided it was not significant. We can fight and fight for significance. We can take matters into our own hands, but only what is done for a cause greater than ourselves, for the cause of God's kingdom, will our lives have meaning and significance. We must work on eternal matters, not temporal matters that are here today and gone tomorrow. The section is complete with a peh instead of a samek. Usually a peh is a larger separation in a book, like a chapter separation rather than a paragraph separation in the samek letter. There's also a possibility that this peh is meant organizationally as a finality to Nineveh as well, coming on the heels of the words “insignificant” and “grave.”

1:15 (H 2:1) Behold upon the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate, O Judah! Fulfill your festival vows because never again will the utterly worthless pass through you. He is exterminated!

In the Hebrew text, this verse starts a whole new section after the peh and also starts the second chapter, but for some reason, the English Bible sees it as a fitting completion to the prophecies about Nineveh. It can fit either way. Everything in the structure of the Hebrew text points to it being the opening thought to a new section, though. It starts out with a word that often opens new sections. The word “behold” is a transitional interjection. It calls people to attention, sometimes for warning and sometimes for celebration.

Here, the behold is meant to draw attention to the celebratory nature of Judah as Nineveh falls to the Lord’s chosen empires and armies. The people of Judah should rejoice in the city of Nineveh’s downfall and overthrow because the torture and terror of its reign is over. But the section opens also with a Messianic prophecy, confirmed in Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15. Paul adds the word beautiful, in an allusion both to this verse in Nahum and in Isaiah the word beautiful is there.

The mountaintops were the places closest to heaven. The Messiah is coming from above and proclaiming the message of good news. This is the word used for gospel in the New Testament, and Jesus is the one who brought the good news of salvation from sin and death and into God’s kingdom. Here, the word good news is most likely one of military and political significance. But in the fulfillment of all prophecy, this speaks of Jesus who is the only one who can bring good news and peace completely to the human race.

We have already discussed the word peace above, but it is a harmony with all of creation that allows each part of creation to obtain its destiny without hindrance. Jesus is the only one who can make that kind of harmony happen. His feet are beautiful because they transport the messenger, speaking of the message itself as long in coming and beautiful when it finally arrives. It is a time of joy and excitement, of celebration. For those who cannot see why the Israelites would celebrate news of the destructive annihilation of an arch nemesis that was purely evil and wicked, just remember how America and Iraq reacted to Sadam Hussein’s end.

The nation of Judah is called to a celebration, to delight in their festivals and vows and to live with gladness and feasting because of the downfall of Assyria. Celebrate carries the images of dancing and staggering in celebration, leaping for joy. They are called to enjoy the feasts and vows, the whole of the temple rituals in Judah. They are set free to be themselves and to allow their cultural values to reassert themselves.

The Lord promises with the fall of Assyria that He will never allow again the utter wickedness and worthlessness of that empire to pass through their land. Assyria, you must understand, was the most vile and wretched, the most grotesque and brutal empire known to the Israelites throughout biblical history. The Babylonians will take Judah, but they are not as vile as Assyria. So that exile does not preclude the imagery of Assyria being “utterly vile or worthless.”

The imagery of them passing through Judah is literal, for to get to Egypt, Assyria would pass right through the land of Judah. In fact, every city was taken except for Jerusalem, its capital, when the king of Assyria attempted after northern Israel to take Judah as well. The Assyrians will no longer pass through their land. Finally, the Lord refers to the Assyrians, and specifically the inhabitants of Nineveh as exterminated or cut off. The literal verb is cut off, an image of being separated from the world and sequestered forever. The city and its empire no longer have any allies or any resources that would gain its momentum back. The Lord's devastation is once and for all final.

Chapter 2

2:1 (H 2:2) The one who scatters has come up against you. Guard the fortified cities, watch the road, be strong in the loins, be strong in the mighty power.

It is better to see this as the Hebrew text sees it as the second verse of a new section, not the first. The last verse in the English Bible of chapter one is actually the introductory idea of this section. It is continued here, referring to the Lord as the one who scatters. The same promise of the last verse is the one who is the bane of Nineveh's existence in this verse. The one who brings good news to Judah brings exile to Nineveh. The good news for Judah is that although the Assyrians attempted to take Jerusalem and all of their country, God will destroy the Assyrians through the Babylonians.

The Assyrians and Babylonians both had dispersal policies when they conquered a people. The difference is the way in which they dispersed peoples. The Assyrians scattered groups and entire countries to another geographical location so that they were not a threat to the empire while the Babylonians scattered the upper classes of the nations and brainwashed them and integrated them into their empire. The scatterer here refers to the Lord who uses the scattering policies of the Babylonians. So the one who scatters is ultimately the Lord, but through the empire of Babylon.

The word for ascend or come up speaks of the Babylonians opposing the Assyrians and being against them. The prophet in almost complete irony and taunting commands the Assyrians to put their very best of defenses together, to guard the cities and the fortifications, to keep watch on the road and to keep a lookout ready at all times, as if the advanced warning will do them one bit of good.

Then we read what must have been an idiom in Hebrew and in that culture, to gird up or be strong in the loins, which can be a point-on-point idea expressed in our culture as having guts. It has very little to do with a strong bowel system. A fortified inner core is the idea here, having the guts to take on their enemies that are better than they are and not shrinking away from the challenge. Of course, at this time, the Assyrians are at the peak of their power and are assuredly arrogant toward their enemies. The statement is then clarified by "be strong in mighty power," two words that talk of strength and fortification. The mocking by the prophet is that Assyria even in its height will lose to the Babylonians. All of the world is happy to see such a vile and gruesome empire be engulfed by anyone.

2:2 (H 2:3) Thus the Lord is bringing back the eminence of Jacob, as the eminence of Israel, for the waster has laid waste, and their shoots it has ruined.

The Lord is often seen as "meddling" in the nations in the prophets. His use of one nation against another to suit His purpose is often discounted, but this is what we see in Nahum's

prophecy here. Just as the Lord used an evil and vile Assyria to bring northern Israel low from their pride and arrogance, so now the same Lord is going to bring low the Assyrians who have reached the full point of His wrath.

God is a God of time, although He is outside of time. He uses time to reveal Himself and His will. The prophet explains that God who is not just a national god of Israel, as many cities and empires had gods that protected them, He is the God of all nations. He can use this nation and that nation, and the Bible tells us that He does not change. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. He still uses nations according to His plan. He is not meddling. He is bringing judgment, peace, and eventually, the end of time.

It is now the Lord's good will to bring back happiness to Israel in the destruction of its arch enemy that wounded it beyond repair in annihilating the northern kingdom with violence unseen and spoken of before the Assyrian empire's time. Their ruthless behavior in conquest is going to catch up to them and the Lord will deal out their judgment and His wrath for their treatment of the nations. No nation would have been dissatisfied to hear of their demise.

The total and complete destruction and annihilation of Assyria is mentioned in this verse as well. It was the Lord's good pleasure to bring happiness to the nations of Judah and Israel, Israel as retribution for its exile and Judah for rescue from such a brutal tyrant. Although Judah's time will come, it will not be overtaken by the Assyrians, but rather the Babylonians. So the nation's pride or eminence will be reestablished. The people will thank the Lord for the demise of the Assyrians, even if it is by another empire's hand that will soon come to Judah. For the moment, the rejoicing will be enough.

Once again, both the Lord and His instrument the Babylonians are mentioned in the reference to the waster or the destroyer. This speaks of the Babylonians who leave nothing in their annihilation of Nineveh, not even flowers that will grow. The new shoots of plants will even be demolished in their wake. They will lay waste to all things in the city. No life will be there. The devastation is complete and it is just what the Lord ordered.

2:3 (H 2:4) The shield of his mighty warriors is red, powerful men wrapped in scarlet, the chariots with fiery metal on the day he appoints and the cypress spear shafts are brandished.

Beginning in verse three here, we see a change in perspective as the prophet begins to speak of the image the Assyrians would have seen on the horizon as their precious city is brought under siege. They would see the Babylonians coming in red and gold. The shields and outfits seem to be colored red and their chariots are some metallic substance because they beam in the sun, looking like fire as they pass through the streets.

They are in reds and scarlet colors as they attack, the color of blood. The empire sets a time, perhaps when they are least expected to rise up and take the Assyrians by surprise. We know that the Assyrian empire was at its peak when Nineveh was wiped off the map. But we

have references and descriptions of the battle. The power of Assyria is cancelled out by the power of the Babylonians as they take the city.

There is a point Nahum is making about God's power over the power of other nations and of anything in our lives that we hold in great fear. God is greater in power than any nation or situation. It may seem like a nation is invincible. It may seem like there's no way out, no peace to be proclaimed, and no salvation from dire straits, but this simply is not true. God is more powerful than any superpower and He can do the impossible with less than powerful instruments.

We have a picture of an attacking war band, an army that can stand up to the mighty Assyrians, an army that is not afraid to march on their most prized and well-guarded capital city, the jewel of their empire. The Babylonians bring the rain, so to speak. And they conquer the mighty with their own might. Everything about them speaks of power and authority to crush the Ninevites.

2:4 (H 2:5) The chariots are driven wildly through the streets. They rush around through the squares. They gleam like torches. They dart like lightning.

Nahum continues with imagery of the chariots running through the city's streets in a wild manner. The image is one of confusion and craziness. The Babylonian chariot drivers relish in the confusion of the people as they speed through the Ninevite streets, running people over and causing mass panic. Nowhere in the city is safe from their onslaught.

Because we get an image of the chariots rushing through streets and squares inside the city, it is safe to say that the siege went well for the Babylonians. The gates of the city would have to be brought down before the chariots could cause such mass pandemonium inside the walls. Yet another image of the chariots being fiery and gleaming in the sun and darting around provides the fearful response from the Ninevites.

It looks to them like the very judgment of God in its horror and terror. The speed of the chariots is seen in the image of them darting like lightning. Lightning is very quick in striking. It is gone before even the sound of its attack is heard. And the image of torches gleaming shows the blinding array of chariots and their divisive and devious purpose.

2:5 (H 2:6) He remembers his mighty ones; they stumble in their going. They hurry to her wall; the siege tower is established.

The pronoun "he" here most likely refers the whole way back to verses one and two where the destroyer and the waster is the subject. The Babylonians are well organized with officers and mighty men who know exactly how to fight, and they have the support of the whole company. The stumbling might refer to the Assyrians as they attempt to mount a defense, but it probably refers to the craziness of war and the officers stumbling through the overturned city to their tasks.

The final two sentences produce the imagery of the armies attacking the wall after the siege towers have done their bidding. The people attack the whole structure and are drawn to its demolition. Once the siege tower is established and stands ready, no outward defense is left and the plundering will begin. The mighty men are stumbling to the spoil, overjoyed that their strength is greater than the city's defense.

2:6 (H 2:7) The river gates are opened and the palace sways backwards and forwards,

The perspective now switches to the Ninevites and their understanding of what is happening. Most scholars here speak of the river gates as those that are controlled by Nineveh. These river gates harnessed the power of the Tigris river and another river that ran through the city. These made for great defense, but they also made for a way for enemies to siege the city. What seems most likely to be discussed and illustrated here is the overpowering of these gates and then the subsequent flooding of the city of Nineveh, although the Babylonian account does not give detail as to how Nineveh was taken.

In peacetime, the river provided the very substance of life and crops and fertility, but in war, it could be turned against the city and used to flood it. It is most likely that this was the mode of attack by the Babylonians, to use the city river gate to flood the city and drown its inhabitants. The gates were opened and the city filled up like a bowl with water and then it is most likely that the Babylonians rushed in after overwhelming the city and its strongholds through flooding.

The palace is described as swaying to and fro, most likely collapsing in the flood. If this happened to the palace, then it most certainly happened to any buildings that would have been defensible. The imagery is almost like that of dancing or swimming, except with a negative connotation for the Ninevites. One might question whether the flooding happened first and then the chariots through the streets, or if it happened in this order. Either way, the frightful destruction of the beloved Assyrian city would have brought pause to any Assyrian no matter what the method.

2:7 (H 2:8) and it is fixed; it is stripped. She is carried off and her slave girls moaning like the sound of doves and beating their breasts.

At least one version, the ESV, speaks of the mistress of the city being stripped. While this makes a whole lot of sense, the word translated mistress is the word for being affixed or held in position. It is most likely this still refers to the palace, that it is fixed in its foundation but the walls are swaying back and forth under the power of the flood waters. The city is stripped of all its precious buildings in this fashion, or if you prefer, the palace itself is stripped of its beauty in the flooding.

Now another support for the reading of mistress is in the pronoun "she" which most likely refers to the city of Nineveh as a whole. The people of the city are carried off, maybe even

in the waves of the flood, but probably by the attackers. There is a specific reference to female slaves groaning or crying out like doves, like the noise a dove makes. Groaning might be the best idea here and they also beat their breasts or their hearts. The slave girls are unhappy that this beautiful city is now in utter ruin and that they are captives to their enemies. It could also be possible that these are all the women of the city, now demoted to slave girls to the enemies.

2:8 (H 2:9) So Nineveh is like a pool of water from her days and they flee. “Stop! Stop!” but there is no one who turns back.

Nahum once again reminds his hearers and readers that the city he refers to is the invincible Nineveh and that it is now just a giant pool of water. The flood has had its effect and left the city with nothing, completely desolate. It looks nothing like it used to in its day. Now it is destroyed and left in antiquity. The name the city made for itself is erased by the currents of flood. It has become a pool of water.

The people flee in every direction to get away. Not even a forced command to stop would stop them. They will not stay but will continue to run away. Not one of the people will turn back upon the city. It is left to nature to be annihilated. They all try to get away from the city. Imagine the chaos of the event as people seek refuge away from the city they once deemed their refuge. But no one relies on that city anymore.

2:9 (H 2:10) Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! There is no end to the stored up wealth of all *their* precious implements!

The command to plunder speaks to the Babylonian army as it takes everything of value, the silver and the gold, the wealth of the city, its precious tools and trinkets. The Babylonians take everything. They even take the people captive. There is no one left in the city, nothing of value in the city, and no reason to care about the city. Indeed, throughout history, the Ninevites have not been known.

Only recently have the ruins been rediscovered. The flood waters did their work nicely. But we are also informed of the greatness and vastness of the wealth of the Assyrians. They had stolen much from their conquests and now it is all stored up just for the Babylonians to take it in the spoils. Not even their treasure is left. Nothing is left at all.

2:10 (H 2:11) Emptiness and desolation and ruin! Even hearts melt and knees shake, and anguish is in all loins, then all faces grow pale.

Three words show the completeness of the loss of the city of Nineveh. The word for waste or emptiness is used first, and then the word for desolation and devastation. Finally the word for ruin or destruction is used. This is the city that at the moment of Nahum’s speech is still standing. Not only is Nineveh still standing, but it is arrayed in all of its glory and the empire

enjoys the strength of its position among the nations. It is at the height of its success. The surprise is in describing such a happening city with destruction as the prophet overlays its destiny with its current status.

The description of the people's reaction to the loss of their fabulous city comes next in this verse. The people react in exactly the opposite way they were commanded earlier in the prophecy. The prophet mockingly told them to be strong in the loins, or to fortify their guts. But their guts are not strong. In fact, they sag with anguish and despair at their fine city ruined. The hearts of the people that enjoyed the city's gifts now melt at its demise.

Their knees shake at the sight of their precious city destroyed and laid waste. The people cannot endure the vision. They cannot even walk away from it. They simply watch as the desolation happens before their eyes and do nothing. All they can do is long for its former days of glory. Their faces grow pale at the sight of its demise. The word for pale here is better understood as the color draining from them. The literal word speaks of being blackened, a dull moment in their countenance, as if the light is gone from their bodies and the joy is now darkness and nothingness. The heart of the people has been taken in taking their city.

2:11 (H 2:12) Where is the lion's den or his pasture for the young lions, where the lion and lioness walked? There were the lion's cubs and there was nothing to disturb.

In these last three verses, we have the imagery of a lion, which speaks directly of the city of Nineveh and its empire Assyria. Without the chief city of Assyria as a place of comfort and strength, where does that leave the empire? The den of the lion is the city of Nineveh, left to its demise. There is no place of comfort or prosperity for the empire. There is no pasture and there is nowhere safe for the young lions, the allies of the empire.

There is no peace and no prosperity for Assyria with the annihilation of its precious and capital city Nineveh. It is left desolate and leaderless, without a backup plan. The empire surely has been struck to the heart and its jewel has been stolen from it and trampled upon. The disturbance in the empire is unmatched and taking this one city has crippled the Assyrian empire more than anyone could have imagined. It will crumble before the Babylonians in shame.

2:12 (H 2:13) The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses and he filled his cave with prey and his dens with torn flesh.

The imagery of the lion is continued in this verse and the next as well. The lion is a proud and strong king of the animal kingdom. It is the lead animal and is therefore a perfect image of Assyria and of Nineveh as its chief treasure. For a long time, the empire of Assyria took its spoils as it wished and did what it wanted.

Now the Lord has brought a stop to its ravaging and rending the flesh of the nations. No longer can it go on the prowl and bring back the spoils of war to its chief den, the city of Nineveh. It no longer has a place. It used to take care of itself and its allies and all those under its

protection and governance, but now it has nothing to give them to protect them. It can do nothing about its new threat. The days of prosperity are over.

2:13 (H 2:14) “Behold, I am against you” declares the Lord of Hosts, “and I will purge by smoke your chariots and the sword will devour your young lions, and I will cut off from the earth your prey and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard.”

Finally in this section we receive a word from the Lord, connoted by the “declares the Lord” clause. The Lord declares His own ruling, that He is against the empire and the city. It is He who is behind the strength and ability of the Babylonians. It is He who has decreed and made possible the city’s fall. He is called here the Lord of Hosts, a common name given to the Lord when He controls the armies of the nations and of nature itself. He is the divine warrior who plunders for Himself in due season.

The Lord tells them that He will purge by smoke or will burn their weapons that brought them strength in battle, the chariots. Not only this, but the sword will devour the other nations, the young lions, and all who were under their protection. The Babylonians will destroy their chariots and then take all of the cities and nations they owned as an empire.

Not only this, but the Lord will cut off their prey from the earth and they will not be remembered by the earth. They will not only be overtaken, but they will be wiped off the map geographically and they will have no voice as an empire or a people. This is true because the Babylonians tended to absorb their spoils into their own culture. No longer would the people have a messenger to go for them and they would no longer have their chief place among the pages of history. Their day had darkened to night, and now their place was reserved for their captors. They would fade into history like every empire before them and after them. They were nothing special.

Despite our best efforts to make a name for ourselves or build our reputations, it is not worth the effort we put forth. The only thing that will be remembered throughout history is the work of God and obedience to the will of God. Let’s not build our own kingdoms, because they are destined to not last. Let us build the kingdom of God, the only enduring kingdom that this world and its pages of history will ever remember or acknowledge. Let’s not waste any more time. Let us build the kingdom of God with every thought and every word, with every action and with every attitude. Let us see God reign first in us, and then in this world!

Chapter 3

3:1 Woe to the bloody city, full of all her lies and plunder, no end to the prey!

The final chapter, a complete and unbroken section in the book of Nahum, completes the prophecy against the enemy city of Nineveh with strikingly poetic and powerfully accurate imagery of the city's last moments under siege. Remember that this has not happened in history yet and will not happen for about 38 years. God has a habit of using prophets in some cases to call His shots.

This section opens with a lament or woe upon the city. Nahum, the compassionate one as his name implies, calls the city a bloody city. Now this is not the Englishman's swearword, but rather the mere fact of the chaos and destruction of battle. The city is bloodied with the bodies and dead, with the rebellion that is squelched. We will also see the prophet characterize the city as a prostitute for its destruction and playing with the nations of the world as an empire.

The beginning of that imagery comes in the very next phrase that the city is full of her lies and plunder and there is no end to the prey. This was a big city with a lot of people as part of the enemy's prey to hunt down in battle and kill. Not only this, but the city was the chief city of the empire, and so the empire's most precious implements of its own battle spoils would probably be located there. The empire used deception and lies to manipulate the nations. The third person feminine pronoun here probably refers either directly to the city or indirectly to the empire as a whole. It is often in poetic Scripture that cities and nations are described with a gender.

3:2 The sound of the whip and the roaring sound of the wheel, and the galloping horse and leaping chariot.

One of the greatest elements of poetry is its ability, like good storytelling, to describe an event or an action in such a way as to ignite all of the senses, and so we almost personally feel a part of the action. We know what a whip sounds like, so we can hear it swooshing through the air, cutting toward its target. This is most likely the whip for the horses on the chariots to drive them faster, but might also refer to a couple of straggling lashes toward any peasant in the way or flat out torture of the army's new slaves.

The roaring sound of the wheel is made on the chariot as it wisps through the streets, boundlessly and noisily running along the roads. Anyone who has seen a movie of this era with war would understand this sound. You can see the violence with which the chariots comb the city in your imagination. We continue to imagine the confusion and discombobulating of the people as the armies seize their new city and its spoils.

You can hear the hooves of the war horses as they gallop through the streets, their horseshoes pounding the ground they run upon. This army seems invincible, uncanny,

unstoppable, an act of God by His own hand, in their fright and their fierceness. Think big screen battle and you're in the ballpark. The empire that was built in arrogance and was at its height of power is made very small in its chief city. The fierce bully that pillages and rapes and ravages in its own plundering is now subject to the same brutality from another empire.

Even the chariots seem supernatural as they dance or leap through the city at speeds unseen before. These chariots will stop for nothing and no one. Anyone in the way is trampled underfoot. Imagine the noise of that confusion, the people screaming for mercy, the horses pounding the ground, and the chariots running over anything left in their way, the chariot riders laughing in derision as they whip at the horses and people. This even would be imprinted on a survivor's mind.

3:3 Horsemen ascending and flaming sword and lightning spear, with multitudes of the slain and heaps of carcasses, and with no end to the corpses, they stumble over their corpses,

The next description almost gives godlike qualities to the armies that attack Nineveh. The horsemen ascend, this cavalry of super soldiers that come up upon the people and go over all their defenses, the walls and the fortifications. Even the swords gleam in the sun and look like fire as they slash and flash, like a flaming sword they cut the people down and burn with cuts. Then there's the spears that are as quick as lightning to find their victims. The screams and horrors as the ears and eyes are exposed to the arts and devastations of pure war.

Next our noses get a stench unmistakable as the poet describes the heaps and mounds of dead bodies and carcasses reaching toward the skies. These soldiers have killed many in the city to have these, and a dead body does not go without smelling, especially in the hot sun and the flood waters of the city. As one looks around, there is nowhere to go to escape that horrific stench of decay on the corpses because everywhere you look, there are dead bodies. There is no end to them. In fact, the corpses are so many that even the enemy armies trip over them and stumble through the city because they cannot stand upright from the sheer number of dead.

3:4 for the abundance of whorings of the prostitute, a pleasantly graceful mistress of sorcery, who sells off nations with her whorings and families with her sorceries.

Verse four gives us an idea, a reason, for the high level of torment and torture in the overtaking of Nineveh. It is because of the city's and more readily, the empire's treatment of the nations. The empire acted like a prostitute in its dealings with the nations, selling this one off for that one or making deals with all of them that violated every shred of humanity and decency. The prophet describes the chaos and the plans of the Assyrian Empire like that of a prostitute who is simply drunk off of the amount of whoring she does.

The empire is characterized as a prostitute, much like the nation of Israel was characterized as a prostitute in Hosea. Indeed, for a moment here, it feels like we are right back

in Hosea, but it is a mere passing. Look at the description of this prostitute. She is not some vulgar and obvious prostitute, but a pleasant and graceful mistress, sneaking in through false relationships and ruining without her victims realizing it. This may speak of the empire's sneaky approach to foreign relations.

There is also the word sorcery here, speaking of the trickery and charms to win the nations to her. The empire used deception and violated its partners for slaves. It sold off one nation to get another nation and became a trader in humans. Worse than destroying the institutions of nations, the empire actively destroyed the institution of the family or clan, the smaller institution organizationally. There was no institution left sacred in its dealings. It plundered without respect to anything.

3:5 “Behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord of Hosts, “and I will uncover your skirts over your face so nations see your nakedness and kingdoms your shame.

After Nahum details some of the scene at the city's fall and the reasons for such destruction and devastation, we hear now directly from the Lord. He grabs the nation's attention with the word behold. This is a word of warning meant to seize the attention of its hearer. The Lord of the second time in the book (2:13 and here) declares that He is against the city Nineveh and the empire of Assyria.

So here we have yet another promise from the Lord of His resulting actions in His burning anger. First, the quote is introduced as coming from the Lord of Hosts. This is a formal title for the Lord. He is the one who controls the armies of the world, of the angels, and of every other army force there is in the universe, in all of creation. He uses His influence in Babylon to bring this mighty war band together against Assyria. He is the Lord, the Master, the King over every military force and can and will use them to His purposes.

The Lord of Hosts promises in battle to uncover the prostitute's skirts, to expose her to the nations for her shame. This kind of imagery is also used in Hosea of Gomer. Uncover also can be translated as exile, but here the image is of uncovering, of lifting the skirts of a prostitute to expose her private parts. The skirt is lifted up over the face so that her shame is fully exposed and she is blinded in the process of the Lord's uncovering and shaming her.

The nations see her for what she truly is and the empire is exposed for its harlotry. Every deal that was made is now in the light of the day and the secretive deception is no longer a weapon of foreign affairs. The nations and kingdoms are exposed to these lies and the empire must now deal with their reactions, causing it great shame. Shame in that culture was an extremely great motivator, as much as guilt is a great motivator in our own culture.

3:6 “Then I will throw filth at you and treat you with disdain and I will lay you down in a spectacle.

The Lord's shaming the empire does not end there. He continues by telling the prostitute that he will throw filth at her and shameful dirt. The word for filth here describes the abominations and utterly detestable objects and things that would draw scorn from the observers. This may speak to idols or other images or to taboo things of the culture. The Lord will then treat the empire with disdain or contempt, showing the emptiness and the foolishness, the worthlessness of the empire.

Finally as part of the Lord's judgment and wrath, He will lay down the empire, to put it down in the dust, to end its life and vitality. But He's not just going to kill the empire quickly and get it over with. He's going to make a spectacle so the whole world of nations sees the full evil and wickedness of the empire. Everything will be exposed and it will be the show of a lifetime. God will bring into the light of public scrutiny everything carefully and quietly hidden away by the empire.

3:7 “And it will happen that all who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Devastated is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?’ Where shall I seek comforters for you?”

The Lord continues His promise by saying that the reaction of the nations and kingdoms will be less than helpful to the empire. The nations when exposed to all of the empire's secrets and true nature will flee the other way. They will run from what they are involved in. Not only will all of the empire's allies be gone, but they will pity the once strong empire by asking if anyone will grieve for the devastation of the city.

The reason for such a question is partly of the city deserving to be pitied. The empire was extremely cruel to all the nations. If its allies would grieve for it, the opposed nations would come after the allies. The other side of it is not feeling sorry for an empire that was so violent and rude. To grieve would be strange for something that was evil from the beginning. The word grieve here literally speaks of swaying back and forth, to shake in emotional reaction, to cooperate with the empire. This is the idea of mourning. Who will mourn for the city and support it now that it has been laid waste?

With such an international attitude toward the ailing and falling empire, the Lord asks whom He could find to feel sorry for the empire as it crumbles. It did not apparently have any true friends or allies. No one will step out and comfort the empire or the city in its destruction. The Assyrians treated so contemptuously every nation that no one comes to their defense in their time of need. It is important how we treat people, not just so that they will help us when we need help, but because our reputation should be that of a servant to all. We must carefully guard our friendships so that they can be fruitful for both us and our friends.

3:8 Are you better than Thebes, with the Nile all around her, with her rampart the sea and water her city walls?

The prophet asks the whole city if it is better than Thebes. This verse is very important internal evidence to help us date the book as was mentioned in the introduction. Thebes is the chief city of the Egyptians. Thebes fell in 663 BC. We know this because it is well documented in ancient annals. The city of Thebes in Hebrew is No-Amon. I think that is an interesting name because Amon is the name of the sun god Amon-Ra, and the name in Hebrew says that there is no sun god Amon. At least, at face value, that's what it looks like.

Because we are given this distinct event as a past event of history, it helps us narrow down this book's dates to somewhere between that date, 663 BC and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. So this is a very helpful verse for scholars, but its chief implication was to ask the arrogant Ninevites if they were any better than other great cities of other great empires that had experienced their own demise.

Thebes was much like Nineveh in that it had the Nile around it, just as Nineveh is built right on the Euphrates River. The geological comparisons are the reason for the reference. Just like Nineveh, Thebes enjoyed a heavily fortified position because the Nile acted like a moat as a defense. But the same waters that can defend can also offend if used or controlled by the ones seiging the city, which is what we believe happened in Nineveh's case.

Other great cities have failed to survive that were on riverfronts. Why is Nineveh any different? The rampart and city walls were the waters that surrounded Thebes. But these same natural barriers and defenses did not save that city. The ramparts and the walls of a city were the chief defenses. These were not made out of water for Thebes. The defenses of the city were water.

3:9 Cush her strength, and Egypt, and without end! Put and the Libyans were your support.

Cush is another name for Ethiopia, a fellow African nation that lent support to Thebes in its day. Not only is the prophet speaking of Thebe's defensive capabilities, but also the city's allies and friends. Cush is mentioned several times in the Old Testament and even in the New Testament, there is a man from Ethiopia in the book of Acts. It is a strong nation that is a formidable ally.

Cush lent a strength to Thebes and Egypt itself was strong and mighty as an ally. Indeed, Thebes was the place of Pharaohs whose influence knew no end and without end did these alliances benefit Thebes. But they were not enough. Other countries joined with Thebes as allies as well, including Put and the Libyans. All of these allies lent support in some fashion or another to Thebes, and they were all legendary. Could Nineveh measure up to them? Whether or not that question could be answered, this much is for sure: Nineveh would share the same fate in losing its allies when it was overrun.

3:10 Yet she was exiled; she walked into captivity. Even her infants were dashed to peaces at the head of every street, and for her honored men lots were cast, even all her great ones were bound in fetters.

Even though Thebes was a strong city and had many allies and was well protected, that city still endured its capture and exile. The images here are of the city being captured and the people led into death and destruction. Even infants were not left unscathed, taken into death by ruthless armies when Thebes was attacked. The infants' bodies were put at the heads of the streets and they were cut up by the swords of the armies.

The men who were of glorious fame were sold into slavery. The word here for honorable men is the word for glory in the Old Testament, men who had a weighty presence, whose greatness was in their ability. So these men were not killed, but the soldiers cast lots to enslave them. The other great ones, leaders and men at the front of their fields were locked away in fetters or chains. The binding could be chains but it might also be fetters. They were bound and were no longer great men. This fate even the great city of Thebes could not escape. And this same destiny was headed for Nineveh.

3:11 You also will become drunk; you will hide. You will also seek a refuge from the enemy.

As in the same way that the city of Thebes fell to its enemies, so also Nineveh has no hope. The image of drunkenness here might speak to the confusion of the battle event or it might speak of the depression of being captive. The next line clarifies that the people of Nineveh will look to hide from their enemies. They will seek ways of escape through drinking or through hiding. They will look for a refuge, a hiding place that is a stronghold.

But that will not save them from their demise. There is nowhere they can hide. They cannot find a refuge when God is their enemy. He knows all things and He is ultimately powerful. They will not get away from the coming wrath. They will not be able to subvert or change it. They must endure it as others have endured God's wrath. His jealousy and vengeance are at hand against the Ninevites for what they did to His people in their exiles of Israel and their advancements into Judah.

3:12 All your fortified cities are first-ripe fig trees; if they are shaken, then they fall into the mouth of the devourer.

Verse 12 speaks of the cities around Nineveh, the other cities of the Assyrian empire, or it may speak of the fortifications around the city of Nineveh. If the second is most accurate, the point is that at a moment's shaking, the fortifications will crumble. The forts are the things that are supposed to last the longest, be the hardest targets in the battle. But for Nineveh, they will be the first things to crumble and fall, and the rest will be just as easy.

A first-ripe fig literally falls off the tree when the wind blows or the tree is shaken in harvest. It doesn't take much to get the fruit. They do not need to be pulled off the branch. They are already prepared to be taken. Despite the strength of Nineveh, it will be just as though a little bit of shaking by the enemy forces will be enough to wipe out its strongest and most enduring defenses. If this speaks of other fortified cities, once Nineveh falls, those cities will be easy to take.

Falling into the mouth of the devourer is an image of being destroyed and exiled. They will easily go into captivity. It will not be a long drawn out war but a short battle with surrendering and exile. The captivity will easily be enforced and despite Nineveh's strength, they will weakly go into exile.

3:13 Behold, your people are women in your midst to your enemies; the gates of your land are open; fire devours your gate bars.

There are no other defenses once the forts have been taken out. The men that fight against the enemy will be like women in battle. Now this is meant to be a cultural scoffing of the fighting men of Nineveh, whom all feared greatly for their skill in battle and their ruthless reactions. This would be the same as saying in our culture, "You punch like a girl" to a young strapping lad or "You run like a girl" to a young man. The idea is to taunt Nineveh's forces, which are normally a force with which to be reckoned.

The fighting men will have no success fending off the attacks of the enemy. They fight like girls. Their skills are not as good as their adversaries and their abilities and strengths have become weaknesses. They are being schooled by greater war masters than themselves. The land around the city and the whole of the empire is left to open raids by these enemies. The gates to the land are open and welcoming to the rampage.

There is no way to stop the flood of soldiers and the incursion into their land. The soldiers use fire to gain access to the city and to its lands. They will break down every bar. The bar is placed over the gates to lock the gates in place. But it does them no good because they have been defeated and the gates are not only unlocked, but wide open.

3:14 Draw water for the siege against your forts! Go into the clay and trample in the mortar! Seize the brick mold!

Next, the prophet calls on the people, perhaps what we would hear from a leader trying to organize against the falling walls to build up decaying defenses. These are commands from what seems like a foreman to rebuild demolished parts of the wall or the forts. First he commands the soldiers to draw water or gather water. The water would aid in making the mortar and clay that would be needed to rebuild parts of the wall. But it would only be stop-gap measures. It takes a while to rebuild a wall. Probably they were working on the gaps that soldiers could come in through.

The trampling on mortar and making of clay would be the prime activity if the defenses were not useful at all in battle. The last stand is in keeping as many soldiers out of the city as possible. This is damage control that we see in this verse. Someone is ordering anyone who is capable to trample the mortar as it mixes so it can be used to fill in the bricks of the walls.

And the clay must also be worked to the right thickness to fix the barriers. Finally, the brick mold must be grabbed. The clay would be poured into the brick molds to be shaped and then it would be taken to the walls and laid with the mortar between to glue it all together. But it would also need time to dry to be effective. So it is most likely they are making a second wall or a barricade inside the city walls. What we pick up on here is the sense of desperation, the last resorts of the workmen and the panic of the foreman. Things are not going well and this plan most likely won't work either.

3:15 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 yourselves like the grasshopper!

In the midst of their fighting to keep the siege of the city outside and to rebuild defenses and fight with what little talent and vigor they have left, fighting like women, the fire of the armies will devour them. We don't know how but both fire and water were most likely effective tools to gain the city in the siege. The enemy most likely used them along with fighting soldiers to take the population, or what was left after the battle scars and desolation.

The men will come into the city through the breaches in walls and through its open gates. The city's palace and many of its fortified areas are demolished through flood damage and all that is left is for the soldiers to take the rest of the city captive. They will do this by administering the sword to any rebels. They will cut them apart with the sword. The soldiers will allow their swords to cut the people down as if they were like a plague of locusts. No matter how numerous the population, they will all share the same fate.

The prophet calls upon them to multiply like the locust that will be devoured, to multiply like grasshoppers. Biblical imagery of locusts and grasshoppers usually speak of their numerous nature and their ability to multiply, much like the image of rabbits multiplying at sometimes alarming rates. The idea is that defeating the enemy by sheer number of the population is their only true defense, although there is no time to accomplish that goal while the city is in its last moments. There is no recourse left at all.

3:16 You increased your merchants more than heaven's stars. The locust strips and flies away.

The image goes now to the idea of multiplying like grasshoppers. The empire was getting too large for the emperor to manage. The merchants were all over the place, as numerous as the stars of heaven. At least one other familiar reference to such a number is found in God's promise to Abraham in Genesis that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars.

It is possible that this is a reference to the abuse in merchandise and economics that the empire put upon the nations of the world, for it seems the second line talks about the locusts once again with the idea of spreading or stripping and then flying away. The locusts are famous in biblical imagery for stripping the fruits and bark and the healthy things off of producing crops and leaving them barren. Perhaps the merchants did this through commerce and then simply fled from the consequences, taking advantage without paying justly.

God's justice would not allow for merchants to take full advantage and get away with it, to flee forever. He will repay what they have stolen through commerce. In our world today, everyone attacks every system of commerce from capitalism to communism for different reasons. It seems when humans do commerce, someone is violated in some way financially. But Christians must be people who stand above the din of violations and use God's resources in a redeeming and blessing way.

3:17 Your princes like grasshoppers and your officials like gobs of locusts encamping on the fences on a cold day; the sun rises, and no one even knows where they are.

Not only did the merchants expand at alarming and unsustainable rates, but the government and officials also increased beyond measure. As the empire expands, more and more bureaucracy is brought into the works. Measures are harder to get passed and dealt with and the inefficiency of rule oversteps the expansions. There is no longer a high degree of control and assistance asserted over the empire, an internal weakness that will bring them to their knees.

Once again the imagery in this section is on the expansions of the empire, outgrowing its sufficiency, as represented in the common numerous locusts and grasshoppers. These animals seemed to do quite well and when they were too many, they could destroy not just one harvest, as we see in Joel, but the entire future of harvests, and consequently, the living of a people or nation!

The officials are described as gathering in one place like locusts on a fence in the cold day and then scattering in the sunlight. This imagery speaks of the king not knowing which official is where and why they are not doing what he has commanded. There is no governmental control over the empire as a whole. Any part of it is vulnerable to attack, and the king would not even know it was attacked.

Today, we deal with a nation in the same dire straits. We have stretched ourselves so thin and made our government so large that it has become ineffective. It has been this way for a while now, and is not the fault of one administration. We need to see from history that this path leads to invasion and destruction. God was using all of these elements in His wrathful vengeance.

3:18 Your shepherds are asleep, O King of Assyria, your nobles are settling down, your people are scattered over the mountains with no one to gather *them*.

The images of being too enlarged without support for that big of an empire continue as the shepherds who feed and nourish animals are asleep. This most likely refers to the officials and the ones supplying aid for anyone in the empire who needed it. You could take it literally, although in this case it falls in a section about the leadership of the empire, and leaders are often referred to in Scripture as shepherds. That is indeed part of the job of a pastor, to shepherd God's people.

But those who are to be nourishing are sleeping on the job and the king has no clue until it will be too late. Even the nobles, the mighty men and the great ones, are settling down and some translations interpret it as lying down to sleep. The empire is not prepared for the attack when it comes. Everyone is asleep at the wheel and the surprise comes because no one was watching or diligent in their duties. The empire failed on several levels in the Babylonian attack. The last ditch efforts were way too late to affect any positive change.

Even the people were all scattered out. The word for scatter in some connotations speaks of pawing at the ground or frisking around. The image is that the people have no true leadership on the very basic of levels. They have no means to survive. Without leadership, the people in the empire have no hope of saving themselves. They are described as being scattered throughout the mountains. No one knows where everyone is or what everyone is up to. And there is no sense of gathering together or community. The ending of the verse ends on that word for gathering. Most imply that no one in the king's administration can gather the people together. But the idea of community might be what is intended, for the pronoun for them is not there in the original.

One of the biggest issues larger churches have is finding a way for community to happen. They have to be much more intentional about making community happen because it will not naturally take place. With the increase of any institution, churches included, community and togetherness may be sacrificed for larger groups. It is best to have smaller groups so that community can happen and everyone can feel like they are part of something and contributing to something greater than themselves. The longing of humans for community is impossible to underestimate. Even in smaller groups, we must be intentional about making others feel welcome and a part of whatever is going on.

3:19 There is no dulling for your fracture, your wound is making you weak All who hear the report about you clap their hands over you, indeed, upon whom your evil has not constantly crossed.

The empire cannot be quickly fixed. The flaw is within the very fabric of the empire. It has reached its limit at its height. The imagery is of a wound that is incurable, a pain that cannot be dulled or eased. The suffering will be internal and full-blown. The empire will screech to a halt and will suffer a great deal of upheaval. The fracture cannot be fixed. It is too deep. The wound is weakening the whole empire and it's only a matter of time for a stronger and younger empire to rip it to shreds, as do the Babylonians beginning with Nineveh.

The peoples of the nations that have been abused for far too long respond in kind by clapping their hands in delight rather than coming to Nineveh's aid. They have been abused by the empire and refuse to be sad about its demise. The empire's evil strategies and abuse have come back on its head and the people rejoice in the justice of God. They are happy to no longer be under Nineveh's or Assyria's thumb. The last line speaks of the evils the empire has unleashed on the world. The world joins in a collective sigh of happiness at its demise. Evil will not go unpunished and the world will enjoy the avenging justice of God.