

Introduction to Nahum Chapter 2

The Siege of Nineveh: Chariots Like Torches, and the Lion's Den Emptied at Last

Chapter 2 moves from the sweeping theophany and general oracle of chapter 1 into a vivid, cinematic depiction of Nineveh's actual military destruction, rendered with such specific, sensory detail, flashing chariots, jostling streets, collapsing river gates, a captive queen led away, that many readers across the centuries have found in these verses an almost eyewitness quality, poetic prophecy anticipating with startling precision the historical siege that would in fact end the Assyrian empire in 612 BC at the hands of a coalition of Babylonians and Medes.

The chapter opens with an ironic call to Nineveh's own defenders to prepare for a battle they cannot win, before shifting into an extended, almost frantic battle sequence depicting the attacking army's overwhelming speed and force, the city's own defenses failing catastrophically, and its population fleeing in terror and despair. The chapter's closing image reaches back to Assyria's own favorite royal symbol, the lion, long used throughout Assyrian art and inscription to depict the empire's ferocity and dominance, now turned directly against it: the same lion's den that once devoured prey without limit or fear will itself, Nahum declares, be emptied and burned, the LORD of hosts himself directly, personally opposed to the empire that had for so long terrorized the ancient world.

Opening Prayer

Lord God of Hosts,

You are the one who turns away the excellency of the proud and restores the excellency of your own people, as you turned again the excellency of Jacob and of Israel after the emptiers had emptied them out. Thank you that no wall, no chariot, no fortified defense can stand against the purpose you have determined, for when you pass through, gates of rivers are opened and every stronghold is dissolved.

Lord, let us never place our trust in the pleasant furniture of this world, in silver or gold or any store or glory, knowing that such things may become empty, and void, and waste in a moment, while you alone remain our sure foundation. Where the proud have filled their dens with prey, and thought themselves untouchable as lions, remind us that you say, Behold, I am against thee, to any power that sets itself against your people.

And Lord, thank you that you fight for those who trust in you, and that no voice of a wicked messenger shall be heard forever against your purposes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Nahum 2:1–2

He That Dasheth in Pieces Is Come Up: The LORD Hath Turned Away the Excellency of Jacob

(1) He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.

(2) For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.

The Context

Verse 1's "he that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily" addresses Nineveh directly with a series of urgent military commands, keep the garrison, watch the road, gird for battle, strengthen defenses, that read, on the surface, as genuine advice, yet function throughout as bitter irony: the coming destroyer has already arrived, and no amount of frantic defensive preparation described in this verse will prove sufficient, a rhetorical strategy that lets the futility of Nineveh's coming resistance speak for itself.

Verse 2's "for the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches" pauses the battle imagery briefly to explain its deeper theological cause, naming Assyria's own past role as "the emptiers" who had ravaged Israel and Judah, God's own covenant people, their vines marred, likely referring to the widespread devastation Assyria had

historically inflicted on Israelite and Judean agriculture and prosperity during its campaigns. “The LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob” promises restoration of what Assyria had stripped away, tying the coming judgment on Nineveh directly to justice on behalf of the very people it had oppressed.

Plain American English

An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength. The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines.

Key Observations

“keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily”: This signifies **Urgent Military Commands Deployed With Deliberate Irony to Underscore the Futility of Nineveh’s Coming Resistance.**

By issuing genuine-sounding defensive advice to a city already facing an unstoppable destroyer, this verse lets the pointlessness of frantic preparation speak for itself, no amount of fortification proving sufficient against the judgment already determined.

“the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob... for the emptiers have emptied them out”: This signifies **Nineveh’s Coming Judgment Directly Tied to Its Own Past Role in Ravaging God’s Covenant People.**

By naming Assyria specifically as “the emptiers” who had devastated Israel and Judah, this verse grounds the coming destruction not merely in abstract divine justice but in specific, remembered historical wrong done to God’s own people, now finally being answered.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Recognize That No Amount of Self-Reliant Preparation Can Withstand Judgment Already Determined by God: This passage’s ironic military commands invite contemporary readers to consider what forms of self-reliant fortification, whether

personal, institutional, or national, might prove similarly futile against consequences already set in motion by persistent wrongdoing.

2. Trust That God Remembers and Will Eventually Answer Wrongs Done to His

People: The direct link between Nineveh's judgment and its past oppression of Israel offers contemporary believers confidence that God takes genuine notice of harm done to his people, even when justice appears delayed across generations.

How This Relates to Today

This passage's ironic call to futile defensive preparation speaks to any contemporary situation where confidence in self-generated strength or resources proves ultimately powerless against consequences already determined by persistent wrongdoing, a caution against misplaced trust in one's own fortifications, however mighty they may appear.

Key Lesson: **This opening unit issues a series of ironic, urgent military commands to Nineveh, whose defensive preparation will prove entirely futile against the destroyer already come up before its face, and grounds this coming judgment directly in Assyria's own past role as the emptier of Jacob's excellency, promising that the LORD will now restore what the empire had for so long stripped away.**

Nahum 2:3–5

Chariots Like Torches: They Shall Run Like the Lightnings

(3) The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken.

(4) The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.

(5) He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared.

The Context

Verse 3's "the shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken" launches into vivid, sensory battle imagery, red shields and scarlet-clad warriors likely describing either actual dyed military equipment, a known ancient Near Eastern practice, or, more ominously, the color of imminent bloodshed. "The fir trees shall be terribly shaken" may refer to the trembling of spear shafts, often made of fir, as the army advances, or to the natural landscape itself reacting to the army's approach.

Verse 4's "the chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings" intensifies the chaos with rapid, overwhelming motion, chariots colliding in the city's own streets, their movement compared to both fire and lightning, images conveying speed, brightness, and destructive force all at once, a scene of frenzied, unstoppable momentum overtaking the city from within its own defenses.

Verse 5's "he shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared" shifts attention specifically to Nineveh's own commander mustering his forces, "stumble in their walk" suggesting panicked, disorganized haste rather than confident, orderly defense, as the defenders rush toward the wall to prepare what protection they still can, a picture of desperate, last-minute scrambling rather than calm readiness.

Plain American English

The shields of the soldiers are red; the warriors are dressed in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of juniper are brandished. The chariots race through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning. He summons his picked troops, yet they stumble on their way. They dash to the city wall; the protective shield is put in place.

Key Observations

"the chariots shall rage in the streets... they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings": This signifies **Overwhelming Speed, Brightness, and Chaos Deployed to Convey Unstoppable, Frenzied Momentum.**

The compressed, rapid-fire imagery of colliding chariots compared to fire and lightning creates a sense of frenzied, overwhelming chaos overtaking the city, conveying destructive momentum that no organized response can effectively contain.

“he shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk”: This signifies **Nineveh’s Own Defenders Pictured as Panicked and Disorganized Rather Than Confident and Orderly.**

This detail undercuts any expectation of a competent, composed Assyrian defense, describing instead desperate, stumbling haste, a striking reversal for an empire whose military reputation had for generations inspired terror throughout the ancient Near East.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Recognize That Reputation for Strength Offers No Guarantee Against Genuine Collapse: The picture of Nineveh’s once-feared military stumbling in panic invites contemporary readers to hold any reputation for strength or invincibility, whether personal, institutional, or national, with appropriate humility, aware that outward reputation and actual resilience under real pressure are not the same thing.

How This Relates to Today

This chapter’s vivid battle imagery, remarkable for its specific, almost cinematic detail, continues to be cited by historians and readers alike as a striking example of prophetic literature anticipating actual historical events with unusual precision, offering contemporary readers a concrete case study in the relationship between biblical prophecy and verifiable history.

Key Lesson: **This unit renders Nineveh’s coming destruction in vivid, sensory battle imagery, red shields and scarlet warriors, chariots raging through the streets like torches and lightning, and Nineveh’s own once-feared defenders reduced to stumbling, panicked haste as they scramble toward the wall in desperate, last-minute preparation.**

Nahum 2:6–8

The Gates of the Rivers Shall Be Opened: Nineveh Is Like a Pool of Water, Yet They Shall Flee Away

(6) The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved.

(7) And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts.

(8) But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back.

The Context

Verse 6’s “the gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved” describes what many historians identify as the decisive factor in Nineveh’s actual historical fall, ancient records suggesting that flooding of the Tigris and its tributaries breached portions of the city’s defenses, allowing the attacking coalition entry, “the palace shall be dissolved” naming the destruction of Assyrian royal power at its very seat and symbol.

Verse 7’s “and Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts” pictures a royal or symbolic female figure, possibly the queen, a goddess-image, or a personification of the city itself, led away into captivity, her attendants mourning with the plaintive sound of doves and the ritual gesture of beating their breasts in grief, a poignant image of humiliation replacing former royal glory.

Verse 8’s “but Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back” compares the city, famous for its water supply and canal systems, to a pool now draining away, its population fleeing despite desperate cries to stand and hold the line, “none shall look back” picturing total, irreversible panic and abandonment rather than any organized, defensible retreat.

Plain American English

The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses. It is decreed that Nineveh be exiled and carried away. Her female slaves moan like doves and beat on their breasts.

Nineveh is like a pool whose water is draining away. Stop! Stop! they cry, but no one turns back.

Key Observations

“the gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved”: This signifies **A Detail Widely Understood to Anticipate the Actual Historical Circumstances of Nineveh’s Fall by Flood.**

This image aligns remarkably closely with ancient historical accounts describing river flooding as a key factor in the actual siege and fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, an alignment between prophetic image and later verified history that has drawn considerable scholarly attention.

“Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away”: This signifies **The City’s Own Famous Prosperity and Water Supply Turned Into an Image of Its Own Rapid, Irreversible Draining Away.**

By comparing the once-thriving city to a draining pool, this verse ironically reverses Nineveh’s own celebrated resource, its abundant water, into a symbol of the empire’s own life and power rapidly, irrecoverably emptying out.

“stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back”: This signifies **Total, Irreversible Panic Depicted as Overwhelming Any Attempt at Organized, Defensible Resistance.**

The futile cry to stand, unheeded by a fleeing population, pictures the complete collapse of order and courage within the city, a scene of total panic rather than any coordinated last stand.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Recognize That Scripture’s Prophetic Claims Have Sometimes Been Verified by Later, Independent Historical Record: The remarkable correspondence between this prophecy and the actual historical circumstances of Nineveh’s fall offers contemporary believers a concrete example of prophetic Scripture’s claims being borne out by subsequent, independently verified history.

How This Relates to Today

The image of a once-thriving city's resources rapidly draining away speaks to contemporary situations of sudden institutional or societal collapse, where apparent prosperity and permanence prove, under real pressure, to have been far more fragile and temporary than assumed.

Key Lesson: **This unit describes the decisive breach of Nineveh's defenses through opened river gates, a detail closely matching the city's actual historical fall, pictures a royal or symbolic female figure led away captive amid her attendants' mourning, and closes with the image of the once-thriving city draining away like a pool of water, its population fleeing in total, irreversible panic despite desperate cries to stand.**

Nahum 2:9–10

Take Ye the Spoil: She Is Empty, and Void, and Waste

(9) Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.

(10) She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness.

The Context

Verse 9's "take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture" addresses the conquering army directly, inviting them to plunder Nineveh's accumulated wealth, "none end of the store and glory" naming the sheer scale of riches the empire had gathered across generations of conquest and tribute, wealth now, in a single devastating irony, becoming plunder for others exactly as Nineveh had once plundered so many nations before it.

Verse 10's "she is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness"

describes the city's aftermath and its inhabitants' terror using a triple description of desolation, echoing the language of Genesis 1:2's "without form, and void" applied here to complete devastation, alongside a vivid physical description of human terror, melting hearts, knocking knees, and darkened, ashen faces, a comprehensive picture of both physical ruin and psychological collapse.

Plain American English

Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures! She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale.

Key Observations

"take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold... none end of the store and glory": This signifies **Wealth Once Gathered Through Assyria's Own Conquest Now Becoming Plunder for Others in a Deliberate Historical Irony.**

This invitation to plunder Nineveh's riches enacts a fitting reversal, the empire that had for generations enriched itself through conquest of others now itself becoming the source of plunder, exactly matching the pattern of the very violence it had inflicted.

"she is empty, and void, and waste": This signifies **Language Echoing Genesis 1:2's Description of Primordial Formlessness Applied to Nineveh's Complete Devastation.**

By using language that recalls the earth's condition before creation's ordering work, this description frames Nineveh's destruction as a kind of complete undoing, a total reversal of the order, structure, and glory the city had once possessed.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Recognize That Wealth Accumulated Through Injustice Provides No Lasting Security: The reversal in which Nineveh's own plundered wealth becomes plunder for others invites contemporary reflection on the ultimate insecurity of prosperity built on exploitation or injustice toward others, however impressive that prosperity may presently appear.

How This Relates to Today

The vivid physical description of terror, melting hearts and trembling knees, offers a genuinely human, sympathetic glimpse into the real cost of judgment even within a prophecy otherwise focused on Nineveh's deserved destruction, a reminder that scriptural judgment oracles do not celebrate suffering but soberly record its real, human weight.

Key Lesson: **This unit invites the conquering army to plunder Nineveh's vast accumulated wealth, a fitting reversal for an empire that had built its own riches through conquest of others, and describes the city's resulting devastation with language echoing Genesis's primordial formlessness, paired with a vivid, sympathetic picture of genuine human terror, melting hearts, trembling knees, and darkened faces among Nineveh's own inhabitants.**

Nahum 2:11–13

Where Is the Dwelling of the Lions: Behold, I Am Against Thee, Saith the LORD of Hosts

(11) Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?

(12) The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.

(13) Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

The Context

Verse 11's "where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?" deploys the lion as an especially pointed image, since the lion served throughout Assyrian royal art, palace reliefs, and inscriptions as the empire's own favorite self-

chosen symbol of strength and dominance, kings of Assyria frequently depicted hunting lions or portrayed as lions themselves. The rhetorical question “where is” anticipates the coming reversal, the once-secure lion’s den soon to be found empty and desolate.

Verse 12’s “the lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin” describes the lion’s former, unrestrained predatory success, tearing prey without limit, filling its dens to overflowing, a direct picture of Assyria’s own historical practice of ruthless conquest and plunder across the ancient Near East, wealth and captives filling the empire’s own storehouses exactly as prey once filled the literal lion’s den.

Verse 13’s “behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard” delivers the chapter’s climactic, direct divine confrontation, “behold, I am against thee” among the most severe personal declarations in prophetic literature, spoken directly by “the LORD of hosts,” God’s own title as commander of heavenly armies, against an empire that had considered itself unstoppable. “The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard” likely refers to the intimidating diplomatic and military messengers Assyria had long used to terrify subject and rival nations alike (compare 2 Kings 18:17–35), their voice now permanently silenced.

Plain American English

Where now is the lions’ den, the place where they fed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs, with nothing to fear? The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled prey for his mate, filling his lairs with kills and his dens with the prey. I am against you, declares the LORD Almighty, and I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard.

Key Observations

“where is the dwelling of the lions... where the lion, even the old lion, walked”: This signifies **Assyria’s Own Favorite Royal Symbol of the Lion Turned Into a Deliberate, Pointed Rhetorical Question About Its Own Emptiness.**

By invoking the lion, a symbol Assyrian kings themselves proudly used throughout their own art and inscriptions, this rhetorical question directly turns the empire’s own chosen emblem of strength into the very image of its coming, complete desolation.

“the lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps... filled his holes with prey”: This signifies **Assyria’s Historical Practice of Ruthless Conquest and Plunder Directly Pictured Through the Lion’s Unrestrained Predatory Behavior.**

This description of the lion’s former, unlimited success at tearing and gathering prey serves as a direct, unmistakable picture of Assyria’s own historical pattern of conquest, its storehouses filled with plunder exactly as a lion’s den fills with prey.

“behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts”: This signifies **One of Prophetic Literature’s Most Severe, Directly Personal Divine Declarations Aimed at a Self-Proclaimed Unstoppable Empire.**

This direct first-person confrontation, God himself declaring personal opposition, represents the chapter’s climactic statement, the LORD of hosts, commander of heavenly armies, personally opposing an empire that had considered itself beyond any such challenge.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Recognize That Symbols of Power and Dominance Offer No Lasting Protection

Against God’s Own Direct Opposition: The reversal of Assyria’s own lion imagery invites contemporary reflection on how any celebrated symbol of strength, whether personal, institutional, or national, ultimately provides no security against divine judgment when built on persistent, unrepented cruelty.

2. Take Seriously the Weight of God’s Direct, Personal Opposition to Persistent,

Unrepented Evil: The severity of “behold, I am against thee” invites contemporary readers to consider with appropriate seriousness the reality that God’s patience, extended repeatedly, does eventually give way to direct, personal opposition against persistent, unrepented wrongdoing.

How This Relates to Today

This closing image speaks to contemporary situations where institutions or powers built on exploitation of others project an image of invincibility, offering the sober reminder that such projected strength, however convincing, ultimately offers no protection against genuine accountability for the harm inflicted in gathering it.

Key Lesson: **This closing unit turns Assyria's own favorite royal symbol, the lion, directly against the empire, asking where its once-secure den has gone, describing the lion's former unrestrained predatory success as a direct picture of Assyria's historical conquest and plunder, and delivering the chapter's climactic divine declaration, behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, promising the burning of Nineveh's chariots, the devouring of its young lions, and the permanent silencing of the messengers whose voice had once terrified the ancient world.**

Closing Prayer

Lord God of Hosts,

You have turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel, restoring what the emptiers had emptied out and marred. Thank you that no fortification, no chariot, no defense prepared in haste can withstand the purpose you have determined, and that even the gates of rivers open at your word, dissolving every proud palace built upon oppression of your people.

Lord, let us never trust in silver or gold or any store and glory of pleasant furniture, remembering how quickly such things become empty, and void, and waste. Where the proud have filled their dens with prey, taking without fear or restraint, remind us that you say, Behold, I am against thee, to every power that sets itself against your people and your purposes.

And Lord, thank you that the voice of every wicked messenger shall in the end be silenced, and that you alone remain the LORD of hosts, able to burn every chariot in the smoke and cut off every prey from the earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Glory to God Alone