

The Death of the Magnificent City

Nahum 2:1-13

The second chapter in Nahum's prophecy has been called "a masterpiece of ancient literature, unsurpassed for its graphic portrayal of a military assault." Although the siege has yet to take place on the real stage of history, Nahum can see it as clearly in his mind's eye as if the battle were being waged in front of him. His message rises like a thundering crescendo of a large orchestra as he forecasts the looming battle—depicting this event in all its awesome color and gory detail.

Open Your Heart: "In humbleness we bow before You, Almighty God. With deep contrition we ask You to hear the cries of deliverance rising from our *own* nation for the national and personal sins committed against You, the Holy God."

Nahum picks up the prophetic story at the point where the Medes and Babylonians have already overrun the countryside of Assyria. ("An attacker advances against you, Nineveh." 2:1a) The dramatic poem of Nahum chapter 2, with its short staccato lines, skillfully conveys in *sense* and *sound* the chaos and conflict of the scene.

Against this background **read chapter two of Nahum aloud.** *Imagine yourself on the walls of Nineveh, witnessing the whole gripping tragedy.*

The alarm is sounded in 2:1! Using military language with a measured two-beat cadence Nahum begins to unveil the coming destruction of this powerful city. **Review** verse 1 line by line.

1. Record the proposed futile steps of Nineveh's defense suggested by the prophet in verse 1. Consider the elaborate irony in his words.

2. a. Verse 2 is a further development of Nahum 1:7, 12-13 and particularly 1:15. Examine each of these verses and comment on the common theme.

- b. Contrast what you see God doing in the verses above with God's actions against the city of Nineveh. What is the relationship between these dual perspectives?

The Attackers Described—verse 3: consult several translations.

3. What did Nahum see regarding the items of clothing and the warfare used by the attackers of Nineveh—the Medes and the Babylonians (verse 3)? **Locate** these countries on Map 1.

The chariots in those days were built of various types of wood for lightness and speed with fittings of leather and metal that would flash with reflected light. By this time the chariots were scythed with steel blades protruding from them and their wheels. It was one of the most terrifying weapons of antiquity which cut down all who came against them. The chariots were fitted with a pole and yoke for the horses, normally a team of two, with spoked wheels and a single axle which permitted a high degree of maneuverability. A chariot crew could be comprised of as many as four members: the driver, equipped with a long spear and round shield, an archer, and two shield bearers for protection of their fellow crew members. The shields were made of wood and covered with leather, which could have been dyed red. -Gaebelien

The Initial Assault—verse 4: This battle took place in the suburbs of Nineveh, outside the massive walls. But it's likely that the city's walls and towers were already surrounded by enemy forces. The combined Medo-Babylonian armies had moved toward Nineveh along the great roads that reached out in all directions from the city. Secular historians believe the battle that was waged in the suburbs of Nineveh may have lasted three years or longer.

4. a. Explain what you see happening in the scene depicted by Nahum in verse 4.

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- b. Comment on what it would be like to be in a city under siege, to see the enemy break through and charge after you.

The Wall Assault—verses 5-9: **Review** this section using several translations. Military authorities believe the Medes attacked the city on the northeastern corner, where ground height was on the level with the wall. They could also control the waterworks by which most of the canals were supplied. Once the Assyrians were defeated in the suburbs they would probably retreat behind the walls. The enemy capture of the waterworks made the walls more vulnerable.

Note: *There is a question as to whether verse 5 applies to the attackers or to the defenders. It seems preferable to this writer to view verse 5 as an attempt on the part of the Assyrian king to defend the city.*

5. Describe the key elements of verse 5 in your own words.

Although the Assyrians had besieged many walled cities over the centuries, they would now feel the fury and terror they had inflicted on others. The exact manner of Nineveh's fall is foretold in Nahum 2:6.

Reread Nahum 2:6-8 together in unison from the NIV. Notice again Nahum's measured poetic beat tolling the doom of the city.

6. Why were all of Nineveh's elaborate and massive fortifications a vain defense now (2:7)?

Nahum gives us a remarkable picture of the fate of this great city and its inhabitants. Study the images from this dramatic scene. Try to visualize each one. (**Read** the note below on verse 8.)

7. What did Nahum *see* and *experience* in his mind's eye (2:6-8)?

8. What is the spiritual significance of the sudden demise of the magnificent city of Nineveh?

9. Do you think the capture of Nineveh was due to divine intervention, or occurred through natural means or both? Support your reasons.

Note: The word "pool" (verse 8) is a reference to Nineveh's invulnerable position situated beside the Tigris River and encompassed as an island surrounded by a pool of water.

The Tigris River flowed close to the walls of Nineveh and two of its tributaries passed through the city. Virtually all of Nineveh's 15 gates also contained passages for the water from one of these tributaries or its canals. The ancient Greek historian Diodorus wrote that "flooding from heavy rains also played a role in Nineveh's fall." Xenophon also referred to "terrifying thunder (presumably with a storm) associated with the city's capture." -Bibliotheca Historica; Anabasis

The Sack of Nineveh—verses 9-13: Now God addresses the conquerors and calls upon them to spoil the city of its wealth. What would the plunder of a city like this look like? Carefully consider each word and phrase as you **reread** Nahum 2:9-13. Try writing your own modern paraphrase of verses 9-13. (See the note on verses 11-12 below.)

Note: Nahum's metaphor of the lion (verses 11-12) mocks the symbolic lion with which Ishtar, the goddess of Nineveh was traditionally associated. The kings also likened their own viciousness and fearlessness to that of a lion. Thus, statues of lions adorned the palaces of the kings.

10. How has your faith been affected by the stunning scenes of God's wrath from this chapter?

Pride and cruelty were the hallmarks of the Assyrian Empire. They became a worse offense to God after Nineveh turned from them in repentance—then returned to practice them again with greater zeal than ever! *These sins of the ancient Assyrians are also the sins of modern man.*

11. How is God calling you to respond to this sobering message that has implications for our lifestyle as Americans? Be specific.