

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO NAHUM 2

This chapter gives an account of the destruction of the city of Nineveh; describes the instruments of it as very terrible and powerful, and not to be resisted, (^{<311>}Nahum 2:1-4). The manner of taking it, the flight of its inhabitants, and the spoil of its riches and treasures, (^{<311>}Nahum 2:5-10) and the king and the princes thereof, compared to a lion, and a lion's whelp, are insulted as being without a den or dwelling place, because of their cruelty and ravening, for which the Lord was against them, and threatened them with utter ruin, which he brought upon them, (^{<311>}Nahum 2:11-13).

Ver. 1. *He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face,* etc.] O Nineveh, or land of Assyria; for this is not to be understood of Sennacherib's coming up against Jerusalem, as Kimchi; but of Nebuchadnezzar against Nineveh, as Aben Ezra; not Nebuchadnezzar the great, who, the Jewish chronologers say^{f51}, took Nineveh in the first year of his reign; but his father, Nebuchadnezzar the first, called Nabopolassar, who, with Cyaxares or Ahasuerus the Mede, joined their forces against Nineveh, and took it, see the Apocrypha:

“But before he died he heard of the destruction of Nineve, which was taken by Nabuchodonosor and Assuerus: and before his death he rejoiced over Nineve.” (Tobit 14:15)

and these together, the Chaldeans and Medes, are the “dasher in pieces”; or, “the hammer”^{f52}, as the word may be rendered; and so Babylon, over which one of these kings reigned, is called the hammer of the whole earth, (^{<311>}Jeremiah 50:23) these came up openly, boldly, to the face of the king of Assyria, attacked him in his metropolis, not fearing his strength and numbers:

keep the munition; this and what follow are spoken ironically to the Assyrian king, and inhabitants of Nineveh, to take care of their towers and garrisons, and fortify them, and fill them with soldiers: and

watch the way; in which the enemy came; secure the passes and avenues that lead to their city; stop his march, and prevent his access:

make [thy] loins strong; put on armour, gird on the sword, prepare for war:

fortify [thy] power mightily; increase thine army, exert all thy strength and courage, and do all that is in thy power to do, to oppose the enemy, and defend thyself; and when all is done, it will be in vain.

Ver. 2. *For the Lord hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel*, etc.] Or, “will render” a recompence for, or “revenge the pride of Jacob”^{f53}; all that insolence, and those injuries done in a proud and haughty manner by Sennacherib king of Assyria to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin; invading their land, taking their fenced cities, and besieging their metropolis; and in an audacious manner threatening them with utter destruction, unless they surrendered; and also by Shalmaneser, another king of Assyria, who had besieged and took Samaria the capital city of Israel or the ten tribes, and had carried them captive; and now Assyria, though it had been the rod of God’s anger, and the instrument of his chastisement and correction of his people, must in its turn suffer and smart for all this:

for the emptiers have emptied them out: the Assyrians, partly by their exactions and tributes they demanded, and partly by their spoil and plunder, had stripped Israel and Judah of all, or the greatest part, of their substance, wealth, and treasure:

and marred their vine branches; their children, their sons and daughters, slaying them, or carrying them captive. Israel and Judah are often compared to a vine, and so their posterity to branches: or “corrupted”^{f54} them, with superstition and idolatry. The Targum interprets it of their renowned cities; these, and towns and villages, being to the land as branches to the vine; and which had been ransacked and pillaged by the Assyrians, and now they should be paid in their own coin.

Ver. 3. *The shield of his mighty men is made red*, etc.] The shields of the soldiers in the armies of the Babylonians and Medes, those dashers in pieces that would come up against Nineveh, should be red; either with the blood of the slain, or thus coloured on purpose to inject terror to their enemies; or this may express the lustre of them, which being gilded, or

made of gold or brass, in the rays of the sun glittered, and looked of a fiery red; see the Apocrypha:

“Now when the sun shone upon the shields of gold and brass, the mountains glistered therewith, and shined like lamps of fire.” (1 Maccabees 6:39)

the valiant men [are] in scarlet; the generals and other officers of the army were clothed in scarlet; partly to show their greatness and nobleness, and partly to strike their enemies with terror, and to hide their blood should they be wounded, and so keep up their own spirits, and not encourage their enemies:

the chariots [shall be] with flaming torches in the day of his preparation; that is, when the Medes and Chaldeans, under their respective commander or commanders, shall prepare for the siege of the city, and to make their onset and attack upon it, the chariots used by them in war, which was common in those times, would have flaming torches in them; either to guide them in the night, or to set fire to houses or tents they should meet with, or to terrify the enemy: or “the chariots [shall be] as flaming torches”^{f55}; they should run with such swiftness, that the wheels, being of iron, or cased with it, should strike fire upon the stones in such quantities, that they should look like torches flaming:

and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken; with the motion of the chariots; or this may be interpreted of spears and lances, and such like instruments of war, made of fir; which should be in such great numbers, and with so much activity used against the Ninevites, that it would look like shaking a forest of fir trees. The Targum interprets these of the great men and generals of their armies glittering in dyed garments; and Kimchi’s father, of the princes and great men of the city of Nineveh, who would be seized with terror, and reel about like drunken men; and so all that follows in the next verse (^{344*}Nahum 2:4).

Ver. 4. *The chariots shall rage in the streets*, etc.] In the streets of Nineveh when taken; where they shall be drove in a furious manner from place to place, the men in them breathing out slaughter and death wherever they came. Kimchi understands this of the chariots of the Ninevites; who shall drive about in them in the streets of the city like madmen; not daring to go out to fight the enemy, being mightier and more numerous than they.

They shall jostle one against another in the broad ways; because of their numbers, and the haste they shall make to spoil and plunder the city; or the Ninevites shall jostle one against another, in their hurry and confusion to make their escape.

They shall seem like torches; either the chariots of the Medes and Chaldeans, for the reasons given in the preceding verse (^{311B}Nahum 2:3); or they themselves, because of their fierceness and cruelty; or the faces of the Ninevites, being covered with shame, so Kimchi; (see ^{231B}Isaiah 13:8).

They shall run like the lightnings; exceeding swiftly, with irresistible force and power; the above writer interprets this of the Ninevites also, running from one end of their city to the other in the utmost confusion, not knowing what to do; but the whole of these two verses (^{311B}Nahum 2:3,4) seem to be a description of their enemies.

Ver. 5. *He shall recount his worthies*, etc.] Either the dasher in pieces, (^{311B}Nahum 2:1), the kings of Babylon and Media, shall call together their general officers, and muster the forces under them, and put them in mind of their duty, and recount the actions of their ancestors in former times, in order to animate and encourage them to the siege and attack of the city of Nineveh; or the king of Assyria shall recount and muster up his nobles, and the troops under them, to sally out against the enemy, and meet him in the field, and give him battle:

they shall stumble in their walk: being many, and in haste to obey the orders of their commander, shall stumble and fall upon one another; or else the Ninevites in their march out against the enemy shall be discomfited and flee before him, or be dispirited and flee back again:

they shall make haste to the wall thereof; of Nineveh; that is, the Medes and Chaldeans shall make haste thither, to break it down or scale it; or the Ninevites, failing in their sally out, shall betake themselves in all haste to their city walls, and defend themselves under the protection of them:

and the defence shall be prepared; or the “covering”: the word^{f56} used has the signification of a booth or tent, to cover and protect; here it signifies something that was prepared, either by the besiegers, to cover them from the darts and stones of the besieged, as they made their approaches to the walls; or which the besieged covered themselves with from the assaults of the besiegers; rather the former.

Ver. 6. *The gates of the rivers shall be opened*, etc.] Of Diava and Adiava, or Lycus and Caprus, between which, according to some writers,^{f57} Nineveh was situated; or the gates of the city, which lay nearest to the river Tigris, are meant; or that river itself, the plural for the singular, which overflowing, broke down the walls of the city for two and a half miles, and opened a way for the Medes and Chaldeans to enter in; of which (see Na 1:8):

and the palace shall be dissolved; by the inundation, or destroyed by the enemy; meaning the palace of the king, which might be situated near the river; or the temple of Nisroch the Assyrian deity, or Jupiter Belus; for the same word^{f58} signifies a temple as well as palace.

Ver. 7. *And Huzzab shall be led away captive*, etc.] The Targum translates it the queen; and Jarchi and Aben Ezra, after R. Samuel, take it to be the name of the queen of Assyria; so called, as every queen might, from her standing at the king's right hand, (^{<980>}Psalm 45:9) who, when the royal palace was destroyed, was taken out, and carried captive with the rest, who before was in a well settled and tranquil state and condition: or perhaps the king himself is designed, who may be represented as a woman, as follows, for his effeminacy; conversing only with women; imitating their voice; wearing their apparel; and doing their work, spinning, etc. which is the character historians^{f59} give of the last king of the Assyrians: some^{f60} take it to be the idol Venus, worshipped by the Ninevites: though it may be meant either of the palace itself, as Kimchi's father, which was firm and well established; or rather Nineveh itself, thought to be stable and secure, the inhabitants of which should be carried into a strange land:

she shall be brought up; the queen, or the king, out of the palace or private retirement, where they were in peace and safety; or Nineveh, and the inhabitants of it, out of their secure state and condition:

and her maids shall lead [her]; her maids of honour, supporting her on the right hand and left, ready to sink and faint under her misfortunes: this may also be understood of towns and villages, and the inhabitants of them, that should go into captivity along with Nineveh:

as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts; mourning like doves, inwardly and secretly, not daring to express their sorrow more publicly, because of their enemies; but knocking and beating upon their

breasts, as men do upon tabrets or drums, thereby expressing the inward grief of their minds; (see ³⁷¹⁶Ezekiel 7:16).

Ver. 8. *But Nineveh [is] of old like a pool of water*, etc.] This was a very ancient city, built by Nimrod, as some say; or rather by Ashur, as appears from (¹⁰⁰⁰Genesis 10:10,11) and it was like fish pool, full of people, as it was in the times of Jonah, who for their number may be compared both to water and to fish; and likewise full of wealth and riches, which for their instability may be signified by water also; and moreover, like a pool of standing water, had never been liable to any commotions and disturbances, but had remained from the beginning in a tranquil and prosperous state; besides, some regard may be had in a literal sense to its situation, being watered by the river Tigris, and which was for its profit and defence: so some copies of the Septuagint read the words,

“Nineveh is like a pool of water, the waters are her walls:”

and the Syriac version is,

“Nineveh is as a lake of water, and is among the waters;”

(see Na 1:6):

yet they shall flee away; the waters out of the pool, the sluices being opened, or the banks broken down; or the people out of the city, breaches being made in its walls, or its gates opened, and the enemy entering; when everyone would flee for his life, and make his escape in the best manner he could:

stand, stand, [shall they cry]; either the generals and officers of the king of Assyria’s army, to the soldiers running away; or the more courageous inhabitants of the city, to those that were timorous and seized with a panic, fleeing in the utmost consternation; or the enemy, as Kimchi, who shall call to them to stop, promising to spare their lives upon a surrender of them to them:

but none shall look back; and stand to hear what is said unto them, but make the best of their way, and flee with all their might and main.

Ver. 9. *Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold*, etc.] Of which there was a great quantity in this rich and populous city: these are the words of the prophet, or of the Lord by the prophet, to the Medes and Chaldeans, to seize the spoil of the city, now fallen into their hands;

suggesting that this was by the order and will of God, though they saw it not: or of the generals of the army of the Medes and Babylonians, giving leave to the common soldiers to take part of the plunder, there being enough for them all, officers and private men:

for [there is] none end of the store [and] glory out of all the pleasant furniture: no end of the wealth which had been hoarded up, and of their household goods and rich apparel, which their coffers, houses, and wardrobes, were full of, the value of which could not be told. The king of Assyria, perceiving that he, his family, and his wealth, were like to fall into the hands of the enemy, caused a pile of wood to be raised, and in it heaped his gold, silver, and royal apparel, and, enclosing himself, his eunuchs, and concubines in it, set fire to it, and destroyed himself and them. It is said^{f61} there were no less in this pile than a thousand myriads of talents of gold, which are about fourteen hundred millions sterling, and ten times as many talents of silver, together with apparel and furniture unspeakable; and yet, after all this, the princes of the Babylonians and Medes carried off vast quantities. The Babylonian prince loaded several ships with the ashes of the pile, and a large quantity of gold and silver, discovered to him by an eunuch, a deserter; and the Median prince, what of the gold and silver left out of the pile, which were many talents, that fell into his hands, he sent to Ecbatana, the royal city of Media^{f62}.

Ver. 10. *She is empty, and void, and waste*, etc.] The city of Nineveh, empty of inhabitants, being killed, or having fled; and stripped of all its treasures and riches by the enemies; its walls and houses demolished and pulled down, and laid in ruins, and become a heap of rubbish; (see Gill on “Na 1:8”). Various words are here used to ascertain and confirm the thing; and there is an elegant play on words or likeness of sounds, which our language will not express:

and the heart melteth; the heart of every inhabitant of Nineveh melted with fear at the approach of their enemies, their entrance into the city, and plunder of it; flowed like water, or melted like wax; (see ^{<9214>}Psalm 22:14):

and the knees smite together; like people in a fright, and when a panic has seized them; and as it was with Belshazzar, (^{<9716>}Daniel 5:6):

and much pain [is] in all loins; like that of women in travail; or of persons in a sudden fright, which gives them a pain in their backs at once:

and the faces of them all gather blackness; like a pot, as the Targum adds; being in great distress and disconsolation, which make men appear in a dismal hue, and their countenances look very dark and gloomy; (see ²⁰¹⁶ Joel 2:6).

Ver. 11. *Where [is] the dwelling of the lions?* etc.] Of the kings of Assyria, comparable to lions for their strength, courage, and cruelty, tyranny, and oppression; such as Pul, Tiglathpileser, Shalmaneser, and Sennacherib. So the Targum,

“where are the habitations of kings?”

these are the words, either of the prophet, or of the people that had seen this city in its glory, and now see it in its ruins; and so desolate and waste, as that it could scarcely be said where it once stood:

and the feedingplace of the young lions? the sons of the kings of Assyria, the princes of the blood, and who were of the same blood, temper, and disposition of their ancestors, and were born, brought up, and educated, in Nineveh the royal city. So the Targum,

“and the dwelling houses of the princes,”

or governors:

where the lion, [even] the old lion, walked: not Nebuchadnezzar, as Jerom, who entered into Nineveh the den of those lions, or seat of the Assyrians, and took it, and walked about in it, as the conqueror and possessor of it; but rather Nimrod, that old lion and tyrant, if he was the first founder of this city, as some say; though it does not seem so much to design any particular person, but the kings of Assyria in general, even the most cruel and savage, as the old lion is. So the Targum in the plural number,

“whither the kings went;”

and the lion's whelp, and none made [them] afraid: there were none to resist their power, curb their insolence, and put a stop to their cruelty and oppression; or make them afraid of pursuing such methods. The Targum is,

“there they leave their children, even as a lion that continues in hunting with confidence, and there is none that terrifies.”

Ver. 12. *The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps,* etc.] The metaphor is still continued; and the kings of Assyria are compared to lions

that hunt for their prey, and, having found it, tear it in pieces, and carry home a sufficiency for their whelps. It is a notion that is advanced by some writers, as Herodotus^{f63}, that the lioness, the strongest and boldest creature, brings forth but once in its life, and then but one; which Gellius^{f64} confutes by the testimonies of Homer and Aristotle; and it appears from the prophet here to be a false one, as well as from (³⁹⁰Ezekiel 19:2,3) thus the Assyrians made war on other nations, and pillaged and plundered them, to enlarge their dominions, provide for their posterity, and enrich their children:

and strangled for his lionesses; that is, strangled other beasts, as the lion first does, when it seizes a creature, and then tears it in pieces, and brings it to the she lion in the den with its whelps. These “lionesses” design the wives and concubines of the kings of Assyria, among whom they parted the spoils of their neighbours. So the Targum,

“kings bring rapine to their wives, and a prey to their children;”

that is, riches, which they have taken from others by force and rapine: thus Cicero^{f65} observes of the kings of Persia and Syria, that they had many wives, and gave cities to them after this manner; this city for their headdress, this for the neck, and the other for the hair; the expenses of them:

and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravine; as the lion fills his dens and lurking holes with the prey he has seized and ravined; so the kings of Assyria filled their palaces, treasures, magazines, towers, cities, and towns, with the wealth and riches they took by force from other nations; as the Targum,

“and they filled their treasuries with rapine, and their palaces with spoil.”

Ver. 13. *Behold, I [am] against thee, saith the Lord of hosts*, etc.] Against Nineveh, and the whole Assyrian empire, for such rapine, violence, and oppression, their kings had been guilty of; and if he, who is the Lord of hosts, of all the armies of heaven and earth, was against them, nothing but ruin must inevitably ensue: or, “I come unto thee”^{f66}; or will shortly come unto thee, and reckon with thee for all this; will visit thee in a way of wrath and vengeance. The Targum is,

“behold, I will send my fury upon thee:”

and I will burn her chariots in the smoke; either those in which the inhabitants of Nineveh rode in great splendour about the city; or those which were used in war with their enemies; and this he would do “in the smoke”; or, “unto smoke”, as the Vulgate Latin version; or, “into smoke”, as the Syriac^{f67}; easily, quickly, at once, suddenly, so that they should evaporate into smoke, and be no more; or, with fire, as the Targum; that is, as Kimchi interprets it, with a great fire, whose smoke is seen afar off; and may be figuratively understood of the smoke of divine wrath, as Aben Ezra explains it:

and the sword shall devour thy young lions; the swords of the Medes and Chaldeans shall destroy the princes, the sons of their king. The Targum interprets this of towns or villages destroyed thereby:

and I will cut thy prey from the earth; cut them off that they should no more prey upon their neighbours; and what they had got should be taken away from them, and be of no use to them:

and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard; in foreign courts, demanding homage and subjection; exacting and collecting tribute; blaspheming the God of heaven, and menacing his people, as Rabshakeh, a messenger of one of these kings, did; and which is mentioned by most of the Jewish commentators as being then a recent thing. Some render it, “the voice”, or “noise of thy jaw teeth”^{f68}; alluding to the lion’s breaking the bones of its prey, which is done with a great noise; signifying that such cruelty and oppression the Assyrians had been guilty of should be used no more; or rather, as R. Judah ben Balaam observes, as it signifies the noise of the teeth devouring the prey, it is as if it was said, I will cut off thy prey from the earth; and Ben Melech says that, in the Persian language, grinding stones are expressed by this word, and teeth are called grinders; (see ^{2113B}Ecclesiastes 12:3).