

**THE BOOK OF NAHUM**  
**Lesson 9, Chapter 3 Conclusion**  
**END**

We'll conclude our rather short study of Nahum with today's lesson. We ended last time at verse 13 of chapter 3, and we took a step back for the purpose of remembering the larger picture and purpose of this prophecy, so as not to get lost in the weeds. Nahum is a very challenging book even for the most advanced scholarly Bible translators and interpreters. We necessarily have looked into the structure of Nahum to understand that despite the typical academic mindset that basically Nahum is a badly corrupted text handed down and remodeled from time to time over the centuries, it turns out that's not actually the case. The issue is that Nahum's book is a super-technical form of Hebrew poetry and even includes mathematic and astronomical elements as understood in his era.

The other major issue is that Nahum's prophecy is about God's wrath, and we spent some time examining what God's wrath amounts to as opposed to human emotional reactions. Even the Hebrews had a most difficult time with the issue of wrath, because pagan thoughts of how their god systems worked had long ago infiltrated the Israelites' belief system. The pagan gods and goddesses were selfish, competitive, petulant, and never thought in terms of right and wrong, good and evil, but rather what they each wanted or didn't want from their human worshippers at any particular moment in time.

We discussed a bit about how righteous anger over God-defined injustices was the right type of anger, versus the wrong type of anger, which results from eruptions or disagreements over perceived wrongs among humans. So, all anger is not evil, and in fact anger can be a necessary good. We ended that part of the discussion by stating that just as law and grace are complementary and compatible, so is God's love and His wrath. God's wrath is predictable, never impulsive, and it is always based upon the terms of the covenants He had made with humanity, through the Hebrews.

Let's re-read the final verses of Nahum chapter 3.

## RE-READ NAHUM CHAPTER 3:13 to End

Verse 13 essentially states that Babylon isn't going to have all that hard of a time to defeat the Assyrians. Their capital city and national pride that was Nineveh is going to fall much faster and more completely than anyone could have imagined. Their fortress walls would fail; their warriors would lose their ferocity and exchange them for the stereotypical traits of helpless women. Their city gates would be flung wide open to allow their enemies to flood inward nearly unrestricted. It would not be defeat... it would be annihilation.

Verse 14 continues with explaining that because God has decreed this to happen, no amount of defensive planning, weaponry, strength or fortifications will stop it.

**CJB Nahum 3:14 *Draw water for the siege! Strengthen your fortifications! Go down in the clay, tread the mortar, Take hold of the mold for bricks!***

Yehoveh acts like a cheerleader and urges the Assyrians to prepare, plan, and build even more. They should spare no effort in preparing for what is coming. Of course this is meant ironically. And everyone in ancient times knew that the number one need to prepare for any siege was to store an ample supply of drinking water. They also need to inspect every area of their walls for vulnerabilities and repair them. They need to make a large supply of bricks to repair the inevitable breeches cause by the enemy that is attempting to knock them down.

Verse 14 begins the final canto... the final unified poetic section... of this book. Not looking at verse numbers but rather at the actual 7 lines of Hebrew poetry that together concludes this book, they form a so-called Menorah pattern... something I showed to you before, so I won't take the time to do that again here, because it operates just the same.

The point being made is not only God's taunting of Nineveh by ironically urging them to make every preparation for the coming siege. Rather, it is that it doesn't matter what this most powerful, advanced civilization can do, it

amounts to nothing before the Lord. From earliest times when Nimrod built his famous ziggurat, walked up its steep steps and shook his fist at God showing Him that he, too, could ascend into the clouds, and he, too, could create great mountains of earth, and so he stood equal to God, forward until modern times humans still think we are the superior intellect and powers on earth... that nothing is beyond us if we put our minds to it. Many, especially those in leadership, believe we can outthink, outwit, out engineer, God. We can reverse Gods laws and even defy the physical properties of the cosmos. Without doubt, such beliefs in endless technological advances as the solution to all of humanity's ills and challenges dominates 21<sup>st</sup> century thought and has greatly infected the Churches and Synagogues as well. It doesn't seem to matter that by looking at God's ancient prophecies and combining them with recorded history that these wicked and arrogant thoughts are proved wrong in every era, because Liberal/Greek thought is that history is a straight line... that the past has little or nothing to do with the present or the future. Yet, in reality we are no different than Nineveh; despite our own efforts and abilities, our true security and protection lies in God, and not in money, militaries, strategies, religious institutions, or science.

**CJB Nahum 3:15** *There the fire will burn you up; and the sword will cut you down; it will devour you like grasshoppers. Make yourselves as many as grasshoppers, Make yourselves as many as locusts!*

This verse opens with the Hebrew word **s(h)am**, which means "there". Thus, there is no doubt that this is speaking about the previous verse in connection with the siege of Nineveh. While the burning up with fire is intended to be quite literal (and the ancient ruins of Nineveh prove that fire destroyed much of the city) the use of the terms grasshoppers and locusts are merely commonly employed metaphors. In the first instance, fire and sword don't devour the grasshoppers, but rather fire and sword devour completely in the same way grasshoppers do. For the sake of accuracy, it is probably best not to use the term grasshoppers, or like some older versions do, cankerworm. Two Hebrew terms are used here to describe these insects: first is **yeleq**, and second is **arbeh**. But, in reality, there are 3 stages of locust development that the Bible speaks of. The **yeleq** is simply a recently emerged locust... a young one... that is in process of emerging from its first skin to become a **hasil**.

**Hasil** literally means “devourer” and is spoken of here in the singular. That is, an individual locust that has already become a threat. **Arbeh** carries the meaning of the most destructive kind of locusts and literally means “multitudinous”. Sometimes this word means the collection of individual locusts into huge numbers, but they have not yet developed the stage of being able to fly. Finally, we’ll find the word **gobay** in Hebrew, that is meant to indicate huge swarms of mature, flying locusts that attack and decimate entire fields and orchards leaving virtually nothing in their wake.

So, in this passage, it is first talking about young individual locusts and finally talks about these becoming more mature locusts assembling themselves into a vast number. Locust development and behavior was well known in the Middle East... since all societies were agrarian... and so every culture spoke of them and used them in metaphors about damage and destruction. For the Israelites, locusts also held a special place as the 8<sup>th</sup> plague upon the Egyptians that eventually led to Pharaoh releasing them to go into the wilderness to worship their God. Even so, there is no locust event occurring here; it is only referring to locust-like behavior on the part of the inhabitants of Nineveh in one case, and the warriors of Babylon in the other.

**CJB Nahum 3:16** *You had more merchants than stars in the sky. The locust sheds its skin and flies away.*

I like the way the YLT Bible phrases this verse because it clears the way for a better interpretation.

**YLT Nahum 3:16** *Multiply thy merchants above the stars of the heavens, The cankerworm hath stripped off, and doth flee away.*

The issue for interpretation is not the merchants but rather the particular locust behavior that this verse brings up (that is, substituting the word locust for cankerworm). It concerns the Hebrew word **pas(h)at**, which literally means to “take off”, and it is often used by itself to indicate the entire thought of “to take off one’s garments”. This is the only place in the Bible where the word **pasat** is used to describe locust behavior, and that is because of what it is attempting to highlight. It is comparing a leader, perhaps a military leader,

in Nineveh to a locust in the sense of it flying away on the one hand. The meaning is that when Nineveh is being attacked and overwhelmed by Babylon, these leaders change their clothing to something else (leaving their shed clothing behind that identifies them as leaders) and take flight in disguise to safety. But, on the other hand, the Babylonian soldiers are the warriors that devour.

As for the merchants; Assyria had used merchants as a hoped-for means to help expand and control their empire. The city of Nineveh used the Tigris and nearby Euphrates rivers to expand their scope of importing and exporting goods to far-away places. This was all part of a conscious and well-planned means for Assyria to vastly increase its influence and project its wealth geographically. Today, we might talk in the terms of trade and economics. It is better to build up the economy of a subjugated nation than to impoverish it. If that nation that is now under your control can generate a good economy, then 2 things happen. First, more taxes can be extracted. Second, if people feel good because they have sufficiency in food and housing, they are far less likely to rebel. Unfortunately, Assyria's enlightened adoption of an age-old understanding of conquering and empire building fell short because they also maintained a policy of brutality and deporting people from their native countries to other ones. So, they defeated themselves in this regard. This hybrid policy of enlightenment and oppression is not just speculation on the part of historians; it is actually spoken about and recorded in Assyrian annals. Sargon II of Assyria wrote this:

**“I made the fearful lustre of Asshur (Assyria), my lord, fell down the inhabitants of Egypt and Arabia. The mentioning of my name made their hearts pound and weakened their arms. I opened the sealed borders of Egypt, mixed the inhabitants of Assyria and Egypt, and made them trade.”**

I hope it goes without saying that these hyperbolic metaphors like “more than the stars of heaven” and “more than the sands of the seashore” are NOT literal, nor are they literal in the Bible. It just means a big and indefinite number in general. In the next verse, the locust metaphor continues.

**CJB Nahum 3:17** *Your guards are like grasshoppers, your marshals like swarms of locusts, which settle on the walls on a cold day, but when the sun rises they fly away; they vanish to no one knows where.*

I'm a bit disappointed with the CJB translation... at the least the first several words of this verse. I think the RSV does the superior job, even better than the YLT that I often like to turn to.

**RSV Nahum 3:17** *Your princes are like grasshoppers, your scribes like clouds of locusts settling on the fences in a day of cold -- when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they are.*

Part of the problem with deciphering this verse is that some of the terms used in Hebrew are so rare that it is hard to know for sure when they meant in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Whereas the CJB interprets the opening Hebrew words as "your guards", and the RSV as "your princes", and other versions as "your crowned ones", another possibility is magicians or sorcerers. That word is **minnezarayik**. It is strange enough that a significant strain of language scholars feels certain that this is a kind of Akkadian loan-word that is **mansaru** or **massaru**, which the Hebrews borrowed and Hebrew-ized. Yet, a much more complete and nearly identical word from the Assyrian language is **manzazayik**, which is used when referring to astrologers, and so the words sorcerer or magician might be a bit closer to what was intended.

Therefore, since whomever this term represents are supposed to be great in number (like grasshoppers), that doesn't fit the term "prince". There were certainly only very few princes. And, since astrologers and magicians worked for the king, that seems like it might be the better fit. Bottom line, I'm taking the opening words to mean: "Your palace astrologers and magicians are like a huge number of adult locusts". This is because, once again, the word "grasshopper" isn't appropriate. The word is **arbeh**, which means an adult locust, and carries with it the notion of many in number. Remember: this is Hebrew poetry, so word precision is an afterthought.

The next word is scribes. In Hebrew it is **tipsar**. This is another little used Hebrew word, and scholars tend to lean towards thinking it is the same as its

Akkadian cognate **tupsarru** (which, in Akkadian, means scribes). Others don't accept this and think it means something like "recruiting officer" for the military. For me, that is a stretch and again challenges the notion of being in great numbers like locusts. Scribes is probably the best sense of it, but I can't be certain. Nonetheless, all these words about officials and higher ups and the higher educated that are fleeing is the point. The leaders and the important people are vanishing... running away... because they know they have no chance of saving Nineveh from Babylon. So, as Assyria's warriors took on the characteristics of women, the leadership took on the characteristics of locusts flying away. When the sun rises, and the people left in the city under siege look around, those who they counted on to lead and protect them are either cowering and unable to fight, or they have snuck out of the city to go into hiding and save themselves.

When we pause and look at what we've just read in verses 15, 16, and 17, we notice that each uses the locust metaphor in a different way. In verse 15a, Nineveh's fiery destruction is so complete that it is compared to the total devastation of a plague of locusts. Then, in verses 15b and 16, the locust illustration morphs to indicate the enormous number of individual locusts and that they are in the final process of gaining the ability to fly. In verse 17, the locusts now have the full ability as adult insects to take winged flight and so use that mobility to flee the doomed city of Nineveh, letting the helpless inhabitants fend for themselves.

**CJB Nahum 3:18** ***Your shepherds are slumbering, king of Ashur. Your leaders are asleep. Your people are scattered all over the mountains, with no one to round them up.***

At this point, the King of Assyria is addressed. This mentioning of slumbering and sleeping is just a common Hebrew expression that means death. And by the way, it works the same way in the New Testament, even though (because the modern Christian world pays no attention to the Old Testament) various denominations have come up with all sorts of fantasies about what it means to sleep. It means death and all it entails. Of course, death is one thing for a Believer and another for a non-Believer. But, in the end, it still means bodily death and not some interim or in-between conditions of life and death.

The use of the term “shepherds” was rather standard in the ancient Near and Middle East to indicate a king. Other times, it was the king’s family, or mostly his biological princes. And, whereas the CJB says that “your leaders are asleep” more correctly it is that your nobles or elites are dead. Everyone who propped up the king, gave him advice, formed his brain trust, those who protected him and carried out his will had been eliminated by Babylon. Because the shepherds are dead, the flock (the people they are to tend over) are scattered. There is no one to guide them or rescue them. Essentially, this expresses the end of the Assyrian Empire. Because there are no leaders, then... unlike for Israel and their exiles... no possibility of a reconstitution or restoration of the people is possible. As we read in verse 19:

**CJB Nahum 3:19** *Your wound cannot be healed. Your injury is fatal. Everyone hearing the news about you claps his hands in joy over you. For who has not been overwhelmed by your relentless cruelty?*

It is interesting to note that while we find the term “wound” used here, most Bibles instead choose “your injury”. Either way, the Hebrew word involved is **subreka** and it literally means “fracture”, like to break a bone. It also carries the larger sense of something that is breaking apart (as with the statement that a relationship is fractured). This is truly an apt description of Assyria, as it happened; it was fractured into many pieces... broken apart and irreparable. Babylon would take it and reform it into their own empire.

This comment from the Cambridge Ancient History volume says this about the destruction of Assyria from a historian viewpoint:

**“The disappearance of the Assyrian people will always remain an unique and striking phenomenon in ancient history. Other, similar, kingdoms and empires have indeed passed away, but the people have lived on. Recent discoveries have, it is true, shown that poverty-stricken communities perpetuated the old Assyrian names at various places, for instance on the ruined site of Ashur, for many centuries, but the essential truth remains the same. A nation which had existed**

**2,000 years and had ruled a wide area, lost it independent character....”**

Assyria’s fracture had no healing. It was wiped out for good. I think this is good example of what it means in the Book of Revelation for a person, angel, or Satan and His minions to be thrown into the Lake of Fire. It is a complete destruction of one’s soul, or spirit, or whatever term might be preferred to mean one’s living life essence. It is permanent, it no longer exists, and there is no hope for healing. It is the opposite of the fate of the righteous dead.

Although the word “curse” is not to be found in this final verse of Nahum, it is appropriate to see these final words as a curse. In fact, very similar words were used in ancient treaty languages. One the treaty documents of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon says these words:

**“May Gula, the great Physician, put sickness and weariness on your hearts, and unhealing wound on your body. Bathe in your blood as in water.”**

As we have seen in various places in Nahum, Our God can be quite ironic, and He is also quite big on using the principle of reciprocal punishment. That is, what you do to My people I will do to you. I think it is more probable than not that this verse of prophecy from God, through the mouth of Nahum, is intended to use the same Assyrian treaty language curse that was standardly employed upon their vassal states, in a reversal upon them.

The people Assyria had oppressed, and those who feared her so greatly for so long, clapped their hands as an expression of their joy over Assyria’s complete demise. The final words of this book are only one of two places in the Bible where a book ends with a question... a rhetorical question. Not surprisingly, the other book is Jonah, which also deals with Nineveh and Assyria.

For who has not been overwhelmed by your relentless cruelty, this final verse asks? The expected answer is: “no one”. So, God, in His Wrath, did what God does: He balanced the books. My secret mentor (meaning that he had no idea

of it because we never met!) Dr. Walter Kaiser, Jr., makes this comment about verse 19.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous Washington D.C. speech will long be remembered for that famous line: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" And, that would sum it all up for Judah.**

He goes on to say this:

**If some are offended by such a celebration, then it be remembered that what is being celebrated is not a human victory but a divine one.**

I have heard so many times in my life... from the pulpit and from the people... what a merciless, bloodthirsty God the God of the Old Testament was, and how lucky we are that our new God isn't that way. It used to anger me; now it just breaks my heart, because I hear it mostly from Christians. The Bible tells us, beginning to end, that all victory of good over evil will entail the massive shedding of blood. Our own personal righteous before God was won at such a cost. The rejoicing to end Nahum's prophecy is not about the death of a nation or of its people, but rather the renewal of life for God's nation and people, and what the great cost of it was. Yet, there is more to be done, and more blood-letting to come, as the final book of our Bible, Revelation, assures us.

We must always keep in mind that Nahum's book is not about humans seeking vengeance. It is entirely about God's actions... His wrath... and not ours. Earthly justice has been handed to humans to carry out, provided it is within the boundaries and terms God has so thoroughly explained justice, especially and foremost in The Law of Moses. But **divine** justice is His alone to administer. We are reminded in His Word that hatred and oppression is not justice; nor is it the proper means of carrying out justice. We are right to be angry at injustice, and to do all we can to push back strongly against evil even when it means war. Yet, there are limits. From the time of Cain and Abel onward, if one thing has proved true more than anything else about human nature and behavior, it is that violence only begets more violence. Wars only beget more wars. Even so, pacifism in the face of evil has proved more wrong

than opposing that evil force with implements of battle, destruction, and lost blood when necessary... both innocent and guilty blood. It is our human condition and fate that it be so, because at the core of our DNA is sin. And at the core of this humanly-corrupted planet and its many societies, is the want of power and control by would-be tyrants.

Even though the ending of Nahum speaks of scattered sheep and their deceased shepherd, and that as a permanent condition, that is not the case for God's people, Israel. He has already gathered Judah and brought them back to their former land, Israel, and re-established them as a sovereign nation, doing that in 1948. He is currently in process of bringing back the remainder of the people of Israel as we speak. His wrath over Assyria could not have been stopped, and neither can the final ingathering of those who are His. The day of our mutual rejoicing... for an Israel and for grafted-in people to Israel's covenants...as an act of Our Savior Yeshua, is nearer with every passing day.

For that moment is at hand, when we will all who worship the God of Israel, will look-up and in unity shout the victory cry to The Father: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank you God Almighty, YOU have made us free at last!".