

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

*The Book
of*

NAHUM

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Initial edition

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AN INTRODUCTION TO NAHUM

The word ‘**Nahum**’ means "The Comforter". Although several prophets came in a period of pitch spiritual darkness, yet, in the midst of revealing the danger of the ailment of sin, they opened the door of hope by repentance proclaiming its blessings: “*Comfort, comfort My people*” (Isaiah 40:1).

Nahum’s name came corresponding to his mission as his book presents comfort to the people revealing that, although God allowed for the captivity of the kingdom of Israel to chasten them, yet at the same time He would destroy their enemies who humiliated them, and mocked them and their God.

❖ Nahum, the comforter of the world, after uttering his words: “*Woe to the bloody city*” (Nahum 3:1) he proclaimed: “*Behold, on the mountains, the feet of Him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!*” (Nahum 1:15)¹.

St. Jerome

Nahum refers himself to Kosh, which some believe to be a village in Galilee, while others believe it to be on the eastern bank of the River Tigris, few miles away from Nineveh. Knowing well the conditions in Mesopotamia led some to believe that Nahum was one of the captives there.

As the Kingdom of Israel has fallen under the violent Assyrian captivation, and as some prophets anticipated the falling of the Kingdom of Judah under the Babylonian captivation, Nahum presented this prophecy proclaiming the devastation of the great city ‘Nineveh,’ because of its use of violence; a prophecy that brought great comfort to the captivated Israel (the ten tribes).

It is claimed that Nahum escaped to Judah during the Assyrian invasion of Israel and resided in Jerusalem until the time it fell under siege by Sennacherib, King of Assyria, when 185000

¹ Letter 53:8.

of his men were killed in one night (2 Kings 18:19; Nahum 1:11). He wrote his book right after that episode.

THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK:

Its topic is to **proclaim how the apostasy from God would end up**. That is why it talked about how the great empire of Nineveh, which was set upon violence, had come to its end with violence 85 years after this prophecy. He talked as well about the devastation of ‘No Amon’ (Thebes) in Egypt that symbolized the pride in the human strength (Nahum 3:8-10) to show that sin will definitely lead to perdition!

In a superb poetic style it **demonstrates the struggle between the work of the living God and that of His adversaries**, revealing the might and justice of God, Who **runs history according to His holy will**.

TIME OF WRITING OF THIS BOOK:

Nahum wrote his prophecy before the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, probably in the days of King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah.

DIVISIONS OF THIS BOOK:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. A Jealous God | Chapter 1 |
| 2. Peace for those who lean on Him, and perdition of the adversaries | Chapter 2 |
| 3. The destruction of Nineveh | Chapter 3 |

A JEALOUS JUDGE (Chapter 1):

- The descendants of the people of Nineveh, who gained God’s mercies by their repentance (Jonah 3), apostatized to extreme violence. Their kings used to amuse themselves by cutting off the noses of the captives, plucking out their eyes, and severing their hands and feet then mockingly parading them before their people.
- The Lord is a jealous God, on His name and on His people. If Nineveh became a sea, “He rebukes it and makes it dry” (7); “He will take vengeance on His adversaries” (7), and will support the good.

- “He reserves wrath for His enemies, who, “while drunken like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dried” (10).
- God proclaims peace to His children (15).

PEACE FOR THOSE WHO LEAN ON HIM AND PERDITION FOR THE ADVERSARIES (Chapter 2):

- God, in His jealousy, does not stand evil and keeps those who lean on Him: “Will restore the excellence of Jacob;...though ravagers have ravaged them” (2).
- Portraying the destruction of Nineveh, he proclaims that sin would bring about: emptiness with no fulfillment, spiritual devastation with no edification, faint hearts, trembling knees, quaking lions, no possibility for work, and all faces would grow pale for shame (10).
- If man thinks of himself as a lion, lioness, or a lion’s cub, by walking in evil, he would lose every authority and possibility (11, 12).

THE REASON FOR THE JUDGMENT OF ADVERSARIES (Chapter 3):

God in His fatherhood debates with them, and reveals the following **reasons for their judgment**:

- **Cruelty towards others** (1): “Woe to the bloody city!”
- **Lying** (1): By which it deprives itself of the truth, and seeks the vain.
- **Harlotry** (4): By which the soul loses her spiritual beauty and strength and gets destroyed.
- **Not heading the lesson of other** cities, like that of No Amon (Thebes), that eventually collapsed.

THE ACTIVITY OF EVIL

- It turns its army into spoiled and weak women (13).
- It brings them down into mire (14), to bear earthly minds.
- Its commanders become like swarming locusts (17) devouring their people.
- Their people will scatter, and will become a lesson to others.

CHAPTER 1

A JEALOUS GOD

This book portrays the extent of devastation that dwelt on Nineveh, because of the corruption that prevailed in the kingdom of Assyria and the violence of its kings, especially when dealing with their captives. Although God has previously brought His mercy on Nineveh when it repented, yet apostatizing to evil made it fall into utter destruction. This lesson, directed to both the Gentiles and the Jews, teaches man that God is mighty in His love and mercies, yet He does not stand or accept sin.

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1. AN INTRODUCTION:

“An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh” (Nahum 1:1)

A century and a half ago God sent the prophet Jonah to warn the great city of Nineveh that it is going to be destroyed because of its corruption. And as the king together with the people presented repentance, He forgave them. But they soon apostatized to their sins and became even worse, to be called *“the bloody city”* (Nahum 3:1). With their persistence on their wickedness on a horrible level, He did not send them a prophet, but a prophecy to proclaim the destruction that would dwell over the city. And as it came in the book of Jeremiah: *“The instant I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will*

relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it”
(Jeremiah 18:9-10).

This prophecy was realized by the kings Nebuchednezar and Ahsuerus (Xerxes).

- ❖ The word ‘**oracle**’ means a kind of insight given to prophets, by which the Spirit of God causes a sudden transformation in their minds, to receive, with a deep awe in the form of a clear vision or proclamation, knowledge of what will happen in the future. Such an oracle seized Nahum’s mind by the grace of the Spirit to know the destiny of the city of Nineveh².

Theodoret, Bishop of Messisa

2. GOD IS MIGHTY IN HIS MERCIES, AS WELL AS IN HIS WRATH OVER SIN:

“A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries and rages against His enemies” (Nahum 1:2)

This prophecy, although harsh and firm, yet is full of compassion over the souls attached to God. He starts talking about the Lord as a jealous God; a kind of jealousy like that of a husband toward his wife not allowing anybody to touch or harm her; and like that of a king toward his loyal subjects planning and working for their good. God’s jealousy toward man is out of His love for him; He accepts no competitor to occupy his heart!

This jealousy sometimes requires the use of the rod of chastisement on man, who tends to break his mutual love relationship with God by giving Him his back instead of his face.

God pours this jealousy in the hearts of His faithful ministers, to say together with the apostle Paul: *“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:2)

With such jealousy the heart of Phinehas the priest flared over the holiness of the people and the tabernacle, when Israel committed harlotry with the women of Moab and sacrificed for

² *Commentary on Nahum, 1:1.*

their gods; and when one of them dared to introduce to his brethren a Midianite woman, and to bring her into the tabernacle. When the priest stabbed her, God said: ***“He has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal”*** (Numbers 25:11).

The prophet Elijah also said: ***“I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword”*** (1 Kings 19:10).

“A jealous and avenging God is the Lord” (2); He is jealous over His believers who walk in His ways, are faithful in their love for Him, and are leaning on Him. If they err, He chastens them out of His jealousy and great love for them. And He is an avenging God, not for His own sake, but for that of His children; counting anyone who takes a position of animosity against them as though taking it against Him personally. That is why He says: ***“He takes vengeance on His adversaries.”***

To chasten His people, God allowed the kingdom of Assyria to captivate them. But Assyria assumed that her idols are mightier than God and started to mock Him and humiliated His people.

- ❖ The Lord is a jealous God; He does not take the mocking of anyone lightly. He is longsuffering, yet He is avenging and wrathful³.

Tertullian

- ❖ My Brethren, fearsome is the falling in the hands of the Lord; and fearsome is “the face of the Lord against those who do evil” (Psalm 34:16); fearsome is the Lord’s ear listening to the voice of Abel talking through his silent blood; fearsome is the fact that nobody can hide himself from His face (Jeremiah 23:24) even if he ascends into heaven, if he enters hell, if he escapes to the far east, or dwells in the uttermost parts of the sea (Psalm 139:7-8).

³ *On Modesty, 2.*

Nahum of Elkosh stands in terror as God proclaims His vengeance against His enemies⁴.

St. Gregory the Nazianzus

- ❖ Notice, O beloved brethren, that, although the Lord our God is merciful, righteous, compassionate and gentle toward men, yet most definitely **“He will by no means clear the guilty”** (Nahum 1:3). Although He welcomes the return of the sinner and grants him life, yet He leaves no doubt that He firmly judges and condemns the transgressors. When you hear Him say through the prophet Isaiah to the bishops: *“‘Comfort, O comfort My people,’ says your God; Speak tenderly to Jerusalem”* (see Isaiah 40:1), it is fitting for you to encourage those who sin, to give them hope, and to lead them to repentance; joyfully receive the repentant, rejoice over them, and judge the sinners with mercy and compassion. If someone is walking on the bank of a river and you push him into the water instead of helping him, you would be condemned for killing your brother⁵!

The Apostolic Statutes

“The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3)

The Lord is slow to anger, waiting for man to repent and return to Him. It was fitting for Assyria to realize that their conquest was allowed by God to chasten His people. They should have heeded the lesson, forsaken their idols, and believed in the true God taking into consideration their past experience in the days of the prophet Jonah. But instead, Assyria used every way to mock and blaspheme God and to savagely humiliate His people. And as the apostle Paul says: ***“Do you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed”*** (Romans 2:4-5).

⁴ *On His Father’s Silence*, 16.

⁵ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 2:3:15.

God's forbearance on the wicked is not out of a lack of might, for "**He is great in power**" waits for their repentance, or otherwise He will by no means clear them.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will He keep His anger forever" (Psalm 103:6-7).

The Lord revealed to Moses that He is merciful out of power and love, when He came down in the cloud, passed before him, and proclaimed: "***The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation ...***" (Exodus 34:5-7). Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

God is longsuffering, but He by no means clears the guilty. He does not let evil go all the way. Those who persist on their wickedness and not repent would never be acquitted.

As man cannot stand in the way of storms, hurricanes, and clouds, he will not be able to stand before the wrath of God in haughtiness and pride. Yet, through repentance and humility, he would enjoy the divine mercies.

❖ "***The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy***" (Psalm 103:8). Why is He slow to anger? Why is He abounding in mercy? Why do men commit sin and still live? Why are sins continuous, and so is life? Why do men blaspheme every day and still "*His sun rises on the evil and on the good*" (Matthew 5:45)? Anyway, He calls for reform, He calls for repentance, He calls through His blessing for the creation, He calls through granting more time for life (more chance for repentance), He calls through the reader of the word in the church, through the preacher; through the inner thoughts, through the rod of reform, and the mercies of comfort. He is indeed slow to anger and merciful, yet we should be careful lest, according to the words of the apostle (Roman 2:7) ⁶, through

⁶ On Ps. 103 (102).

abusing the greatness of His mercies we may “treasure up for ourselves wrath in the day of wrath”.

St. Augustine

- ❖ *“I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done,” says the Lord God* (Ezekiel 16:62-63). With these divine words the prophet refers to what is said in another place: *“If He purifies you, yet, He does not make you righteous.” Even the righteous, if they apostatize from their righteousness through committing sin, they would not dare to open their mouths, but would say together with the apostle: “I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”* (1 Corinthians 15:9)⁷.

St. Jerome

- ❖ **“The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; and the Lord by no means clear the guilty”** (Nahum 1:3). He does not bring punishment (chastisement) all of a sudden and on the spot, but after a great longsuffering. You, the people of Nineveh, should testify to this, as after having committed evil for a long time without being punished when you presented repentance, you found salvation. “The Lord by no means clears the guilty” means that He does not acquit those worthy of punishment among sinners⁸.

Theodoret of Cyrus

“The clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3), as though God comes from heaven on His swift chariot like lightening, He would be surrounded by clouds like those that surround the swift chariots and horses.

“He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades” (Nahum 1:4)

⁷ *Against the Pelagians, 2:25.*

⁸ *Commentary on Nahum, 1:3.*

God, by His word, has created everything, and by His word He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; and dries up all the rivers that pour their water into the sea. In the old days He dried up the Red Sea to let His people walk on its bottom as though on land; and so He did to the River Jordan.

While the seas and the rivers dry up by the word of the Lord God, man, in his great weakness, takes a position of rebellion and mutiny against His longsuffering and loving Creator. If man thinks so high of himself, let him behold Bashan with its green pasture (Joel 1:10), the Carmel with its vineyards and fields of wheat, and Lebanon with its forests (Isaiah 33:9). If these regions, characterized by such dense vegetation and beautiful flowers, wither by the heat of summer and by the snow of winter, then who could stand before the Creator of time, and the Lord of the whole world?!

Tertullian believes this prophecy to be about the Lord Christ, who rebuked the wind and the waves, and who walked over the water of the sea realizing the words of the psalm that say: [“*The Lord is over many waters*” (Psalm 29:3) ⁹].

“The mountains quake before Him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves at His presence, the world and all who dwell on it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken in pieces by Him” (Nahum 1:5-6)

He likens the divine wrath to the fury of volcanoes and earthquakes that destroy the mountains, melt the hills, and devastate entire cities. If no one can stand before these natural phenomena, how could man stand before the indignation of the divine wrath?!

“Thus says the Lord God, ***‘Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place – On man and on beast, on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched’*** (Jeremiah 7:20).

⁹ *Against Marcion, 4:20.*

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He protects those who take refuge in Him” (Nahum 1:7)

So that no one –even Assyrians- would think that God is a Mighty Avenger, the prophet illustrates the righteousness and compassion of God towards those who take refuge in Him.

When man becomes angry, he loses his peace, love, and compassion, whereas God, in His anger over evil, is always compassionate. The prophet Habakkuk says in his prayer: ***“In wrath, remember mercy”*** (Habakkuk 3:2). In His anger over evil, God anticipates to have mercy on the sinner, if he reveals a true longing for repentance. While the wicked are terrified to encounter God, those who trust in Him praise Him saying: ***“The Lord is good, s stronghold in the day of trouble; and He protects those who trust in Him”*** (7). The righteous see in God’s might a consuming fire that keeps them protectd, that He is capable of saving them, that He surrounds them and keeps safe them against any fiery arrow directed to them. St. Peter says: ***“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the Day of Judgment”*** (2Peter 2:9).

- ❖ ***“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good”*** (Psalm 106:1). You, who commit major sins, despair of salvation, and assume that because of the seriousness of your sins you would never be forgiven, I advise you –or the prophet does– to give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. Although your sins are great, yet God, who has compassion on you, is greater. Confess your sins to Him, show remorse and never despair of your salvation, as God is compassionate. Don’t lean on your own power, but lean on the mercy of the Lord¹⁰.

St. Jerome

- ❖ ***“For the Lord is good.”*** He is not good the way the things He created are, as ***“God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good”*** (Genesis 1:31); not just ‘good,’ but ‘very good’ ... If He created everything very good, then how would be the One who created them?! ... To what extent can we

¹⁰ *On Ps, Os (106).*

talk about His goodness?! Who can realize what is in His heart? Let us re-evaluate ourselves, we are not even worthy to contemplate in Him; yet through hope, we can, when our hearts are purified by faith, then we can truly rejoice. If we cannot behold Him now, let us behold His works so that we do not live without praising Him. That is why I say: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; praise His name, for it is sweet ... What could be sweeter than the food of angels? ... How can God not be sweet, when man ate the food of angels? Men live on a similar kind of food. That is true; it is the Wisdom, it is the goodness of God, yet you cannot enjoy it the way the angels do”¹¹.

St. Augustine

“But with an overflowing flood, He will make an utter end of His adversaries; and will pursue His enemies into darkness” (Nahum 1:8).

Some believe this phrase to be a prophecy on what would dwell over Nineveh by the hands of the armies of Mede and Babylon, that attacked the city like an overwhelming flood. Whereas others believe it to be a prophecy about the flood that the enemy caused by destroying the 20 furlongs high wall protecting the city against the river (220 yards or 1/8 mile).

3. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM AND THE ARMY OF ASSYRIA:

“Why do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. No adversary will rise up twice” (Nahum 1:9)

Here he probably refers to what Sennacherib and his deputy Rabshkeh have done, when they publicly boasted against the Lord of hosts as a God helpless to protect His people or to save them from the King of Assyria. The prophet here mocks the kingdom of Assyria that assumed to be capable of opposing the great Lord saying: ‘Your opposition is not against mortal humans, but against the mighty God!’

¹¹ On Ps 135 (134).

“No adversary will rise up twice”. When Sennacherib tried to invade Jerusalem, his army was destroyed and his own sons killed him on his return home. There was no way for all that to happen again!

- ❖ A father would not tend to teach his son unless he loves him. And a teacher would never try to mend the ways of his student unless he sees some promise in him. When a physician stops caring for a patient that would be a sign that he despairs of his case. It is fitting for you to think about the afflictions that Eleazar endured in his life, and say to yourself: I will gladly endure affliction in order to enjoy the promised glory as “Affliction will not rise up twice” (Nahum 1:9)¹².

St. Jerome

- ❖ The bishop, the priest, or the deacon, who falls in adultery, false vow, or stealing, would be completely excommunicated, as according to the holy Book **‘No one could be punished twice for the same crime’**¹³.

Ecclesiastic statutes

- ❖ When common people are cast away from the congregation, they could again eventually receive their rank, but in case a deacon falls; his excommunication could never be reversed, but would be permanently set¹⁴.
- ❖ A priests who commits a fatal offense, although he would be excommunicated, yet he would not be cast away from his fellowship in the congregation as he could not be punished twice for the same offense¹⁵.

St. Basil the Great

“For while tangled like thorns, and while drunken like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dried”
(Nahum 1:10)

¹² Letter 68:1.

¹³ ANFrS, vol. 7, p.501 (cf. St. Basil: Ad Amphilochium, 3.)

¹⁴ Letter 188 (Cenonica Prima), 3.

¹⁵ Letter 199 (Canonica Secunda), 31.

He likens Sennacherib and his men as they boast against the Lord of hosts to dry thorns before the fire, or to drunkards who do not know what to utter. They are like stubble, fully dried, that fire consumes in no time.

Because those 185 thousand men must have been like their leader boasting against the Lord God, they were struck by the angel of the Lord, which is obvious from the words of the prophet: ***“tangled like thorns, and drunken like drunkards.”*** They became like a tangled lump of thorns that could not be separated and would be thrown together to burn in fire.

Thorns symbolize the **wicked**, who may seem harmful, yet, because they are fully dried, they are easily consumed by fire to become helpless ashes. ***“The godless sons of Beleal. are all like thorns that are thrown away; to pick them up with the hand; or to touch them, one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear, Yet they are entirely consumed in fire.”*** (2 Samuel 23:6-7)

The **drunkards** while staggering, they pretend to be brave, and boast as being great, rich, and strong, when anyone can push them to fall with his finger tip.

Diodorus Siculus states that when the enemy approached Nineveh, Sardanapalus set his famous palace on fire, realizing the prophecy of the prophet Nahum that they would be consumed like thorns.

“From you comes forth one who plots evil, against the Lord, a wicked counselor” (Nahum 1:11)

He addresses Nineveh, out of which Sennacherib comes forth to utter evil against the Lord, bringing perdition on himself and on his city. He calls Rabshakeh a ‘wicked counselor,’ for counseling the men of war sitting on the walls of Jerusalem not to lean on the Lord God, claiming that He is helpless to save them from the hand of Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isaiah 36). By his wicked counsel, he brought perdition on 185 thousand men of his army, who were killed by an angel of the Lord in a single night (Isaiah 37:36), and on the king Sennacherib himself, who was killed by his own sons: Adrammelech and Sharezer (Isaiah 37:38).

4. THE LIBERATION OF JERUSALEM:

“Thus says the Lord, ‘though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more’” (Nahum 1:12)

The kingdom of Assyria was likened to a razor that shaved the kingdoms like the hair of a head, so its punishment was that it itself will be shaved: ***“On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River – with the king of Assyria – the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well”*** (Isaiah 7:20).

Having defeated several cities that leaned on their pagan gods, the Assyrian army, with their great number and strength, stood before Jerusalem feeling confident and secure, but were soon to be shaved away like grass by the angel of the Lord, who afflicted them once and for all and would afflict them no more.

By saying: ***“I have afflicted you, and will afflict you no more,”*** the Lord reveals His goal for chastisement which is the repentance of the sinner in humility, after which He would raise him up and set him glorified. That is why it is said of the Lord: ***“For the Lord will not reject forever. Though He causes grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love. For He does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone”*** (Lamentation 3:31-33).

By saying: ***“I have afflicted you, and will afflict you no more”*** the Lord confirms to king Hezekiah that He allowed that siege for him and his people to let them recognize their transgressions and present a true repentance with the spirit of humility; and that the strike to come over the army of Assyria, who is putting Jerusalem under siege, will be a devastating one, after which Sennacherib will never be able to do it again.

“For now I will break off his yoke from you, and burst your bonds apart” (Nahum 1:13)

The Lord confirms to king Hezekiah and his men that He will break the yoke of Sennacherib and burst his bonds apart, he, who with his army invaded several of the cities and villages of Judah and exploited them freely, while Jerusalem could not defend

them having been itself helplessly bound and shackled. He confirms to them that the Assyrian army, out of which 185 thousand men were killed by the angel of the Lord in one night, will never attack them again, having become as though extinct and helpless.

The yoke of King Sennacherib was the tax he imposed on Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14).

“The Lord has commanded concerning you: Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. From the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the cast image. I will dig your grave, for you are worthless” (Nahum 1:14)

The Lord issued His command to abolish the name of Sennacherib altogether as a conqueror and victorious, to scatter his reputation like dust carried away by the wind. And by saying: ***“from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the cast image,”*** He probably refers to his being killed by his two sons in the house of Nisroch his god (Isaiah 37:38; 2 Kings 16:37); a horrible crime that proved that Nisroch is helpless to protect those who worship him; led the people to forsake worshipping it, and to cut off from its house the carved and cast images. He probably also refers to the collapse of the Assyrian kingdom, when its enemies devastated Nineveh and destroyed the images of its gods that they thought to be the secret of their might.

“I will dig your grave, for you are worthless”; the house of Nisroch his god became his grave, where he laid despised and killed by his own sons, deprived even of the natural sonhood love. He may also refer here to the city of Nineveh, having been disgracefully devastated, became a grave for Assyria.

Having the Lord our God in our hearts and carrying His name, we wish no more for our name to be perpetuated; to say: ***“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”*** (Galatians 2:20). When the Lord destroys in us the ‘ego,’ sets in us His divine Kingdom, buries our selfishness as though in a grave, and cast away our worthlessness to be granted His glories, the heavenly creatures will sing saying: ***“The royal daughter is all glorious within”*** (Psalm 45:13); and the Heavenly

One Himself will praise us saying: *“You are all fair My love, and there is no spot in you”* (Songs 4:7), *“Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”* (Songs 6:10)

5. THE GREAT SALVATION:

“Behold, on the mountains the feet of Him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Oh Judah, keep your appointed feasts, fill your vows, for the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off” (Nahum 1:15)

Bringing to Jerusalem the good tidings of bursting her bonds apart, of breaking off the yoke of the Assyrian army, the perdition of King Sennacherib, and of cutting off the images of his gods, the prophet Nahum prophesies what is greater, namely the salvation presented by the Messiah to the whole world. He beholds the Lord Christ as though coming on the mountains proclaiming the true, inner, and eternal peace, reconciling mankind with God the Father; transforming our life into incessant feasts, and destroying and utterly cutting the devil off together with his hosts, ways, works, and thoughts to have no more authority over the children of God.

What are these mountains on which the One, who brings the good tidings of peace, walks but the prophecies, which prepared humanity to receive the Savior?

❖ He surely brings good tidings to Zion and presents peace to Jerusalem. He ascends a mountain, where He spends the whole night praying (Luke 6:12). Refer back to the prophets to know His whole role. The prophet Isaiah says: *“Get up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings”* (Isaiah 40:9). *“They were astounded at His teaching, because He spoke with authority”* (Luke 4:32) ... *‘When the time comes, I will be there on the mountains, to bring the good tidings of peace’* (See Isaiah 42:7); and according to Nahum, one of the twelve minor prophets: *“Behold, on the mountains the feet of Him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace”* (Nahum 1:15)¹⁶.

¹⁶ Tertullian: *Against Marcion*, 4:13.

Tertullian

- ❖ Let us be reminded of how the Lord ascended from Hades and breathed the Holy Spirit in the face of Judah –namely, His Jewish disciples, who, being referred to the New Testament, their days of feasts have become spiritually renewed and would never become old. Moreover, we can also see how the rest of the prophecy (Nahum 1:14) has been realized, when the gospel has “*cut off the carved and cast images*”, namely the vain idols that were delivered to forgetfulness in the grave¹⁷.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Speaking about the ‘feet,’ he means the coming of the apostles, who wandered with their feet all over the world preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God; as their appearance brought light over humanity by revealing the way of holding peace with the Lord, to whom John the Baptist came to prepare the way (Mark 1:3; Isaiah 40:3). That is the peace, towards which those who believe in Christ hasten¹⁸.

Fr. Ambrosiaster

- ❖ It is not only my words that clarify these things, they are already proclaimed by the prophet who cries out: “*Behold, on the mountains, the feet of Him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace*” (Nahum 1:15). His message, about which He brought the good tidings, says: “*O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, fulfill your vows*” (Nahum 1:15). For they will not return to what is old; it is no more there altogether. He, who breathed on your face and took the grief away from you, has ascended (Nahum 1:15). Now, who is He, who ascended? If you want to know the truth and disregard the allegations of the Jews, behold our Savior, who ascended and breathed on His disciples and told them: “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” (John 20:22). Once crucifixion was consummated the old things came to an end: the veil of the temple was torn (Matthew 27:51), and the Jewish altar was destroyed, and, although the city was still intact, the

¹⁷ *City of God, 18:31.*

¹⁸ *Commentary on Paul's Epistles (Rom. 10:15).*

“abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15) was preparing to stand in the holy temple to bring an end to Jerusalem and all those old statutes¹⁹.

- ❖ The day of the feast has once again approached, in which, if we keep silent, we may make it unholy; it should be dedicated to prayers more than any other day, in it we should keep the commandments. For, although we are suffering affliction by those who grieve us, yet we thank God, who comforts the grieved so as not to be defeated by the evil of those, who, when they accuse us, we keep silent. In our obedience to the voice of the truth, we cry out loud, together with you, on the day of the feast, for the God of all said that Moses and Aaron should persuade the people to keep the Passover; and the Spirit proclaims in the psalms: *“In the head of the month, blow the trumpet, It is the feast of the crescent”*; and the prophet Nahum cries out saying: *“O Judah, keep your appointed feasts”* (Nahum 1:15).

I am not addressing the word to you as though you are ignorant, but I proclaim it to those who already know it in order to realize that although some are creating dissension among us, yet God keep us together; we celebrate the same feast and will always worship the same God.

We do not celebrate it as on-lookers, who are rebuked by the apostle, who says: *“You observe days and months and seasons and years”* (Galatians 4:10), but we –who minister to God everywhere– rather honor this great day as a feast to please the Lord by our collective prayers. The blessed Paul proclaiming, not the day, but the Lord, for whose sake we observe the feast, says: *“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”* (1 Corinthians 5:7). Contemplating in the eternity of the word, we approach Him to minister to Him²⁰.

- ❖ Beloved brethren, once again God brought us over to the season of the Passover; and through His compassionate love He

¹⁹ *Paschal Letters, 1: 8.*

²⁰ *Paschal Letters, 3:1.*

gathered us together to celebrate it. For God, who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, is still calling us this very day to celebrate the Passover, saying through Moses: “*You shall keep the Feast of the Weeks to the Lord your God*” (Deuteronomy 16:10); and through the prophet Nahum He says: “*O Judah, keep your appointed feasts; fulfill your vows*” (Nahum 1:15).

If God Himself loves the feast and calls on us to observe it, it is not right, brethren, to postpone it or to practice it slothfully, but we should do it joyfully and zealously, so that, if we joyfully celebrate it here, our souls would yearn to the heavenly feast.

If we actively celebrate it here, we will surely receive the perfect joy in heaven, according to the words of the Lord to His disciples: “*I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 22:15-16).

We eat it now; if through our understanding of its significance and our knowledge of the Savior, we walk according to His grace, and according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you are truly unleavened*” (1 Corinthians 5:7). As in these days the Lord died, that we no more yearn to the works of death! He delivered His life to let us keep our life away from the snares of the devil²¹.

St. Athanasius, the Apostolic

- ❖ **[For the monks]** We should observe these days in a way that our relaxation or rest would be beneficial and not harmful to the body or soul; that the joy of the feast would not weaken the thorns of the body; and our wild enemy (the devil) would not relax because of these days of rest. Therefore, in order to observe the traditions of the feast and to relax just a little bit from the law of fasting, it will be enough for us to have our meal at the sixth hour of the day (12 o'clock noon), instead of at the usual ninth hour without making any change in the quantity or

²¹ *Paschal Letters, 6:1.*

kind of the food. By doing so we do not lose the purity of the body and the goodness of the soul, which we have gained during the days of the Great Fasting.

We should watch ourselves to the end, lest our souls would be weakened by lusts, and we lose the purity that we have gained through relaxation or slothfulness during the feast of Passover after so much strife all along the days of the Great Fasting. That is why, even in the most exalted of feasts, we should not add anything to the kind or quantity of food we usually take, that our joy in the feast would not arouse in us some fatal struggles of bodily lusts, bring us grief, and make us mourn our lost purity of heart.

Yet, at the same time, we should be aware, not to be rebuked by the warning: *“O Judah, keep your appointed feasts; fulfill your vows”* (Nahum 1:15), **as, if celebrating the days of the feast do not contradict with the continuation of our abstention, we will be enjoying perpetual spiritual feasts²².**

Abbot Theonas

²² *St. Cassian: Conferences 21:23.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF NAHUM 1

YOU ARE MIGHTY IN YOUR LOVE; YOU ARE JEALOUS IN YOUR HOLINESS

- ❖ You are a holy jealous God, who does not compromise with sin!
You do not wish, neither to know it, nor to let it know you!
You pour Your holiness on those who believe in You.
And grant Your righteousness on those who desire a fellowship with You.
- ❖ You loved us to sanctify us to become an icon of You.
But foolishly we loved sin, counting it as life and joy.
In Your longsuffering, you provoke us to return to you.
If we persist on evil, how could we stand before You?
- ❖ No man can confront storms.
Nor can he control the clouds,
The rocks cannot stand before the fire of volcanoes.
So, how can we dare to stand before the fire of Your jealousy?
You are a consuming fire that burns evil and lightens righteousness.
- ❖ You are good, O Lord.
Even in Your anger You chasten to save.
You consume evil to take away the dust from us, and to set a new heaven out of us.
Sennacherib, King of Assyria, thought that by his army he can boast against You!
The dried stubble stood before the fire!
His army, who assumed to be mighty, staggered like drunkards;
You broke his yoke and saved Your city.
Nineveh collapsed when You took away her authority.
Her enemy destroyed her and cut off the images of her gods.
Every hand that stretches towards your people, is cut off.
And every soul that opposes Your kingdom, if it does not repent, will perish.
You saved Your people from Sennacherib;

And in the house of his god Nisroch he was killed by his own sons.

Your salvation is amazing and mighty!

- ❖ Your salvation spreads over the whole world.
Behold, You are coming on the mountains of the prophecies.
You came down to bring us the good tidings of the reconciliation with heaven.
You transformed our world into heaven;
And our days into incessant feasts.
You brought the devil down beneath our feet.
You abolished every authority he had.
He fell like lightning from the heaven of our hearts.
He no more has place inside us.
No one but You reigns over our hearts.

CHAPTER 2

PEACE TO THOSE WHO LEAN ON HIM

AND PERDITION ON THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM

In the first chapter God showed that He is jealous in His love and mercy towards those who lean on Him, however great their afflictions are. He is mighty in His wrath when the wicked persist on practicing their evils against His people, counting every opposition against any of His believers as though it is against Him personally. By his opposition, the wicked deprives himself of God the source of his life, joy, happiness, and glory; destroying himself by himself as he falls under God's wrath.

The kingdom of Assyria, with its great capital Nineveh, assumed that it conquered God, not realizing that God allowed her conquest to chasten His people for sometime. Nineveh, falling into

oppression and savagery against the people of God together with blasphemy against God in every way, brought on itself complete destruction.

Now this chapter demonstrates God's work for the sake of those who lean on Him after being chastised, and what would dwell on those who oppose Him after giving them chances to repent their horrible evils.

- 1. Glory to the chastened believers 1–4.**
- 2. Shame on the opposing aggressors 5–10.**
- 3. God opposes the savage aggressors 11–13.**

1. GLORY TO THE CHASTENED BELIEVERS:

“The shatterer has come up against you. Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your lions; collect all your strength” (Nahum 2:1)

God used Assyria as a rod of chastisement on His people; but when Assyria showed haughtiness in boasting against God and used every way to practice savagery against His people under chastisement, God sent Babylon –the “hammer of the whole earth”- against them (Jeremiah 50:23) to pour its hammers on the great Nineveh, publicly and daringly.

He addresses Babylon, which He calls “the shatterer” saying: *“You are My battle ax, and weapons of war; for with you I will break the nations in pieces, with you I will destroy kingdoms; with you I will break in pieces the horse and its rider; with you I will break in pieces the chariot and its rider; with you I will break in pieces the man and woman; with you I will break in pieces the old and young; with you I will break in pieces the young man and the maiden; with you I will break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; with you I will break in pieces the farmer and his yoke of oxen; and with you I will break in pieces the governors and rulers” (Jeremiah 51:20-23).*

God allowed the armies of Mede and Babylon to destroy Nineveh. It may look as though it is a war between nations and peoples, but it is actually allowed by God to support those who lean on Him, albeit under chastisement; and to punish the haughty

Nineveh. That is why He proclaimed beforehand to Assyria that Nineveh will be publicly destroyed and that any attempt to defend it would be in vain, because the issue to destroy it has come from heaven. Any troops to guard its ramparts, to watch its towers, to encourage its men, or to strengthen its military capabilities would all be in vain, because ***“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord”*** (Proverb 21:30). There is no way for Assyria to enjoy conquest as long as it opposes the Lord Himself.

“For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob; as well as the majesty of Israel; though ravagers have ravaged them and ruined their vine branches” (Nahum 2:2).

The prophet proclaims the cause of this destructive war against Nineveh, which is that Assyria ravaged Jacob, ill-treated the Israeli captives, savagely attacked Judah, and boasted against the Lord of hosts that He is helpless to save them from the hand of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. The same way they ravaged Jacob and Israel, they will be ravaged; the same way they boasted against the Lord of hosts, shame will come over them and the lord will restore to His people their dignity after their chastisement.

According to the Septuagint version, it came: *“Someone will breathe in your face, to save you from your temptation”* (Nahum 2:2 LXX). **Theodoret of Cyrus** believes that God presents a different kind of breath to save man; He *“breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life”* (Genesis 2:7); then, when the work of that divine breath was lost, the Lord Christ came to renew the image of man and to restore it in the saintly apostles as well as in the rest of believers through them: *“He breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit”* (John 20:12). God destroyed the Assyrians by the breath of His mouth to save His people; as a symbol of the work of the Lord Christ, who destroys the tyrant Devil by the breath of His Holy Spirit that He granted to His church²³.

²³ Cf. *Comm. on Nahum 2:1*.

“The shields of his warriors are red; his soldiers are clothed in crimson. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day when he musters them; the chargers prance” (Nahum 2:3).

Here he describes the mighty men of the armies of Mede and Babylon, who attack Nineveh.

“The shields of his warriors are red”: The warriors of the old preferred the red color for their shields on the one hand to terrify the enemy, and on the other hand, in case a warrior is wounded and his blood splashes over his shield, it would not be seen by the enemy and strengthen their hearts. Others believe that the shields of the Assyrians, as is proven by the excavations, were made of bronze, which appeared red with the reflection of the rays of the sun on them.

“His soldiers were clothed in crimson”: Xenophon says that the Mede soldiers were clothed in expensive crimson to demonstrate their might and riches.

“The metal on the chariots flashes on the day he musters them”: This is a portrait of the fierceness of the battle, in which the chariots of the enemy race madly and the sparks dart when their wheels rub against the stony road to appear like torches of fire.

He also probably means that the enemy chariots used to carry torches of fire to help them keep fighting day and night until the utter destruction of Nineveh. The warriors with Gideon used to carry torches inside pitchers (Judges 7:16) to guide them and to terrify their enemies.

That was what God allowed on the appointed day *“On the day He mustered them,”* to let Nineveh get the fruit of her deeds.

Some interpret ***“The chargers prance”*** as ‘The Cypress trees sway’: The enemy forces, like the haughty Cypress trees, sway to terrify Assyria. Or he probably portrays how the Cypress trees sway with the strong trembling of the ground underneath the feet of the attacking forces.

“The chariots race madly through the streets; they rush to and fro through the squares; their appearance is like torches, they dart like lightning” (Nahum 2:4)

He demonstrates how the swift military chariots glitter like fiery torches amid the trees through the reflection of the sun rays, madly moving like lightning.

“He calls his officers; they stumble as they come forward; they hasten to the wall; and the mantelet is set up” (Nahum 2:5).

Some believe that he talks here about how the king of Assyria calls his mighty warriors to come to defend Nineveh; how they stumble as they come forward hastening to the walls, and how their efforts were in vain. Whereas others believe that the talk here is about Nebuchadnezer, King of Babylon, provoking his officers not to retreat however strong the walls of Nineveh are. Even if they stumble as they come forward, yet they would never despair; they dig trenches to protect themselves against the arrows of the forces under siege behind the walls of Nineveh.

2. SHAME ON THE OPPOSING AGGRESSORS:

“The river gates are opened, the palace trembles” (Nahum 2:6).

The gates of the city of Nineveh were open on the Tigris River, on the banks of which the city was built. Its western wall on the River extended to 4530 yards, and on its south, north, and east side there were huge water canals that could be filled with water from Khosru to surround the city by water from every side to impede the advance of the chariots and horses of an attacking enemy. It is claimed by the historian Theodors that during the third year of the siege a great flood caused 20 Furling (4400 yards) of the walls of Nineveh to collapse. By that the prophecy of Nahum was realized, saying: ***“The River gates are opened, the palace is dissolved” (6)***; the hearts of the king and those who were with him dissolved by fear to commit suicide by burning themselves together with their palace and wealth.

According to the Septuagint version, it came: ***“The mountains collapsed”*** (Nahum 2:6 *LXX*). St. Ambrose believes that the mountains here are the great things, by which man feels haughty against God. *“If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will*

say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20)²⁴.

"It is decreed that the city be exiled, its slave women led away, moaning like doves, beating their breasts" (Nahum 2:7)

Some scholars believe that he refers here to the queen of Nineveh, who escaped the fire and was led captive by the enemy in shame and disgrace, while others believe that he means the city of Nineveh itself. In either case the maidservants mourned like the incessant voices of doves, beating their breasts, a sign of grief and helplessness.

"Though Nineveh of old was like a pool of water, now they flee away. 'Halt! Halt!' they cry; but no one turns back" (Nahum 2:8).

Because Nineveh was a city very crowded with inhabitants, it was likened to a great pool full of water (Isaiah 8:7; Jeremiah 51:13; Revelation 17:15). But all of them helplessly fled away, not heading the cries of their leaders: Halt! Halt! Having lost every hope, they aimlessly ran away in every direction.

"Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! There is no end of treasure; an abundance of every precious thing" (Nahum 2:9)

The king burnt the royal palace with all its treasures, which was collected from annual taxes, spoils, and massive trade (Nahum 3:16; Hezekiel 27:23-24); yet the enemy confiscated a vast wealth of silver, gold, and valuables.

"She is empty, desolate, and waste! The heart melts, and the knees shake; much pain is in every side, and all their faces grow pale" (Nahum 2:10).

A bitter portrait of how that rich and great city, which submitted a multitude of nations, became empty, desolate, and waste; how the heart melts, the knees shake, and how the faces of its men grow pale.

²⁴ *On the Christian Faith, 3:14:115-116.*

“Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions; where the lion walked with the lioness and the lion’s cubs with no one to disturb them?” (Nahum 2:11).

As indicated by the Assyrian monuments -the winged lions with a man’s head-, Nineveh, the capital of the greatest nation at that time, has been described as the den of lions and the pasture of lion’s cubs, where the king and the queen used to walk like a lion and a lioness in a forest. Now this mighty nation has lost everything and the surrounding nations stand wandering: Where are those men, mighty like lions, who made their nation rich on the expense of the other nations?! Now, the words of the psalm apply to it, saying: *“The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing!”* (Psalm 34:10).

3. GOD OPPOSES THE SAVAGE AGGRESSORS:

“The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs; killed for his lionesses, filled his caves with prey, and his dens with flesh. ‘Behold, I am against you,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more’” (Nahum 2:12-13)

If the kingdom of Assyria has been proud of its armies and forces that knew no defeat, He, who is against it, is ‘the Lord of the heavenly hosts’, who brings justice to the oppressed, defends the humiliated, and grants a victory to the truth.

The chariots of Assyria cannot stand before the divine wrath and are burned in smoke; its young lions are devoured by the sword, and as the kingdom of Assyria has done to the other nations, it shall be done to it (Obadiah 15). It shall be no more!

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF NAHUM 2

WHO WILL RESTORE TO ME MY DIGNITY, BUT YOU?

- ❖ The enemy has taken away my inner glory!
Instead of heaven, the enemy reigned over my depths.
He robbed me of my life, my glory.
He robbed all my talents and energies;
It is the mighty Assyria that humiliated my soul!
- ❖ Yet, here Your hand moves to restore the majesty of Jacob;
I see Your hands stretched on the cross;
Ready to embrace the whole world in love;
To liberate it from the devil and his hosts.
- ❖ Here You are, O Lord, leading the battle Yourself!
What enemy can stand before You?!
Your chariots are mighty and active; they run like lightning.
They come to occupy my heart, to grant it an exalted conquest;
To expel the enemy from it and to take back all what he has robbed.
My enemy will come out destroyed and helpless.
- ❖ My enemy assumed that he, like a lion, will devour with no one to confront;
But his young lions died of hunger and lack of prey;
His forces were destroyed, and he fell like lightning from the heaven of our hearts;
To You is the glory, O Grantor of glory to those who lean on You!

CHAPTER 3

THE TRIAL OF NINEVEH

In the second chapter God proclaims Himself as the Defender of the oppressed and the broken, and the opponent of the unjust and the haughty. But as this seemed to be impossible in the

eyes of many, who assumed that no power on earth could ever stand before Nineveh, the queen sitting on her throne, and that no army could dare attack her strongholds, this third chapter came to confirm that no one is above the divine law.

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| 1. Nineveh, the bloody city | 1–3. |
| 2. The seductive harlot | 4–7. |
| 3. She will be an example to others | 8–11. |
| 4. An utter devastation | 12–19. |

1. NINEVEH, THE BLOODY CITY:

“Woe to the city of bloodshed. Utterly deceitful, full of booty – no end to the plunder” (Nahum 3:1).

1- **The first charge** in the trial of Nineveh was that she is *“the city of bloodshed.”* She shed the blood of many innocents; she enjoyed tormenting the captives and savagely cutting off their body parts.

❖ *“You hate all workers of iniquity”* (Psalm 5:5) whether they are slaves or free or even emperors. God counts His friends, not on the basis of their rank, but on that of their virtue²⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

St Augustine commenting on the words of the psalmist: *“You, O God, shall bring down to the pit of destruction, the bloodthirsty and the deceitful men”* (Psalm 55:23) seeks from us to be aware of the murderers of souls more than those, who shed blood and says: [Those, who isolate themselves through solitude, would murder the souls through spiritual deceit more than through shedding blood²⁶].

And commenting on the words of the psalmist: *“They shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with blood”* (Psalm 106:38), **St. Augustine** believes that the Psalmist probably does not mean offering human sacrifices, although this custom was indeed existing among many nations, especially where ‘Baal’ was worshipped, where the family

²⁵ *On Ps. 5.*

²⁶ *St. Augustine on Ps 55 954.*

sometimes used to offer its children as human sacrifices to please the gods. But what the psalmist means here is that the Israelis have partaken of that pagan custom and its abominations and have given it to their children as an inheritance, by which they have murdered the souls of their sons and daughters through depriving them of the holy life and the fellowship with God. This crime is more horrible than killing the body, as it is a deprivation of the eternal life.

2- The second charge was her use of lies and deceit. She used to justify her continuous attacks that she keeps and protects justice; clothing her evil intentions with a deceitful garment. Through lies and deceit man often resorts to many evils; in not leading an open, pure, and a loving life towards God and men, but hiding his wickedness and corruption behind deceitful words.

- ❖ *“You shall destroy those who speak falsehood”* (Psalm 5:6). God utterly hates evil. Now, the psalmist calls those who live in evil as ‘speakers of falsehood’, who have vain goals, are greedy and love pleasure; as you see, he puts all these among the group of liars.

He is disgusted of the bloodthirsty and the deceitful man (Psalm 55:23); referring here to the killer, the planner of evil and the deceitful, who utters something with his lips while harboring something else in his heart; the wolf clothed as a lamb. You cannot find a more evil man; you can probably confront an obvious enemy, whereas he, who hides his evil while practicing it, is not easy to discover. That is why the Lord Christ warns us against those, saying: *“who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matthew 7:15)²⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

²⁷ On Ps. 5.

3- The third charge: “taking plenty of booty” (rob) and “plunder”: Not being satisfied with robbing what belong to others, they tend to plunder them. The wise Solomon says: ***“He (the Son of God) will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight”*** (Psalm 72:14).

❖ Let us mourn together with the prophet Jeremiah and say: *“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers with injustice”* (Jeremiah 22:13; Nahum 3:1). Let us rather grieve for him as the Lord Christ did when He said: *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation”* (see Luke 6:24). I wish we keep grieving for the slothfulness of our brethren! We should wail for the robber, the mean, and the greedy louder than we do over those who departed²⁸.

St. John Chrysostom

“The noise of a whip, and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots!” (Nahum 3:2)

The prophet takes us to the battle to hear the noise of the whips, by which the riders of the military chariots drive the horses to go faster, the noise of the swift wheels of the galloping horses and of the clattering chariots.

“Horsemen charge with bright swords and glittering spears. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies; countless corpses – they stumble over the corpses” (Nahum 3:3).

The prophet goes on to portray the battle: The horsemen charge with their swords, bright like flames of fire, and with their spears directed toward the people of Nineveh, many of whom are wounded, as to those killed, they are countless; no one cares to count them or to pick up their corpses. They stumble over the corpses on the ground slippery with the blood of those slain.

2. THE SEDUCTIVE HARLOT:

“Because of the countless debaucheries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaves nations through her harlotries and families through her sorceries” (Nahum 3:4).

²⁸ Commentary on Nahum 2:1.

Because she did not learn the lesson that she witnessed, when the angel of the Lord killed 185 thousands of her men in a single night, the same happens again in Nineveh on the day of her utter devastation.

4- The fourth charge: “The harlotry”: He already likened Nineveh to a lion torn apart, and its cubs hungered and scattered, now he likens her to a seductive harlot, who provokes nations to idolatry and its abominations. By her beauty and ability to seduce she brings nations to destruction through her harlotry.

- ❖ Rebuking is a kind of chastisement used by the divine Teacher in Jeremiah, saying: *“You have the forehead of a whore; you refuse to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to Me: ‘My father you are the friend of my youth?’”* (Jeremiah 3:3-4). After calling the virgin ‘a harlot’, that shameful and disgraceful name, He calls on her, through filling her by feelings of shame, to return to an honorable life²⁹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

5- The fifth charge: Being a “Mistress of sorceries”: Being only preoccupied with its desire to submit the nations of the whole world under its feet, the kingdom of Assyria, besides war, robbery and plunder, also resorted to sorceries; the same way a harlot uses her beauty and charm to seduce and enslave young men.

“Behold, I am against you,’ says the lord of hosts,’ I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame” (Nahum 3:5).

Nineveh assumed that she is the mistress of the world, and seduced the nations by her sorcery and harlotry to worship her gods and to commit abominations with her. But, because God hates evil, He deals with her as a harlot, uncovers her corruption, and bears her naked of her clothes of harlotry. The same was likewise prophesied by the prophet Isaiah about Babylon, who later followed on the same way of Nineveh, saying: *“You shall no longer be called ‘tender and delicate’... ‘Remove your veil, take off your skirt, uncover the thigh, and pass through the rivers.*

²⁹ Paedagogus 1:9.

Your nakedness shall be uncovered; Yes, your shame will be seen'" (Isaiah 47:1-3). She will not only lose her false beauty and deceitful charm, but her evil plans will be exposed before the nations and her weakness and corruption will be revealed; **"I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame"** (5) for everyone to realize that she is no longer mighty nor the mistress of the world as she claims to be.

***"I will throw filth on you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle"* (Nahum 3:6)**

The city, with which other nations wished to ally, became a mockery and a jest to all.

***"It shall come to pass that all who look upon you, will flee from you, and say, 'Nineveh is devastated! Who will bemoan her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?'"* (Nahum 3:7)**

Instead of resorting to her for fear of her authority, when they see what happened to her, they flee from her, as she is no longer fit even to live in. Because of her utter devastation, and that there is no hope of reforming her, there will be no comforters, but gloaters! Everyone looking upon her will become so terrified of what happened to her that his tongue will not be able to utter a word of comfort!

3. SHE WILL BE AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS:

***"Are you better than 'No Amon,' that sat by the Nile, and water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall?"* (Nahum 3:8)**

So that Nineveh nor anyone else who hears this prophecy will think that it is impossible to be realized, the prophet presents an example of another city that was once strong and living in peace, but having walked in evil and persisted on opposing God, the divine wrath dwelt on her. That city was 'No Amon.'

'No Amon': Thought by some to be 'Thebes' in Upper Egypt; her name means "the portion of Amon" –an Egyptian god, counter part of Jupiter, the senior Roman god.

It seems that the Assyrian King 'Sargon' was the one who struck 'No Amon'; and as Assyria conquered Thebes despite her

might and possibilities, now is the turn of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to lose her might and to be destroyed by the Babylonians.

Thebes, having been located on the two banks east and west of the River Nile and surrounded by huge water channels, was as secure as Nineveh that was also surrounded by waters, assumed to protect her against the attacks of foreign enemies.

In Homer's time Thebes was famous for her one hundred³⁰ gates, but whose ruins now stretch over 27 miles long, between the two world famous temples 'Luxor' and 'Karnak'.

The River Nile here is called 'the Sea,' as it is still called in Upper Egypt.

“Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength; without limits. Put and the Libyans were her helpers” (Nahum 3:9)

Ethiopia (or Cush) might be either the region of 'Yemen' or that of 'Nubia' south of Egypt. Drawing her strength and wealth from trade and military aids, it supported 'No Amon'.

Put and Lubim were neighboring North African kingdoms, west of Egypt –Cyrene and Lybia, that helped 'No Amon' to live like a queen sitting on her throne.

“Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity; her young children were also dashed to pieces at the head of every street. They cast lots for her nobles, and all her great men were bound in chains” (Nahum 3:10)

Having been securely sitting on her throne, proud of her strength and power, supported by several nations north and south and surrounded by water that protected her against attacks, it did not expect to fall, yet she was led captive to exile. She was deceived by her haughtiness and strength that her children got destroyed and a lot was cast on her honorable men. It was the custom for the victorious in those days to seize the honorable men of the great city they conquered then cast a lot to distribute them as slaves among the leaders of the army. Thus, instead of their golden chains and magnificent garments, they were shackled by iron

³⁰ Homer: Ill: 9: 381.

chains and were led naked as slaves to a foreign country in shame and disgrace.

“You also will be drunk; you will go into hiding; you will seek refuge from the enemy” (Nahum 3:11)

What dwelt upon ‘No Amon’ will also dwell upon Nineveh; her inhabitants will become mad and drunk of the cup of God’s wrath. And as it was said to Jerusalem: ***“You have drunk at the hand of the Lord, the cup of His wrath; you have drunk to the dregs, the bowl of staggering, and drained it out ... Therefore please hear this, you afflicted, who are drunk but not with wine”*** (Isaiah 51:17, 21); and as it came in Jeremiah: ***“For thus says God of Israel to me: ‘Take this wine cup of wrath from my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.’ Then I took the cup from the Lord’s hand, and made all the nations drunk, to whom the Lord had sent me”*** (Jeremiah 25:15-17).

The scholar Origen has a beautiful commentary on the phrase: ***“Every wine-jar should be filled with wine”*** (Jeremiah 13:12), in which he says: [Every man is like a wine-jar filled with wine. Yet, there are two kinds of wine: A good kind, which is the wine of God’s love that causes the souls to melt with the love for God and to live meditating in Him, as though drunk with His love; this kind of wine is made by wisdom: ***“Wisdom ... has mixed her wine ... Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mixed”*** (Proverb 9:1, 5); and there is the bad kind of wine, which fills the wicked, like the wine of Sodom and Gomorrah: ***“Their wine comes from the vine stock of Sodom, from the vineyards of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents, the cruel venom of asps”*** (Deuteronomy 32:32-33). Origen also believes that God holds, in His right hand, the cup of our good works to grant us His blessings and in His left hand the cup of our iniquities to chasten us to return to Him³¹].

³¹ Cf. *Homilies on Jeremiah, homily 12: 1-4.*

St Augustine, talking to us about the wine of God's love, says: [Are those, whose hearts have changed, not drunk? He says: "*Surely its dreg (of the Lord's wine), all the wicked of the earth shall drain and drink down*" (Psalm 75:8); they drink so as not to remain as such; to be justified and not punished³²].

"You will be hidden" (Nahum 3:11), namely Nineveh will hide itself out of shame and fear, because she is no more capable of confronting the enemy, and in vain she will seek the support and the protection of a refuge.

4- AN UTTER DEVASTATION:

"All your strongholds are fig trees with ripened figs; If they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater" (Nahum 3:12)

The prophet likens Nineveh, when it is no more able to confront the enemy and when her children helplessly fall into the mouths of her enemy, to the fig trees with first-ripe figs that, if shaken by the wind, will lose all its figs.

"Surely, your people in your midst are women! The gates of your land are wide open for your enemies. Fire shall devour the bars of your gates" (Nahum 3:13)

Her army will become like women, helpless to defend themselves; and the gates of the city will be wide open, nonresistant to the enemy, because their bars will be devoured by fire.

"Draw water for the siege! Strengthen your strongholds! Go into the clay and tread the mortar! Take hold of the brick mold!" (Nahum 3:14)

He mockingly asks Nineveh to store water and provisions, so as not to die of thirst and hunger during the siege. Although the city is built on the River Tigris and surrounded by water channels on all sides, yet its inhabitants would not dare to go out to drink of it.

³² On Ps 75 (74).

It goes into clay and mud treading the mortar to mend or rebuild her strongholds, but all would be in vain.

“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 like the grasshopper!” (Nahum 3:15)

He calls on her not to depend upon the great number of her inhabitants or of her army men, who will be cut off by the sword and become as helpless as the locusts and grasshoppers before the raging fire.

“You increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens. The locust sheds its skin and flies away. Your commanders are like grasshoppers, your scribes like swarms of locusts settling on the fences on a cold day – when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they have gone” (Nahum 3:16-17)

Because of her geographic location on the River Tigris, surrounded by water channels all around, she became a great commercial center. But when God’s wrath dwelt upon her, she turned from a city packed with honorable merchants into a field devoured by innumerable locusts and grasshoppers that, when the sun rises, they flew away and no one knows where they have gone.

He probably means that once the foreign merchants, who came to Nineveh for business and acquired great wealth, saw the enemy coming they took their earnings and fled. Those, whom Nineveh thought to become her support at the time of affliction, have soon flown away like locusts to seek a more secure place.

Others believe that by the flying locusts he means the foreign mercenaries, hired to guard the city walls from outside, who flew away when they saw the enemy coming and did not know where to go. And as the Lord Christ says: ***“The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep”*** (John 10:31).

“Your shepherds slumber, O King of Assyria; your nobles are asleep in the dust; your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them” (Nahum 3:18)

The king of Assyria assumed that he is well protected by mighty warriors and commanders, but he was awakened by the prophet saying: ***“Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria” (18)***. His nobles were killed and fell on the streets in the dust, whereas his people fled to the mountains with terror and no one will gather them.

“Your injury has no healing; your wound is severe. All who hear the news about you will clap their hands over you; for who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?” (Nahum 2:19)

The prophet ends his book portraying Nineveh as broken with no hope for repair, as wounded with no healing. There will never be a rebuilding of Nineveh or a resetting of the nation of Assyria. Having been so violent with all the nations whom she defeated, they are now gloating and clapping their hands over her.

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE BOOK OF NAHUM 3

DESTROY NINEVEH IN ME AND SET THE NEW JERUSALEM

- ❖ The enemy has infiltrated into my heart, and has set a kingdom for himself.
Drive away the king of Assyria, and make a spectacle of him by Your cross.
Take away his authority, and set Your kingdom in me.
- ❖ Uproot from me what the enemy has planted.
All what is foreign of my nature that You have granted me.
Uproot from me every love of oppression.
And every lie and deceit.
Uproot from me every evil lust.
And every vain glory.
Expose me before my soul.
To return to You, O Whole Love and Mercy.
- ❖ I confess to You my weakness.
And my inability to resist.
Yet, You are my Stronghold!
You are the heavenly Physician, who heals my wounds.
And repair in me every broken bone.
- ❖ Instead of the wine of wickedness that makes me lose my balance,
Grant me the wine of Your heavenly wisdom.
Make me drunk with Your love, and let me praise Your mercies.
Let me forget the world and all its seductions.
And enjoy the advance payments of Your heavens.

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