

Comments on Nahum 2

This chapter presents Babylon as the aggressor and Assyria as the defender. Following the format of the preceding chapter, this canticle has an introduction (v. 1-2), main subject of the Babylonian invaders flooding over a weak Assyria with another rhetorical question (v. 3-12), a conclusion (v. 13).

The center main section could be separated into three strophes of v. 3-7, v. 8-10 and v. 11-12, separating the Babylonian invasion (v. 3-7) from the Assyrian collapse (v. 8-10), and the rhetorical question posed as a lion's pride metaphor.

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

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

v1-2 Nahum introduces the subject of the next canticle. Babylon is coming to destroy Assyria, and while Assyria will try to steel themselves against the invasion (v. 1), it will not matter, because the Lord has chosen to restore Israel after Assyria attacked and scattered them (v. 2).

v2 The excellency, or splendor, or pride, of Jacob referenced here is the promise of the covenant made to the original Jacob, wherein the Lord commits to protecting and preserving the lineage no matter what.

"For the Lord hath turned away", a poor translation in the KJV. Modern translations render this "For the Lord will restore" (NAS) or "For the Lord has restored" (JPS).

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

⁴ The chariots shall rage in the streets,

they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways:
they shall seem like torches,
they shall run like the lightnings.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

v3-12 The Babylonian army will be arrayed in their might against Assyria (v. 3) and their attack will be successful with the chariots breaking through into the city streets (v. 4). Assyria will try to resist (v. 5), but fail as the gates break open and the palace is toppled (v. 6), with the women being led away mourning and beating their chests (v. 7).

The capital of Assyria used to be beautiful and calm like a lovely pool of water, but not anymore (v. 8). The city will be looted (v. 9), with nothing of value left in it anymore, and the only thing that fills it now is fear (v. 10).

Assyria used to be powerful, like the lion's pride, whom everyone feared (v. 11), taking prey whenever it wanted (v. 12). What happened to this great and powerful lion (v. 11-12)? The Lord answers in the next verse (v. 13).

Consider the exceptionally well-crafted imagery Nahum uses here. In v. 3-7, one of the poetical devices used here is to contrast Babylon as "his mighty men...in scarlet" and Assyria as "her maids...with voices as doves". In a military conflict, fleeing fearful women have no chance against rapacious armed men (cp. 3:13). Also note the narrative imagery of these verses is chaotic, just like conflict is in reality.

The poetic imagery continues in v. 8-10 in contrasting the former calmness and opulent splendor of Nineveh (v. 8-9) with the latter dread and fear from the pillaging (v. 10). It was formerly filled with treasure, now there is nothing but scared survivors left to lament what they have lost.

Nahum then ends the imagery to compare Assyria to powerful lion, who ruled with his pride, taking prey whenever he wanted. That lion has been deposed, as always happens over time.

v3-4 In ancient warfare the chariot was equivalent to the main battle tank. The imagery being invoked was the city walls being breached and the most powerful Babylonian military asset is tearing through the cities at will. What would follow would be the infantry to occupy the city.

v7 "And Huzzab shall be led away captive", the JPS indicates the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain and offers an emendation of "And it's mistress is led out and exiled". The NAS renders it "She is stripped, she is carried away".

v8 The imagery Nahum is using here is that of a bunch of people gathered around a lake, enjoying themselves at a party or picnic, and then suddenly they all panic and flee over a disaster. The serene, beautiful setting is blasted apart by utter horror as people run in terror. Nahum has an impressive poetic touch.

¹³ Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and

I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and
the sword shall devour thy young lions: and
I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and
the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

v13 The conclusion. The Lord is done with Assyria, and the result is they will be entirely cut down, wiped off the face of the earth.

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