

Comments on Nahum 3

This chapter is a legalistic listing of all of Assyria's sins. If one were wondering why the Lord has Judged Assyria harshly and decide to destroy them, after using them as a tool in His hand to strike the Northern Kingdom of Israel, this chapter answers that question. It is because they have gotten so bad, the Lord must take them down.

The [JPS translation](#) of this chapter is much clearer in its presentation, even when compared against other modern translations. For example, in v. 4 the JPS makes it plain the woman represents the Assyrian nation, and it is not just talking about prostitution and drug abuse occurring in the city, and she will be humiliated in v. 5. That version is recommended.

¹ Woe to the bloody city!
it is all full of lies and robbery;
the prey departeth not;
² The noise of a whip, and
the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and
of the prancing horses, and
of the jumping chariots.
³ The horseman lifteth up both
the bright sword and the glittering spear: and
there is a multitude of slain, and
a great number of carcases; and
there is none end of their corpses; they
stumble upon their corpses:
⁴ Because of the multitude of the whoredoms
of the wellfavoured harlot,
the mistress of witchcrafts,
that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and
families through her witchcrafts.
⁵ Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and
I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and
I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and
the kingdoms thy shame. ⁶ And
I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and
make thee vile, and
will set thee as a gazingstock.
⁷ And it shall come to pass,
that all they that look upon thee
shall flee from thee, and say,
Nineveh is laid waste:
who will bemoan her?
whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

v1-7 Nineveh is full of deceit, pillage and murder (v. 1). Militarism (v. 2-3) fuels the spread of prostitution and drug abuse (v. 4). The result is the Lord will humiliate Assyria (v. 5-6), so the other nations will be repulsed by what they see (v. 7), rather than seduced.

v4 The KJV translation does not convey the intention. The intention is to portray Assyria as a drug-addicted prostitute. The KJV term "witchcraft" is talking about sorcery, or drug abuse in modern parlance. This drug addicted prostitute is spreading her bad behavior among all of the nations she takes over.

The KJV, and other modern translations as well, suggests the harlot's fees are being paid by the spoils of war. The nations are sold at slavery to pay for prostitutes and families are sold to pay for drugs. But, a better translation (e.g., the JPS) is that Nineveh is introducing or acculturating prostitution and drug abuse to those nations she conquers.

v5 Again, the KJV is poor. Modern translations make it clear the intent is that the Lord is going to humiliate Nineveh by sending her into captivity. It was a common practice to strip captive women to humiliate them, so this is what is going to happen to the Assyrian noble women, who were formerly dressed in beautiful expensive clothes.

V7 The Lord is concerned about the influence Assyria has over the nations it conquers, and it's neighbors in spreading their corrupt practices and culture. By humiliating them publicly, the Lord is showing the rest of the nations that these practices are repulsive and result in their destruction.

⁸ Art thou better than populous No,
that was situate among the rivers,
that had the waters round about it,
whose rampart was the sea, and
her wall was from the sea?

⁹ Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and
it was infinite;

Put and Lubim were thy helpers.

¹⁰ Yet was she carried away,
she went into captivity:
her young children also were dashed in pieces
at the top of all the streets: and
they cast lots for her honourable men, and
all her great men were bound in chains.

¹¹ Thou also shalt be drunken:
thou shalt be hid,
thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy.
¹² All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees
with the firstripe figs:
if they be shaken, they shall even fall
into the mouth of the eater.
¹³ Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women:
the gates of thy land
shall be set wide open unto thine enemies:
the fire shall devour thy bars.
¹⁴ Draw thee waters for the siege,
fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and
tread the mortar,
make strong the brickkiln.
¹⁵ There shall the fire devour thee;
the sword shall cut thee off,
it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm:

v8-15c The Lord castigates Assyria for their attack on Thebes (v. 8-9), where they murdered children and sent adults into slavery (v. 10). At the day of invasion, Assyria will be hapless and try to hide from the invaders (v. 11), but they will be harvested like figs (v. 12), because their warriors will be weak like women, so their gates are effectively useless (v. 13). Draw water to survive the siege, try to fortify with bricks and mortar (v. 14), it doesn't matter, you will be destroyed (v. 15).

v8 "Art thou better than...?", another rhetorical question, where the answer is obvious. From the Lord's perspective they are worse than those they conquer, so they have to be conquered as well.

v11 Another case of obscure Hebrew. The meaning seems to suggest that at the day of invasion the Assyrians will become senseless with fear, as though they were drunk, and try to find someplace to hide in cowardice.

make thyself many as the cankerworm,
make thyself many as the locusts.
¹⁶ Thou hast multiplied thy merchants
above the stars of heaven:
the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away.
¹⁷ Thy crowned are as the locusts, and
thy captains as the great grasshoppers,
which camp in the hedges in the cold day,

but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and
their place is not known where they are.
¹⁸ Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria:
thy nobles shall dwell in the dust:
thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and
no man gathereth them.
¹⁹ There is no healing of thy bruise;
thy wound is grievous:
all that hear the bruit of thee
shall clap the hands over thee:
for upon whom hath not
thy wickedness passed continually?

v15d-19 Again, the JPS does a much better job of translating the intended meaning of the obscure KJV. The intent is to compare all of Assyria's merchants (v. 16), guards (v. 17) and shepherds (v. 18) as insects that disappear quickly when faced with the slightest adversity. They melt away into the countryside and mountains as soon as it gets too hot. Nobody can find them. The result is all of the people who have suffered because of their wickedness will rejoice at their downfall (v. 19).

These verses suggest economic collapse will precede or attend the Babylonian invasion, as all of the tradespeople who formerly did business with them will abandon them as soon as they themselves are endangered.

v15d-e The Hebrew of these two lines is obscure.

v19 "bruit", archaic English for "rumor".

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