

Nahum 1:12-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/nah/nah-1/nahum-112-15/>

Nahum encourages the people of Judah to rejoice because God will destroy Nineveh to give them peace and freedom.

This section spells out God's judgment upon Nineveh and His deliverance of Judah. The prophet Nahum first addressed Judah (vv. 12–13), then the king of Assyria (v. 14), and then Judah again (v. 15). The purpose of this prophecy was to encourage the people of Judah with a promise of hope.

As the prophet encouraged the people of Judah, he began by clarifying the source of his message, saying, *Thus says the LORD*. This statement is a messenger formula often found in prophetic literature (Joel 2:12; 2:32; Amos 1:3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13; 2:1). It is an affirmation that the prophets spoke on God's behalf. It is not just their opinion; it is the truth, spoken from God.

Therefore, when the prophet Nahum said, *Thus says the LORD*, he added weight and emphasis to his message, indicating that it did not come from him. Instead, the message came from *the LORD*. As such, it would come to pass because *the LORD* is faithful to His words (Deuteronomy 7:9–10).

As the prophet encouraged the people of Judah, he disclosed what would happen to their enemies: *Though they are at full strength and likewise many, even so, they will be cut off and pass away*. The pronoun *they* refers to the Ninevites. Since Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, it represents the Assyrian empire (v. 1).

The verb translated as *cut off* literally means to shear an animal, that is, to remove the hair (wool) forming the coat of that animal (Genesis 31:19; Deuteronomy 15:19). In our passage, it describes how God would defeat the Ninevites. The verb *pass away* means to disappear. The idea conveyed is that the Ninevites would experience destruction and would vanish. Although they were strong and numerous, neither their *strength* nor their numbers would help them in the day of God's judgment. They would disappear from the scene and would never return to life.

The destruction of Nineveh would mean deliverance and hope for Judah. Through the prophet, the *LORD* declared, *Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer*. Here, *the LORD* addressed the nation of Judah in the second-person feminine singular. He is, therefore, addressing Israel as His wife, an image that is consistent in both the Old and New Testaments. The covenant between God and Israel made at Mount Sinai can be properly viewed as a marriage ceremony, and the unfaithfulness of Israel was referred to as adultery (Ezekiel 16:32; Hosea 3:1). In the New Testament, the church is said to be the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:31-33).

God told His covenant people that their punishment would soon be over. The *LORD* had used the Assyrian empire as His instrument to discipline Israel and Judah. But, in their arrogance, the

Assyrians went beyond their assignment. God would now judge them to avenge the blood of His people (Nahum 1:2). In so doing, He would free Judah from the Assyrian oppression.

That the nation of Judah would be free from the Assyrian oppression is evident from the next statement in which *the LORD* stated, *So now, I will break his yoke bar from you and I will tear off your shackles*. The pronoun *his* refers to the king of Assyria. A *yoke bar* is a straight bar made of wood. It allowed two or more draft animals to be coupled to plow effectively (Numbers 19:2; 1 Kings 19:19). The *shackles* were the leather straps that fasten the yoke to the neck of the animal.

To break the *yoke* and *tear off the shackles* is to free the animal from having to plow. The *LORD* used the image to describe the oppression the people of Judah had suffered at the hand of the Ninevites (Deuteronomy 28:48). In essence, *the LORD* stated that He would end Assyria's power over Judah to give His people the freedom to rule their nation as they pleased. In the case of Assyria, it is likely that the *yoke bar* of oppression was the requirement to pay annual tribute or taxes to Assyria. This tax was not reinvested in the land of Israel. Rather it was simply required by Assyria as "protection money"—to protect Judah from being invaded and ravaged.

Then, *the LORD* turned His attention to the king of Nineveh who represented the Assyrian empire. He said, *The LORD has issued a command concerning you*. This statement means that *the LORD* had decreed a message concerning Nineveh. The divine decree is in three parts. In the first part, *the LORD* said, *Your name will no longer be perpetuated*, literally "It shall not be sown from your name anymore."

In the time of ancient Israel, families valued children and regarded them as a gift of God and a blessing (Genesis 13:16; Psalm 127:3). Conversely, they regarded barrenness as a curse since the family line would come to an end. That is why Abram expressed his anxiety about an heir: "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Genesis 15:2). Here in Nahum, *the LORD* would eradicate the Assyrians to prevent them from having descendants to carry on the family *name*.

In the second part of the divine decree, *the LORD* declared, *I will cut off idol and image from the house of your gods*. The term for *idol* refers to graven *images* usually carved from stone or wood, while the term for *image* refers to molten images made with metal (Deuteronomy 27:15). The *LORD* used the two terms together to refer to all kinds of *images* that represented the pagan religion of Assyria. Simply stated, God would destroy all the idols that were in the temples of the Assyrian gods. With it, He would end the exploitative practices their pagan religion justified.

In the third part of the decree, *the LORD* said, *I will prepare your grave*. Jacob commanded his son Joseph to bury him in a *grave* which he dug in Canaan (Genesis 47:30; 50:5). Joseph did as his father instructed him. He buried his father "in the cave of the field at Machpelah" (Genesis 50:13). Here in Nahum, God would make a *grave* to bury the Assyrians together when He destroyed them.

The reason God would destroy the Assyrians and bury them in one *grave* is spelled out in the latter portion of the verse: *For you are contemptible*. The word for *contemptible* is a verb

indicating something light or insignificant (Job 4:4). Thus, to be *contemptible* is to be of no value or to be very small.

Although the Assyrians dominated the world with their empire, they were insignificant in the eyes of God because they produced no good fruits. They were only interested in exploiting others, including Judah. Therefore, He would cut them off and throw them in the *grave* prepared for them.

It is worth noting that Jesus says something similar to the church at Laodicea. But God's judgment does not consume His people, rather it refines them. In His letter to Laodicea He tells the believers there that they think they are wealthy because of their material possessions, but do not realize they are actually in spiritual poverty, making them "wretched" (Revelation 3:17). Jesus advises them to gain true riches from listening to Him, and abiding with Him (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus promises that any of His servants who overcome rejection and loss from the world by loving and serving others, just as He overcame, He will share His authority with them to reign over the earth (Revelation 3:21). This is like a bookend promise to Nahum; God will bring down worldly kingdoms like the Assyrian Empire—those who use their power to exploit others. And He will replace these worldly kingdoms with a kingdom that is not of this present world (Daniel 2:44). It will be a kingdom that fills the earth with righteousness/harmony (2 Peter 3:13). Those who "overcome," those who serve others in love, will be the ones who qualify to serve in such a kingdom (Revelation 3:21).

The *LORD* addressed Judah again with some words of encouragement. He introduced the statement with the particle *behold*. In the Bible, the term *behold* is often used to describe an event that is about to take place. It serves to focus attention on the statement that follows it. In other words, the speaker uses the term *behold* to focus on an event that is surprising or unexpected for his listeners. Here, the surprising event was a turning point in the life of Judah as *the LORD* stated, *On the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace!*

The word for *peace* ["Shalom" in Hebrew] is a positive concept associated with notions of wholeness, intactness, and well-being (1 Samuel 20:7; 2 Samuel 17:3). Here, "shalom" refers to a historical event that would benefit Judah: Nineveh's downfall. Thus, the people of Judah were to look toward *the mountains* because a messenger was coming to predict Nineveh's downfall.

Judah would experience freedom and *peace*, fulfilling God's promised blessing, as described in the book of Leviticus: "I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble" (Leviticus 26:6). In this case, it is likely the termination of a constant threat of invasion from Assyria that will give them *peace*.

The *LORD* further urged Judah, saying, *Celebrate your feasts, O Judah*. In Old Testament times, the covenant people of God celebrated three annual pilgrim *festivals* — Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Booths (Exodus 23:16–17; Deuteronomy 16:1–

17). The people of God attended these religious *festivals* to celebrate and commemorate their redemption from Egypt and to thank God for the harvest grain.

During these activities, the Israelites had the opportunity to worship their Suzerain (or Ruler) God as they fellowshiped together, enjoying one another's company and sharing meals. Even though the Assyrians have besieged the city of Jerusalem, God encourages His people to *celebrate* their *feasts*. They are encouraged to continue to do so, and to also *pay* their *vows*. This would indicate that help was on the way, God would provide and preserve them from the Assyrians.

In the ancient world, *vows* were not uncommon. A *vow* is a voluntary, conditional agreement. People requesting divine assistance often promised to perform certain actions—such as offering a gift or making sacrifices to a deity. This voluntary act was done to show gratitude to the deity for providing relief or deliverance since the person requiring divine intervention was in some sort of affliction. The LORD God gave Israel principles regarding vows (Leviticus 7:16, 22:21, 22:23, 27:2; Numbers 6:2, 6:5, 15:3, 30:2-4). In fact, God tells His people to take any vow they make seriously:

“When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5)

When Samuel's mother Hannah found out she was barren, she vowed to the LORD, saying, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head” (1 Samuel 1:9–11). Hannah fulfilled her vow when she brought Samuel to serve in the house of the priest (1 Samuel 1:25-28). Similarly, Jonah stated that he would fulfill his *vows* when the LORD delivered him (Jonah 2:9).

In our passage, the LORD asked the people of Judah to *pay* their *vows* and spelled out the reason: *For never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely.*

The word translated as *wicked* is “beliyya'al” in Hebrew. It can mean “worthless.” It is used in Deuteronomy 13 to describe some men with a bad reputation who went from the Israelite community to seduce the inhabitants of their city (Deuteronomy 13:13; 15:9). Here, as in the previous section, the term refers to the wicked Assyrian king, who made evil plans “against the LORD” (v. 11). He was destroyed and had no heir to continue his rule. This could also have a prophetic application to the antichrist, who will be captured and thrown directly into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

The people of Judah were to rejoice and repay the *vows* they had made to *the LORD* because the Assyrians would vanish and would no longer oppress them [Judah]. Therefore, the *LORD* used Nahum to comfort Judah by telling the people that their suffering would be over once the Ninevites ceased to exist. The destruction of the Ninevites meant deliverance and freedom for Judah. This passage demonstrates how the avenging God cares for the people of Judah. He

fought for them to allow them to live in peace because they were His children. Today, *the LORD* would also fight for anyone who belongs to Him because He is an Almighty God (v. 3).

Biblical Text

¹² Thus says the LORD,

**“Though they are at full *strength* and likewise many,
Even so, they will be cut off and pass away.**

**Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no longer.**

**¹³ “So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you,
And I will tear off your shackles.”**

¹⁴ The LORD has issued a command concerning you:

“Your name will no longer be perpetuated.

**I will cut off idol and image
From the house of your gods.
I will prepare your grave,
For you are contemptible.”**

¹⁵ Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news,

Who announces peace!

Celebrate your feasts, O Judah;

Pay your vows.

For never again will the wicked one pass through you;

He is cut off completely.