

Nahum 1:9-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/nah/nah-1/nahum-19-11/>

Nahum states that the Ninevites will fall under God's judgment because they have made evil plans against the LORD and His covenant people.

This section continues the theme of judgment begun in the previous verse (v. 8). Here, the prophet used the pronoun “you” to address the people of Nineveh. The switch from the third person (v. 8) to the second person likely enhances the accusation reported in the verse. The Ninevites had thought they could destroy God's covenant people. But this would not come to pass because the LORD, the great warrior, is a “stronghold” for His people (v. 7).

The prophet Nahum found it beyond comprehension that the Ninevites thought they could revolt *against the LORD*. So, he said, *Whatever you devise against the LORD, He will make a complete end of it*. The verb *devise* carries bad overtones and speaks of a premeditated act. It means to plot against someone, that is, to establish a plan to harm someone (Hosea 7:15).

The Ninevites entertained the possibility of destroying *the LORD*. They thought they could destroy God's covenant people, and by implication, bring shame to *the LORD*. But any devices *against the LORD* are useless.

We get an illustration of this prideful Assyrian attitude in the episode of Assyria provoking Hezekiah, king of Judah. Roughly fifty years after the prophet Jonah, and Nineveh's repentance, the Assyrian king's envoy says to the people of Jerusalem:

“But do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?” (2 Kings 18:32b-33)

It is likely that Nahum wrote this prophecy some time after this episode, where God delivered Judah from the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 19:35-36). Nahum's prophecy indicates that Assyria did not learn its lesson. They rebelled from God after heeding Jonah's message and repenting. Then roughly fifty years later, in the next generation, they are arrogantly accosting Judah, and taunting the LORD God. At that time God slays 185,000 soldiers and Assyria has to retreat (2 Kings 19:35-36).

Yet now, at the time of Nahum's writing, it is inferred that Nineveh is still threatening Judah. Some believe Nahum wrote after 663 BC, because of a reference in Nahum 3:8 to the destruction by Assyria of Thebes. Nineveh is believed to be destroyed around 625 BC. This would imply that Assyria had two major signs given it, and yet continued to not only disbelieve God, but to also taunt and provoke Him.

Such plans by Assyria to harm Judah would come to nothing because *the LORD* is all-powerful. He would make a full end of His enemies. The *LORD* is “the God of all flesh”; nothing is “too

difficult” for Him (Jeremiah 32:27). He would not give the Assyrians a second chance to attack His people. As the prophet stated, *Distress will not rise up twice*. God would destroy the Assyrians before they could carry out their evil plans.

The prophet Nahum described Nineveh’s destruction in vivid terms using the imagery of fire since fire usually leaves a field barren and desolate when it attacks it. He said, *Like tangled thorns and like those who are drunken with their drink, they are consumed as stubble completely withered*.

The term *thorn* always carries a negative connotation in the Bible. The psalmist David capitalized on thorns’ worthlessness, using them to describe wicked people “Every one of them will be thrust away like thorns” (2 Samuel 23:6). Here in Nahum, the imagery has the same connotation. The idea is that anything that “yields thorns” is “worthless” and needs to be discarded (Hebrews 6:8). Both *thorns* and *stubble* burn quickly when exposed to fire.

The term *stubble* describes the cut stalks of grain plants after the harvest of the grain. Since it burns rapidly, it is used here to portray the destruction of Nineveh (Obadiah 1:18). Simply put, *the LORD* would destroy the Ninevites just as fire destroys *tangled thorns* or the *stubble* left after the grain is harvested. As a result of the destruction, the people of Nineveh would be confused *like* heavy drunkards. In this case, the prophecy was literal; it is believed that Nineveh was destroyed by fire around 612 BC.

Nahum addressed the city Nineveh directly using the second-person feminine singular “you,” although he did not spell out the name of the city. He said, *From you has gone forth One who plotted evil against the LORD*. This statement is a reference to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who reigned from 705 BC to 681 BC. It could also reference the anti-christ, who is the beast, who is prophesied to come out of Assyria (Micah 5:5).

The Assyrians captured the northern kingdom of Israel/Samaria in 722 BC and sent them into exile because King Hoshea stopped paying tribute to the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V (2 Kings 17:6). But the southern kingdom of Judah remained unmolested until 701 BC when King Hezekiah of Judah rebelled against King Sennacherib of Assyria (2 Kings 18:7).

In retribution, the Assyrians attacked Judah, but the death angel of the Lord “went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kings 19:35–36; Isaiah 36–37). King Sennacherib departed from Judah and lived in Nineveh, where his two sons “killed him with the sword” (2 Kings 19:37).

Since the Assyrians failed to destroy Judah, they continued to plot to besiege the city because their king was *a wicked counselor*. The word translated as *wicked* is “beliyya’al” in Hebrew. It can mean “worthless” or evil.

In Deuteronomy 13, the Hebrew term “beliyya’al” translated here as *wicked* describes some men with no reputation who went from the Israelite community to seduce the inhabitants of their city (Deuteronomy 13:13). They did evil by plotting harm to their own city. “Beliyya’al” appears again in Deuteronomy 15, where Moses cautioned the people not to have any “base (*wicked*)

thought” in their heart as “the year of remission” (the year for the cancellation of all debts) drew near (Deuteronomy 15:9). The warning is to avoid doing evil by withholding loaning a poor person funds to help them survive just because they were likely to have the debt forgiven soon.

In our passage, the term “beliyya‘al” refers to the *wicked* behavior of the Assyrian king, who made evil plans *against the LORD*. Such plans would not come to fruition because *the LORD* would *make a complete end* of the Assyrians. Sure enough, Nineveh fell before the people of Nineveh could carry out their wicked plan. The great bloody city of Nineveh fell by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC.

Biblical Text

**⁹ Whatever you devise against the LORD,
He will make a complete end of it.
Distress will not rise up twice.**

**¹⁰ Like tangled thorns,
And like those who are drunken with their drink,
They are consumed
As stubble completely withered.**

**¹¹ From you has gone forth
One who plotted evil against the LORD,
A wicked counselor.**