

# Nahum 2:1-2

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*Nahum urges the city of Nineveh to be on guard and be ready for battle because the enemy is approaching.*

The prophet Nahum announced the arrival of Nineveh's adversary. Using the second-person feminine pronoun to refer to the city, he declared, *The one who scatters has come up against you.* The statement "*the one who scatters*" translates the Hebrew word "mēpîš." It denotes the scattering of fine, light material. The prophet Isaiah used a form of the word for the scattering of seed (Isaiah 28:23–29).

In our passage, Nahum implements the phrase *the one who scatters* to refer to Nineveh's enemy, the one who *has come up* to besiege the city. The prophet spoke of the scatterer's arrival in the past tense as if the scatterer was already at Nineveh's gates, waiting for the appropriate moment to besiege it. Biblical prophets often speak of future events in the past tense as a way to demonstrate the certainty of their prediction; their prophecy is so certain that it is as though it has already occurred.

The verb translated as *come up* in the phrase *The one who scatters has come up against you* is "ālâh" in the Hebrew language. It means "to go up" or "to ascend." However, the Bible often uses the verb in conjunction with the preposition "against" in military contexts. In such cases, it means "to attack" which is likely the application here (1 Kings 14:25; 15:17; Isaiah 36:1). The phrase *against you* is literally "against your face." Thus, when Nahum said that the scatterer had *come up against* Nineveh in a frontal assault, he described an attack that was about to take place.

While the prophecy of Nahum does not tell who the scatterer was, history shows us it was a coalition of Babylonians and Medes. Babylon will become the new world empire.

Of course, God would be the ultimate attacker. God ultimately appoints all authorities on earth (Romans 13:1). God would use the Babylonians and Medes as His instrument to take vengeance "on His adversaries" to give peace and security to the people of Judah (Nahum 1:2).

Having announced the arrival of Nineveh's adversary, Nahum issued a fourfold command using the rhetorical device of irony. Nahum taunts Nineveh, inviting them to prepare their defense, even though their preparations will be for naught. The idea is that the Assyrians stop listening to God, so God is telling them "Do all you want to prepare for this assault—but by My word, you are going down."

First, Nahum stated, *Man the fortress.* The word translated as *man* here is a verb meaning "guard." So, the statement is literally "guard the fortress" or "guard the rampart" (Habakkuk 2:1). The word *fortress* refers to the broad top part of the walled city. Through this command, Nahum encouraged the Ninevites to secure their gates—although he knew this would be

impossible. Nahum is inviting the Ninevites to an endeavor of futility. What they have done to so many other nations is about to be done to them.

Second, Nahum said, *Watch the road!* The verb *watch* means to look out or pay attention. In the ancient world, a watchman was responsible to guard a town to protect it against surprise enemy attacks. In the book of 2 Kings, we find an example of such a practice. A “watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and said, ‘I see a company.’” This example demonstrates that a watchman was to be vigilant (2 Kings 9:17; Psalm 127:1). In the same manner, the Ninevites were to pay attention to see when the scatterer would approach to besiege the city. This, in spite of the fact that there was nothing they could do about it.

Third, the prophet said, *Strengthen your back*, which means literally “make strong your loins.” In Bible times, the loins were regarded as the seat of strength, as the following excerpt from the book of 2 Chronicles demonstrates. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, asked for advice concerning how to lighten the people’s tax burden, the young men told him to say to the people,

“My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”  
(2 Chronicles 10:10–11)

In our passage, Nahum’s command called the Ninevites to gather up their strength to get ready for the upcoming battle (Job 40:7). This, even though their gathering of strength will be for naught.

Fourth, Nahum declared, *Summon all your strength!* This statement parallels the third statement (*strengthen your back*). The idea is that the Ninevites were to gather their troops for battle. These are all the things Assyria would do because they trust in their own power.

Nahum urged them to rely on their own power, to be on guard and be ready for battle because the enemy had come up against them. The nation of Assyria had mistreated many ancient near Eastern nations. But now it was her turn. God tells them “Keep trusting in your own power, you are about to get a big dose of the evil you have done to others, it will now be visited upon your own head.”

Though the prophet urged the Ninevites to defend their city, to trust in their own power, he knew they would not be able to do so because they were under the wrath of the LORD, the great avenger (Nahum 1:14–15). God’s wrath is typically poured out in one of two ways: 1) God giving people what they asked for, which leads to their own destruction (Romans 1:24,26,28), or 2) God giving people the evil they wished upon others. In this case, Nineveh is going to be sieged and conquered, just as they had done to many other nations.

In the next verse God asserts that Nineveh’s fall will lead to a restoration *For the LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel.*

To *restore* means to bring something back. It often implies a reversal of misfortune (Hosea 6:11). The name *Jacob* could stand for the southern kingdom of Judah or to all of Israel (Obadiah 1:18). At this point in history, the northern kingdom of Israel or Samaria was already defeated by Assyria, in 722 BC. Assyria assaulted Judah about a decade later, but God intervened to save Israel (2 Kings 19:35). Nahum is writing some time after that episode. Therefore the *splendor of Israel* might refer to the promised restoration of the entire nation of Israel, a promise that is frequently repeated throughout scripture.

The term *Jacob* is sometimes used to refer to the northern kingdom, which would seem to support the idea of the phrase *the LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel* referring to a restoration of all of Israel (Amos 6:8, 8:7). *Jacob* was the given name of the second son of Isaac, who gained the birthright through the apathy of his brother Esau toward his inheritance (Hebrews 12:16). His name was later changed from Jacob (“supplanter”) to Israel (“God prevails”) (Genesis 32:28). So perhaps what is in view here is not so much northern versus southern but rather before and after. When Israel is fully restored and the Messiah is on the throne, the earth will be filled with righteousness, and God will prevail.

The term translated as *splendor* can also be rendered as “majesty” or “glory.” This could also be applied as the prophet saying that *the LORD* would bring back the former glory of Judah (*Jacob*) as He had promised to do for *Israel*, which was also a name for the northern kingdom, also called Samaria (Hosea 14:5–7) when they were united under David. Both Israel and Judah will regain their former glory *even though devastators have devastated them and destroyed their vine branches*. However, the new glory will have a new *splendor* that will be even greater, as the Son of David will ascend to the throne of Israel (Acts 1:6-7).

Israel and Judah have had *devastators* like Assyria devastate them, but God will raise them up again. The picture Nahum gives is of the *devastators* having *destroyed their vine branches*. This could literally refer to the *devastators* having destroyed Israel and Judah’s ability to grow agricultural products. The *vine branches* would represent the agricultural products or the material blessings of the people (as in Hosea 2:12, 15). That means, when God used the Assyrians as His tool to chastise His covenant people, they took away the harvest also.

The vineyard and grape vine are often used in a metaphorical manner in scripture as well. Jesus uses the vine as a metaphor for God in John 15. God sometimes uses the vineyard as a metaphor for Israel (Isaiah 5:1–7). In the case of the northern kingdom of Israel, it has already been destroyed by Assyria at the time of this prophecy. It could be that the *vine branches* that have been destroyed by the *devastators* refer to Israel and Judah’s ability to thrive. God promises here that the vibrancy of both Israel and Judah will someday be restored.

The Assyrian empire had dominated Israel and Judah since the time Tiglath-pileser (also known as “Pul”) came to power, approximately 740 BC, perhaps around 100 years prior to the prophecy of Nahum. Assyria had a strong army that marched with a reputation for unbridled cruelty and professional efficiency.

The book of 1 Chronicles speaks of the half tribe of Manasseh, as well as the tribes of Reuben and Gad, the three tribes of Israel that settled east of the Jordan River. Because of their

unfaithfulness, “The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pileser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh” (1 Chronicles 5:26). Then later, about 722 BC, the Assyrians continued their conquest and exiled the other seven tribes when they defeated Israel’s capital, Samaria. This took place after the Israelite king rebelled, and refused to pay tribute (taxes) to Assyria (2 Kings 17:5–6).

In Jerusalem—the capital city of Judah—King Hezekiah saw the northern kingdom fall. He knew he was susceptible as well. To prepare against an invasion by Assyria, Hezekiah built a massive wall to fortify the western suburbs of the city. He secured the city’s water supply by redirecting the waters of the Gihon Spring through a 1700-foot tunnel leading to a pool within the city fortifications (Isaiah 22:8–11; 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). He also strengthened the army of Judah and provided a supply system of stored goods to resist the Assyrian army.

In 701 BC, about 20 years after the fall of Samaria (the northern kingdom, also called Israel) the Assyrian king Sennacherib and his troops marched south toward the southern kingdom of Judah. The situation appeared hopeless at first, but the prophet Isaiah encouraged King Hezekiah to hold on, letting him know that Judah would not fall.

Subsequently, the LORD intervened and spared Jerusalem. The death angel of the Lord “went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians,” causing King Sennacherib of Assyria to depart from Israel (2 Kings 19:35–36; Isaiah 36–37). As the biblical texts made clear, the Assyrians took away the possessions of Israel by force, just as people strip and destroy the *branches* of a *vine* (e.g. 2 Kings 18:9). Now God would turn the tables on the Assyrians, causing them to experience defeat and shame.

The LORD is a just God. He always “performs righteous deeds” (Psalm 103:6a). He had used the Assyrian empire as His instrument to discipline His covenant people so that they could return to Him in faith. However, God used Assyria in their arrogance and pride. God would punish Nineveh to avenge the blood of His covenant people.

This parallels the message of the prophet Habakkuk, who prophesied to Judah about the looming invasion of Judah by the Babylonians. Habakkuk begins by asking God why He is not judging Judah for all the injustice he sees. God answers that He intends to chastise Judah through an invasion by the Babylonians. Habakkuk then asks why God would discipline corrupt Judah using a nation that is even more corrupt? God answers Habakkuk by saying that Babylon will get their judgement as well, in due time. As will all who are proud:

“Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him;  
But the righteous will live by his faith.”  
(Habakkuk 2:4)

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup>The one who scatters has come up against you.  
Man the fortress, watch the road;  
Strengthen your back, summon all *your* strength.  
<sup>2</sup>For the Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob  
Like the splendor of Israel,  
Even though devastators have devastated them  
And destroyed their vine branches.**