

Nahum 2:3-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/nah/nah-2/nahum-23-7/>

Nahum describes in vivid images the siege and capture of Nineveh. The city will be defeated and carried away.

In this section, Nahum portrays the siege and capture of the Assyrian city of Nineveh. In describing the attackers' war equipment, the prophet spoke as if he were an eyewitness, showing the certainty of his prophecy.

He began by saying, *The shields of his mighty men are colored red.*

The phrase *his mighty men* refers to the one who would "scatter" Nineveh in verse 1, notably a coalition of Babylonians and Medes. The *his* would seem to refer to the Babylonian leader Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, who is prominent in the book of Daniel. It is believed the Babylonian conquest of Nineveh took place around 612 BC, perhaps about fifty years after Nahum's prophetic word.

The phrase *mighty men* corresponds to the term *warrior* in the second line. Such men were skilled in battle. Their *shields are colored red* to frighten their adversary. Also, *they are dressed in scarlet* to make the blood of their wounds less visible to the enemy. This tactic of the Babylonians to dress in red would later be adopted by the Greek power Sparta.

As far as *the chariots* are concerned, *they are enveloped in flashing steel when he is prepared to march*. Again, the pronoun "he" refers to the scatterer who "has come up against" Nineveh, likely Nabopolassar (v. 1). It seems the Babylonian *chariots* are plated with armor, being *enveloped in flashing steel*. Probably "iron" would be a better translation, rather than what is currently considered *steel*. But the idea is that when the army gets *prepared to march* they wrap the *chariots* in iron, preparing them to deploy for war (*he is prepared to march*). This would convert *the chariots* to a sort of armored personnel carrier. It would become a mobile platform allowing soldiers to shoot volleys of arrows.

In addition to converting the *chariots* to armored vehicles, *the cypress spears are brandished*. This probably means that the *spears* used by the enemy of Nineveh came from the *cypress* tree. The wood of the *cypress* is durable, water resistant, and soft, so not prone to splinter. The verb *brandish* means quiver or shake. Thus, the attackers are shaking their *spears* as they prepare to march to Nineveh with their armored *chariots*, showing their eagerness to fight against the Ninevites.

As Nahum continued to describe the attackers' preparation to march to Nineveh, he now explained the movement of the *chariots*. They *race madly in the streets* and *rush wildly in the squares*, describing the swift movement of the *chariots*. The *streets* and *squares* may refer to the streets and squares of Babylon, since they are being *prepared to march*. It seems the picture here is of the Babylonian army gathering for war, parading before the populace, showing their

proWess before they head off to Nineveh, which is estimated by some to be about a 300 mile march. So it seems unlikely there would be any racing or rushing once the convoy set out for Nineveh.

Moreover, *the appearance of the chariots is like torches, and they dash to and fro like lightning flashes*. This might indicate that the iron-clad chariots are racing through Babylon, with their metal shining in the sun, reflecting bright light, *like torches* as they *dash to and fro like lightning*, showing off the agility they will be able to exercise once they reach Nineveh. If the Ninevites read this prophecy, perhaps it would have demoralized them, imagining such a formidable force mustering to march toward their city.

As the scatterer (Nahum 2:1) or commander monitored the situation, *he remembers his nobles*. The verb remember can be translated as “summon” in this context. It seems now the scene has shifted from the army mustering to make its march, and now they are assaulting Nineveh.

It seems the scatterer (Nabopolassar) noticed that his officers were advancing too quickly, or perhaps imprudently toward Nineveh, so he summoned them. His action was wise because Nahum tells us that the *nobles stumble in their march as they hurry to her wall and set up the mantelet*. The term *mantelet* refers to a large portable shelter used as a protective cover by soldiers when they besieged a fortified city. The idea here seems to be that Nabopolassar is a capable leader, who will lead the demise of Nineveh.

As a result of the attack against Nineveh, *the gates of the river are opened, and the palace is dissolved*.

The *gates of the river* refer to the points where the canals surrounding the city of Nineveh entered it. Since Nineveh was on the east bank of the Tigris River, King Sennacherib of Assyria had created an expanded network of canals and sluice gates to prevent Nineveh from flooding, providing irrigation channels to the city and its surrounding agricultural land. The king also built a *palace* in Nineveh between 703 BC and 691 BC and called it the “Palace Without Rival.” The *palace* had a huge complex of interconnected rooms and courts.

Nahum predicted the destruction of both the *river gates* and the *palace*. This prophecy was fulfilled in 612 BC when the Babylonians and Medes invaded Nineveh. During the invasion, a flood broke down part of the city wall, leading to the city’s ruin. God is faithful to His words. His judgment on the Ninevites was appropriate because they refused to abandon their wicked ways. Thus, God said, *It is fixed*, that is, it is decreed. God also said, *She is stripped, she is carried away*. That means that invaders would plunder the wealth of Nineveh, and she would go into exile.

Nineveh’s exile would cause great pain and sorrow in the Assyrian land: *her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves*. The pain and hardship they visited on others is now visited upon their own land. The verb *moan* describes sounds of mourning and despair. *Doves* are harmless birds that were often used for sacrifice in ancient Israel (Genesis 15:9; Leviticus 1:14; 5:7). They have a soft murmuring sound like that of falling rain. The Bible often uses the cooing (murmuring sound) of doves as an image for human mourning (Isaiah 38:14; 59:11). In our

passage, Nahum said that the female servants mourned, making a sound like the cooing of doves, *beating on their breasts*.

In ancient times, people often beat *their breasts* to express their sorrow and afflictions. The prophet Isaiah, predicting the troubles that would come upon the land of Judah, exhorted the complacent women of Judah to lament: “Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine” (Isaiah 32:12). Here too, the prophet Nahum said that the female servants of Nineveh used their hands, *beating on their breasts* as they lamented the destruction of their city.

Biblical Text

³ **The shields of his mighty men are *colored red*,
The warriors are dressed in scarlet,
The chariots are *enveloped* in flashing steel
When he is prepared *to march*,
And the cypress *spears* are brandished.**

⁴ **The chariots race madly in the streets,
They rush wildly in the squares,
Their appearance is like torches,
They dash to and fro like lightning flashes.**

⁵ **He remembers his nobles;
They stumble in their march,
They hurry to her wall,
And the mantelet is set up.**

⁶ **The gates of the rivers are opened
And the palace is dissolved.**

⁷ **It is fixed:
She is stripped, she is carried away,
And her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves,
Beating on their breasts.**