

Nahum 3:5-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/nah/nah-3/nahum-35-7/>

The LORD announces that He will expose Nineveh to cause her to experience shame and destruction.

In this section, the LORD spoke as if He were speaking directly to Nineveh to announce her defeat. He began with the Hebrew particle “hineh,” often translated as *behold*.

God now speaks directly, saying “*Behold, I am against you,*” declares the LORD of hosts.

The particle *Behold* usually serves to focus attention on the statement that follows it. The speaker often uses it to focus on an event that is surprising or unexpected for his listeners. In our passage, the LORD used *Behold* to announce His opposition of Nineveh, saying, *I am against you*.

The pronoun *you* is feminine singular in the Hebrew text and thus refers to the city of Nineveh (Nahum 2:13). The statement *I am against you* is followed by the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts*. It is, obviously, not good to have God as an enemy, and it will not turn out well for Nineveh.

The term *LORD* refers to Yahweh, the self-existent and eternal God, the I AM who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14–15). The term *hosts* translates the Hebrew term “sabaoth,” meaning “armies.” It refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). In sum, the phrase *the LORD of hosts* demonstrates God’s power and emphasizes His character as a warrior leading His angelic army to fight against Nineveh. God’s vast spiritual host of heaven is about to unleash against the inferior earthly and occult power of Assyria.

Having positioned Himself to fight against Nineveh, the LORD stated, *I will lift up your skirts over your face and show to the nations your nakedness and to the kingdoms your disgrace*.

The action of lifting the *skirts over your face* has to do with removing a woman’s clothes to reveal her nakedness. In the ancient world, people would strip a woman naked to inflict punishment on her for prostitution or adultery (Hosea 2:3; see also Jeremiah 13:22; Ezekiel 23:10). Because Nineveh seduced other nations to exploit them, the LORD would judge her and cause her to experience shame and humiliation. The exploiter will become the exploited. God would *show to the nations* Nineveh’s *nakedness*. This would be to Nineveh a *disgrace* before the competing *kingdoms*.

The LORD continued to say, *I will throw filth on you and make you vile and set you as a spectacle*. The word translated *filth* refers to something detestable or abominable. In Leviticus, it refers to that which is unclean (Leviticus 7:21; 11:23–24; 20:25). In Deuteronomy, the word refers to the worship of foreign gods and idols (Deuteronomy 7:25–26; 29:17). In Nahum, *filth* refers metaphorically to some loathsome substance, such as excrement, that God would throw at

Nineveh to show how much He despised her. The *filth* would make her *vile* or unpleasant, and she would become a public *spectacle*. People would make fun of her in disgust.

Observers would be repulsed when seeing what happened to the wicked city of Nineveh. As the LORD declared, *And it will come about that all who see you will shrink from you*. The verb translated as *shrink* means to flee or run away from something. It often describes panicky wandering as when birds fly due to fear or terror evoked by a fearsome sight (Isaiah 16:2; Jeremiah 4:25; Proverbs 27:8). The idea seems to be that people will see Nineveh's total destruction and be sickened, and run away.

In our passage, the verb *shrink* describes how people would be repulsed upon seeing Nineveh's fatal condition. The onlookers would say, *Nineveh is devastated!* Given Nineveh's cruelty to other nations, we might expect her enemies to cheer that she has been *devastated*. But the picture here seems to be that the destruction is so complete, that it shocks even her foes.

The *LORD of hosts* would destroy Nineveh, and her total destruction would prompt people to shrink back, revolted. They will ask, *Who will grieve for her?* and *Where will I seek comforters for you?*

The implied answer to these questions is "Nobody." There is apparently not even sufficient remaining population to properly *grieve*. There is nobody, apparently including allies, who can be sought as *comforters* for Nineveh.

The verb translated as *grieve* means to show pity, as when Job's friends came to "sympathize with him and comfort him" (Job 2:11; 42:11). Nobody would remain to sympathize with Nineveh on the day of her destruction. She had exploited and oppressed many nations. She would now be *devastated*—utterly destroyed. She will be so completely annihilated that onlookers will apparently be shocked. Nineveh will have no strength remaining, no allies remaining.

The word translated as *comforters* is built off the same root word as the name of Nahum, the prophet sent by God to predict Nineveh's destruction and comfort the people of Judah. This wordplay establishes a contrast between God's plan for Nineveh and His plan for Judah.

Stated differently, Nineveh's fate would mean hope and comfort for Judah. Nineveh would have no one to comfort her, but the people of Judah would find comfort because they belonged to the LORD.

When God judges His people, His judgment fire refines them. But when God judges His enemies, His judgment fire consumes them (Hebrews 10:27). Our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). But for those who are His, His judgment fire will ultimately turn to comfort (Romans 8:28-29).

Biblical Text

⁵“Behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord of hosts;

“And I will lift up your skirts over your face,

And show to the nations your nakedness

And to the kingdoms your disgrace.

⁶“I will throw filth on you

And make you vile,

And set you up as a spectacle.

⁷“And it will come about that all who see you

Will shrink from you and say,

‘Nineveh is devastated!

Who will grieve for her?’

Where will I seek comforters for you?”