

CHAPTER 2

We now come closer to Nineveh, that great city; she took, not warning by the destruction of her armies and the fall of her king, and therefore may expect, since she persists in her enmity to God, that he will proceed in his controversy with her. Here is foretold,

I. The approach of the enemy that should destroy Nineveh, and the terror of his military preparations (v. 1-5).

II. The taking of the city (v. 6).

III. The captivity of the queen, the flight of the inhabitants, the seizing of all its wealth, and the great consternation it should be in (v. 7-10).

IV. All this is traced up to its true causes — their sinning against God and God's appearing against them (v. 11-13). All this was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar, in the first year of his reign, in conjunction with Cyaxares, or Ahasuerus, king of the Medes, conquered Nineveh, and made himself master of the Assyrian monarchy.

NAHUM 2:1-10

THE JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH

Here is,

I. An alarm of war sent to Nineveh, v. 1. The prophet speaks of it as just at hand, for it is neither doubtful nor far distant: “Look about thee, and see, *he that dashes in pieces has come up before thy face.*”

Nebuchadnezzar, who is noted, and will be yet more so, for dashing nations in pieces, begins with thee, and will dissipate and disperse thee;” so some render the word. Babylon is called the *hammer of the whole earth*, Jeremiah 1. 23. The attempt of Nebuchadnezzar upon Nineveh is public, bold, and daring: “*He has come up before thy face, avowing his design to ruin thee; and therefore stand to thy arms, O Nineveh! keep the munition; secure thy towers and magazines: watch the way; set guards*

upon all the avenues to the city; *make thy loins strong*; encourage thy soldiers; animate thyself and them; *fortify thy power mightily*, as cities do when an enemy is advancing against them” (this is spoken ironically); “do the utmost thou canst, yet thou shalt not be able to put by the stroke of this judgment, for *there is no counsel or strength against the Lord.*”

II. A manifesto published, showing the causes of the war (v. 2): *The Lord has turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel*, that is,

1. The Assyrians have been abusive to Jacob, the two tribes (have humbled and mortified them), as well as to Israel, the ten tribes, *have emptied them, and marred their vine-branches*. For this God will reckon with them; though done long since, it shall come into the account now against that kingdom, and Nineveh the head-city of it. God's quarrel with them is *for the violence done to Jacob*. Or,

(2.) God is now by Nebuchadnezzar about *to turn away the pride of Jacob* by the captivity of the two tribes, as he did the pride of Israel by their captivity; He has determined to do it, to bring *emptiers* upon them, and the enemy that is to do it must begin with Nineveh, and reduce that first, and humble the pride of that. God is looking upon proud cities, and abasing them, even those that are nearest to him. Samaria is humbled, and Jerusalem is to be humbled, and their pride brought low; and shall not Nineveh, that proud city, be brought down too? *Emptiers have emptied* the cities, *and marred the vine-branches* in the country of Jacob and Israel; and must not the excellency of Nineveh, that is so much her pride, be turned away too?

III. A particular account given in of the terrors wherein the invading enemy shall appear against Nineveh; every thing shall contribute to make him formidable.

1. *The shields of his mighty men are made red*, and probably their other arms and array, as if they were already tinctured with the blood they had shed, or intended hereby to signify they would put all to the sword; they hung out a red flag, in token that they would give no quarter.

2. *The valiant men are in scarlet*; not only red clothes, to intimate what bloody work they designed to make, but rich clothes, to intimate the wealth of the army, and that is the sinews of war.

3. *The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation;* when they are making their approaches, they shall fly as swiftly as lightning; the wheels shall strike fire upon the stones, and those that drive them shall drive furiously with a flaming indignation, as Jehu drove. Or they carried flaming torches with them in the open chariots, when they made their approach in the night, as Gideon's soldiers carried lamps in their pitchers, to be both a guide to themselves and a terror to their enemies, and with them to set all on fire wherever they went.

4. *The fir-trees shall be terribly shaken;* the great men of Nineveh, that overtop their neighbours, as the stately firs do the shrubs; or the very standing trees shall be made to shake by the violent concussions of the earth, which that great army shall cause.

5. The chariots of war shall be very terrible (v. 4): *They shall rage in the streets*, that is, those that drive them shall rage; you would think the chariots themselves raged; they shall be so numerous, and drive with so much fury, that even *in the broad ways*, where, one would think, there should be room enough, they shall *jostle one another*; and these iron chariots shall be made so bright that in the beams of the sun *they shall seem like torches* in the night; they shall *run like the lightnings*, so swiftly, so furiously. Nebuchadnezzar's commanders are here called his *worthies*, his *gallants* (so the margin reads it), his *heroes*; those *he shall recount*, and order them immediately and without fail to render themselves at their respective posts, for he is entering upon action, is resolved to take the field immediately, and to open the campaign with the siege of Nineveh. *His worthies shall remember* (so some read it); they shall be mindful of the duty of their place, and the charge they have received, and shall thereby be made so intent upon their business that they *shall stumble in their walks*, shall make more haste than good speed; they stumble, but shall not fall; *for they shall make haste to the wall thereof*, shall open the trenches; and the defence, or the covered way, shall be prepared (something to shelter them from the darts of the besieged), and they shall so closely carry on the siege, and with so much vigour, that at length the *gates of the rivers shall be opened* (v. 6); those gates of Nineveh which open upon the river Tigris (on which Nineveh was built) shall be first forced by, or betrayed to, the enemy, and by those gates they shall enter. And then the *palace shall be dissolved*, either the king's house or the house of Nisroch his god; the same word signifies both a palace and a temple. When the God of heaven goes forth to contend with a people, neither the palaces nor their kings,

neither the temples nor their gods, can protect and shelter them, but must all inevitably fall with them.

IV. A prediction of the consequences of this; and it is easy to guess how dismal those will be.

1. The queen shall fall into the hands of the enemy (v. 7): *Huzzab shall be led away captive*; she that was *established* (so some read it), thought herself safe because she was concealed and shut up in secret, shall be *discovered* (so the margin reads it) and shall be *led away captive*, in greater disgrace than that of common prisoners; she shall be *brought up* in a mock state, *and her maids of honour shall lead her*, because she is weak and faint, not able to bear such frights and hardships, which are doubly hard and frightful to those that have not been used to them; they shall attend her, not to speak cheerfully to her and to encourage her, but murmuring and moaning themselves, as *with the voice of doves*, the *doves of the valleys* (²⁷¹⁶Ezekiel 7:16), noted for their *mourning*, ²³⁸⁴Isaiah 38:14; 59:11. They shall be *tabering upon their breasts*, beating their own breasts in grief and vexation, as if they were *drumming* upon them, for so the word signifies.

2. The inhabitants, though numerous, shall none of them be able to make head against the invaders, or stand their ground (v. 8): *Nineveh is of old like a pool of water*, replenished with people as a pool with water (and *waters* signify *multitudes*, ⁶⁷⁵Revelation 17:15), or as those waters with fish; it was long ago a populous city; in Jonah's time there were 120,000 little children in it (³⁰¹¹Jonah 4:11), and, ordinarily, cities and countries are increasing in their number every year; but, though they have so many hands to be employed in the public service, yet they shall not be able to inspire one another with courage, but *they shall flee away like cowards*. Their commanders shall do what they can to animate them; they shall cry, "*Stand, stand, have a good heart on it, and we shall do well enough;*" *but none shall so much as look back*; they shall not have the least spark of courage remaining, but every one shall think it is his wisest course to make his best of the opportunity to escape; they shall not so much as look back to see who calls for them. Note, God can dispirit the strongest and boldest, in the day of distress, so that they shall not be what one would expect from them, but *like a pool of water*, the water whereof is dried up and gone.

3. The wealth of the city shall become a prey, and all its rich furniture shall fall into the hands of the victorious enemy (v. 9); they shall thus animate and excite one another to plunder: *Take the spoil of silver; take the spoil of gold*; thus the officers shall stir up the soldiers to improve their opportunity; here are silver and gold enough for them, for *there is no end of the store of money and plate*. Nineveh, having been *of old like a pool of water*, has gathered a vast deal of mud; and abundance of glory it has *out of all the pleasant furniture, all the vessels of desire*, which they have gloried in and which shall now be a prey and a pride to the conquerors. Note, Those who prepare raiment as the clay, and heap up silver as the dust, know not who may put on the raiment and divide the silver, ^{<3276>}Job 27:16, 17. Thus this rich city is empty, and void, and waste, v. 10. See the vanity of worldly wealth; instead of defending its owners, it does but expose them, and enable their enemies to do them so much the more mischief.

4. The soldiers and people shall have no heart to appear for the defence of the city. Their spirits shall *melt* away like wax before the fire; their *knees shall smite together* (as Belshazzar's did, in his agony, ^{<2866>}Daniel 5:6), so that they shall not be able to stand their ground, no, nor to make their escape; *much pain* shall be *in all loins*, as is the case in extreme frights, so that they shall not be able to hold up their backs. And the *faces of them all shall gather blackness*, like that of a pot that is every day over the fire; so the word signifies. Note, Guilt in the conscience will fill men with terror in an evil day, and those who place their happiness in the wealth of this world and set their hearts upon it think themselves undone when their silver, and their gold, and their pleasant furniture are taken from them.

<3121> NAHUM 2:11-13

THE JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH

Here we have Nineveh's ruin,

1. Triumphed in by its neighbours, who now remember against it all the oppressions and abuse of power it had been guilty of in its pomp and prosperity (v. 11, 12): *Where is the dwelling of the lions?* It is gone; there appear no remnants, no footsteps, of it. *Where is the feeding place of the young lions*, where they glutted themselves with prey? The princes of

Nineveh had been as lions, as beasts of prey; cruel tyrants are no better, nay, in this respect much worse — that, being men, humanity is expected from them; nay, if they were indeed lions, they would not prey upon those of their own kind. *Savis inter se convenit ursae* — *Fierce bears agree together*. But in the shape of men they had the cruelty of lions: they walked in Nineveh as a lion in the woods, and *none made them afraid*; every one stood in awe of them, and they were under no apprehensions of danger from any; though nobody loved them, every body feared them, and that was all they desired. *Oderint, dum metuant* — *Let them hate, so that they do but fear*. The king himself, as well as every prince, made it his business, by all the arts of violence and extortion, to enrich himself and raise his family; he did *tear in pieces enough for his whelps* (and no little would be enough for them) and he *strangled for his lioness*, killed all that came near him, and seized what they had for his children, for his wives and concubines, and *filled his holes with prey and his dens with ravin*, as lions are wont to do. Note, Many make it an excuse for their rapine and injustice that they have wives and children to provide for, whereas what is so got will never do them any good; those that *fear the Lord*, and get what they have honestly, shall not want a competency for themselves and theirs; *verily they shall be fed*, when *the young lions*, though dens and holes were *filled with prey and ravin* for them, *shall lack, and suffer hunger*, ¹⁸¹⁰Psalm 34:10.

2. It is avowed by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth; it is his doing, and let all the world take notice that it is so (v. 13): *Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts*. And what good can hosts do for her in her defence, when *the Lord of hosts* is against her for her destruction? The oppressors in Nineveh thought they only set their neighbours against them, who were not a match for them, and whom they could easily overpower; but it proved they set God against them, who is, and will be, the asserter of right and the avenger of wrong. God is against the princes of Nineveh, and then,

(1.) These military preparations will stand them in no stead: *I will burn their chariots in the smoke*; he does not say *in the fire*, but, in contempt of them, the very *smoke* of God's indignation shall serve to burn their chariots; they shall be consumed as soon as the fire of his indignation is kindled, while as yet it does but smoke, and not flame out. Or, The drivers of the chariots shall be smothered and stifled with the smoke; then the *chariots of their glory* shall be the shame of their families, ²²⁷⁸Isaiah 22:18.

(2.) Their children, the hopes of their families, shall be cut off: *The sword shall devour the young lions*, whom they were so solicitous to provide for by oppression and extortion. Note, It is just with God to deprive those of their children, or (which is all one) of comfort in them, that take sinful courses to enrich them, and (as has been said of some) damn their souls to make their sons gentlemen.

(3.) The wealth they have heaped up by fraud and violence shall neither be enjoyed by them nor employed for them: *I will cut off thy prey from the earth*; not only thou shalt not be the better for it, but no one else shall. Some understand it of the disabling of them for the future to prey upon their neighbours.

(4.) Their agents abroad shall not have that respect from their neighbours and that influence upon them which sometimes they had had: *The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard*, no more be heeded, which some think refers to Rabshakeh, one of Nineveh's messengers, that had blasphemed the living God, an iniquity which was remembered against Nineveh long after. Those are not worthy to be heard again that have once spoken reproachfully of God.