

# CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The inscription of the book, (v. 1).
- II.** A magnificent display of the glory of God, in a mixture of wrath and justice against the wicked, and mercy and grace towards his people, and the discovery of his majesty and power in both (v. 2-8).
- III.** A particular application of this (as most interpreters think) to the destruction of Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, when they besieged Jerusalem, which was a very memorable and illustrious instance of the power both of God's justice and of his mercy, and spoke abundance of terror to his enemies and encouragement to his faithful servants (v. 9-16).

## NAHUM 1:1

### THE JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH

This title directs us to consider,

- 1.** The great city against which the word of the Lord is here delivered; it is the *burden of Nineveh*, not only a prophecy, and a weighty one, but a burdensome prophecy, a dead weight to Nineveh, a mill-stone hanged about its neck. Nineveh was the place concerned, and the Assyrian monarchy, which that was the royal seat of. About 100 years before this Jonah had, in God's name, foretold the speedy overthrow of this great city; but then the Ninevites repented and were spared, and that decree did not *bring forth*. The Ninevites then saw clearly how much it was to their advantage to turn from their evil way; it was the saving of their city; and yet, soon after, they returned to it again; it became worse than ever, *a bloody city*, and *full of lies and robbery*. They repented of their repentance, returned with the dog to his vomit, and at length grew worse than ever they had been. Then God sent them not this prophet, as Jonah, but this prophecy, to read them their doom, which was now irreversible. Note, The reprieve will not be continued if the repentance be not continued in. If men

turn from the good they began to do, they can expect no other than that God should turn from the favour he began to show, ~~2480~~Jeremiah 18:10.

**2.** The poor prophet by whom the word of the Lord is here delivered: It is *the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite*. The burden of Nineveh was what the prophet plainly foresaw, for it was his vision, and what he left upon record (it is the *book of the vision*), that, when he was gone, the event might be compared with the prediction and might confirm it. All the account we have of the prophet himself is that he was an *Elkoshite*, of the town called *Elkes*, or *Elcos*, which, Jerome says, was in Galilee. Some observe that the scripture ordinarily says little of the prophets themselves, that our faith might not stand upon their authority, but upon that of the blessed Spirit by whom their prophecies were indited.

## ~~300~~ NAHUM 1:2-8

### THE AWFUL POWER OF GOD

Nineveh knows not God, that God that contends with her, and therefore is here told what a God he is; and it is good for us all to mix faith with that which is here said concerning him, which speaks a great deal of terror to the wicked and comfort to good people; for this glorious description of the Sovereign of the world, like the pillar of cloud and fire, has a bright side towards Israel and a dark side towards the Egyptians. Let each take his portion from it; let sinners read it and tremble; let saints read it and triumph. The wrath of God is here revealed from heaven against his enemies, his favour and mercy are here assured to his faithful loyal subjects, and his almighty power in both, making his wrath very terrible and his favour very desirable.

**I.** He is a God of inflexible justice, a jealous God, and will take vengeance on his enemies; let Nineveh know this, and tremble before him. Their idols are insignificant things; there is nothing formidable in them. But the God of Israel is greatly to be feared; for,

**1.** He resents the affronts and indignities done him by those that deny his being or any of his perfections, that set up other gods in competition with him, that destroy his laws, arraign his proceedings, ridicule his word, or are abusive to his people. Let such know that Jehovah, the one only living

and true God, is a *jealous God, and a revenger*; he is jealous for the comfort of his worshippers, *jealous for his land* (~~2918~~ Joel 2:18), and will not have that injured. He is a revenger, *and he is furious*; he *has fury* (so the word is), not as man has it, in whom it is an uncontrolled passion (so he has said, *Fury is not in me*, ~~2974~~ Isaiah 27:4), but he has it in such a way as becomes the righteous God, to put an edge upon his justice, and to make it appear more terrible to those who otherwise would stand in no awe of it. He is *Lord of anger* (so the Hebrew phrase is for that which we read, *he is furious*); he has anger, but he has it at command and under government. Our anger is often lord over us, as theirs that have *no rule over their own spirits*, but God is always *Lord of his anger and weighs a path to it*, ~~2985~~ Psalm 78:50.

**2.** He resolves to reckon with those that put those affronts upon him. We are told here, not only that he is a revenger, but that he *will take vengeance*; he has said he will, he has sworn it, ~~4520~~ Deuteronomy 32:40, 41. Whoever are his adversaries and enemies among men, he will make them feel his resentments; and, though the sentence against his enemies is not executed speedily, yet he reserves wrath for them and reserves them for it in the day of wrath. Against his own people, who repent and humble themselves before him, he keeps *not his anger for ever*, but against his enemies he will for ever let out his anger. *He will not at all acquit the wicked that sin, and stand to it, and do not repent*, v. 3. Those *wickedly depart from their God* that depart, and never return (~~4581~~ Psalm 18:21), and these he will not acquit. Humble supplicants will find him gracious, but scornful beggars will not find him easy, or that the door of mercy will be opened to a loud, but late, Lord, Lord. This revelation of the wrath of God against his enemies is applied to Nineveh (v. 8), and should be applied by all those to themselves who go on still in their trespasses: *With an over-running flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof*. The army of the Chaldeans shall overrun the country of the Assyrians, and lay it all waste. God's judgments, when they come with commission, are like a deluge to any people, which they cannot keep off nor make head against. *Darkness shall pursue his enemies*; terror and trouble shall follow them, whithersoever they go, shall pursue them to utter darkness; if they think to flee from the darkness which pursues them they will but fall into that which is before them.

**II.** He is a God of irresistible power, and is able to deal with his enemies, be they ever so many, ever so mighty, ever so hardy. He is *great in power*

(v. 3), and therefore it is good having him our friend and bad having him our enemy. Now here,

**1.** The power of God is asserted and proved by divers instances of it in the kingdom of nature, where we always find its visible effects in the ordinary course of nature, and sometimes in the surprising alterations of that course.

**(1.)** If we look up into the regions of the air, there we shall find proofs of his power, for *he has his ways in the whirlwind and the storm*. Which way soever God goes he carries a whirlwind and a storm along with him, for the terror of his enemies, ~~xxx~~ Psalm 18:9, etc. And, wherever there is a whirlwind and a storm, God has the command of it, the control of it, makes his way through it, goes on his way in it, and serves his own purposes by it. He spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and even *stormy winds fulfil his word*. He has *his way in the whirlwind*, that is, he goes on undiscerned, and the methods of his providence are to us unaccountable; as it is said, *His way is in the sea. The clouds are the dust of his feet*; he treads on them, walks on them, raises them when he pleases, as a man with his feet raises a cloud of dust. It is but by permission, or usurpation rather, that the devil is the prince of the power of the air, for that power is in God's hand.

**(2.)** If we cast our eye upon the great deeps, there we find that the sea is his, for he made it; for, when he pleases, *he rebukes the sea and makes it dry, by drying up all the rivers* with which it is continually supplied. He gave those proofs of his power when he divided the Red Sea and Jordan, and can do the same again whenever he pleases.

**(3.)** If we look round us on this earth, we find proofs of his power, when, either by the extreme heat and drought of summer or the cold and frost of winter, *Bashan languishes, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languishes*, the choicest and strongest flower languishes. His power is often seen in earthquakes, which shake the mountains (v. 5), melt the hills, and melt them down, and level them with the plains. When he pleases *the earth is burnt at his presence* by the scorching heat of the sun, and he could burn it with fire from heaven, as he did Sodom, and at the end of time he will burn the world *and all that dwell therein*. The earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Thus *great is the Lord and of great power*.

**2.** This is particularly applied to his anger. If God be an almighty God, we may thence infer (v. 6), *Who can stand before his indignation?* The Ninevites had once found God *slow to anger* (as he says v. 3), and perhaps presumed upon the mercy they had then had experience of, and thought they might make bold with him; but they will find he is just and jealous as well as merciful and gracious, and, having shown the justice of his wrath, in the next he shows the power of it, and the utter insufficiency of his enemies to contend with him. It is in vain for the stoutest and strongest of sinners to think to make their part good against the power of God's anger.

**(1.)** See God here as *a consuming fire*, terrible and mighty. Here is his indignation against sin, and the *fierceness of his anger*, his fury poured out, not like water, but *like fire*, like the fire and brimstone rained on Sodom, <sup>Ⓜ</sup>Psalm 11:6. Hell is the fierceness of God's anger, <sup>Ⓜ</sup>Revelation 16:19. God's anger is so fierce that it beats down all before it: *The rocks are thrown down by him*, which seemed immovable. Rocks have sometimes been rent by the eruption of subterraneous fires, which is a faint resemblance of the fierceness of God's anger against sinners whose hearts are rocky, for none ever hardened their hearts against him and prospered.

**(2.)** See sinners here are stubble before the fire, weak and impotent, and a very unequal match for the wrath of God.

**[1.]** They are utterly unable to bear up against it, so as to resist it, and put by the strokes of it: *Who can stand before his indignation?* Not the proudest and most daring sinner; not the world of the ungodly; no, not the angels that sinned.

**[2.]** They are utterly unable to bear up under it so as to keep up their spirits, and preserve any enjoyment of themselves: *Who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?* As it is irresistible, so it is intolerable. Some of the effects of God's displeasure in this world a man may bear up under, but the *fierceness of his anger*, when it fastens immediately upon the soul, who can bear? Let us therefore *fear before him*; let us *stand in awe, and not sin*.

**III.** He is a God of infinite mercy; and in the midst of all this wrath mercy is remembered. *Let the sinners in Zion be afraid*, that go on still in their transgressions, but let not those that trust in God tremble before him. For,

1. He *is slow to anger* (v. 3), not easily provoked, but ready to show mercy to those who have offended him and to receive them into favour upon their repentance.

2. When the tokens of his rage against the wicked are abroad he takes care for the safety and comfort of his own people (v. 7): *The Lord is good* to those that are *good*, and to them he will be *a stronghold in the day of trouble*. Note, The same almighty power that is exerted for the terror and destruction of the wicked is engaged, and shall be employed, for the protection and satisfaction of his own people; he is able both to save and to destroy. In the day of public trouble, when God's judgments are in the earth, laying all waste, he will be a place of defence to those that by faith put themselves under his protection, those that trust in him in the way of their duty, that live a life of dependence upon him, and devotedness to him; he knows them, he owns them for his, he takes cognizance of their case, knows what is best for them, and what course to take most effectually for their relief. They are perhaps obscure and little regarded in the world, but the Lord knows them, <sup><300></sup>Psalm 1:6.

## <sup><300></sup>NAHUM 1:9-15

### DESTRUCTION OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY

These verses seem to point at the destruction of the army of the Assyrians under Sennacherib, which may well be reckoned a part of the burden of Nineveh, the head city of the Assyrian empire, and a pledge of the destruction of Nineveh itself about 100 years after; and this was an event which Isaiah, with whom probably this prophet was contemporary, spoke much of. Now observe here,

**I.** The great provocation which the Assyrians gave to God, the just and jealous God, for which, though *slow to anger*, he would take vengeance (v. 11): *There is one come out of thee, that imagines evil against the Lord* — Sennacherib, and his spokesman Rabshakeh. They framed an evil letter and an evil speech, not only against Hezekiah and his people, but against God himself, reflecting upon him as level with the gods of the heathen, and unable to protect his worshippers, dissuading his people from putting confidence in him, and urging them rather to put themselves under the protection of the *great king, the king of Assyria*. They contrived to alter

the property of Jerusalem, that it should be no longer the city of the Lord, the holy city. This one, this mighty one, so he thinks himself, that comes out of Nineveh, *imagining evil against the Lord*, brings upon Nineveh this burden. Never was the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth more daringly, more blasphemously affronted than by Sennacherib at that time. He was *a wicked counsellor* who counselled them to despair of God's protection, and surrender themselves to the king of Assyria, and endeavour to put them out of conceit with Hezekiah's reformation (<sup>2307</sup>Isaiah 36:7); with this wicked counsellor he here expostulates (v. 9): "*What do you imagine against the Lord? What a foolish wicked thing it is for you to plot against God, as if you could outwit divine wisdom and overpower omnipotence itself!*" Note, There is a great deal imagined against the Lord by the gates of hell, and against the interests of his kingdom in the world; but it will prove a *vain thing*, <sup>2308</sup>Psalms 2:1, 2. *He that sits in heaven laughs* at the imaginations of the pretenders to politics against him, and will turn their counsels headlong.

**II.** The great destruction which God would bring upon them for it, not immediately upon the whole monarchy (the ruin of that was deferred till the measure of their iniquity was full), but,

**1.** Upon the army; God will *make an utter end* of that; it shall be totally cut off and ruined at one blow; one fatal stroke of the destroying angel shall lay them dead upon the spot; *affliction shall not rise up the second time*, for it shall not need. With some sinners God makes a quick despatch, does their business at once. Divine vengeance goes not by one certain rule, nor in one constant track, but one way or other, by acute diseases or chonical ones, by slow deaths or lingering ones, he will *make an utter end* of all his enemies, who persist in their imaginations against him. We have reason to think that the Assyrian army were mostly of the same spirit, and spoke the same language, with their general, and now God would take them to task, though they did but say as they were taught; and it shall appear that they have laid themselves open to divine wrath by their own act and deed, v. 10.

**(1.)** They are *as thorns* that entangle one another, and are *folded together*. They make one another worse, and more inveterate against God and his Israel, harden one another's hearts, and strengthen one another's hands, in their impiety; and therefore God will do with them as the husbandman

does with a bush of thorns when he cannot part them: he puts them all into the fire together.

(2.) They are *as drunken men*, intoxicated with pride and rage; and such as they shall be irrecoverably overthrown and destroyed. They shall be as drunkards, besotted to their own ruin, and shall stumble and fall, and make themselves a reproach, and be justly laughed at.

(3.) They shall be *devoured as stubble fully dry*, which is irresistibly and irrecoverably consumed by the flame. The judgments of God are as devouring fire to those that make themselves as stubble to them. It is again threatened concerning this great army (v. 12) that *though they be quiet and likewise many*, very secure, not fearing the sallies out of the besieged upon them, because *they are numerous*, yet *thus shall they be cut down*, or certainly shall they be cut down, as grass and corn are cut down, with as little ado, when *he shall pass through*, even the destroying angel that is commissioned to cut them down. Note, The security of sinners, and their confidence in their own strength, are often presages of ruin approaching.

2. Upon the king. He *imagined evil against the Lord*, and shall he escape? No (v. 14): “*The Lord has given a commandment concerning thee; the decree has gone forth, that thy name be no more sown, that thy memory perish, that thou be no more talked of as thou hast been, and that the report of thy mighty actions be dispersed upon the wings of fame and celebrated with her trumpet.*” Because Sennacherib's son reigned in his stead, some make this to point at the overthrow of the Assyrian empire not long after. Note, Those that *imagine evil against the Lord* hasten evil upon themselves and their own families and interests, and ruin their own names by dishonouring his name. It is further threatened,

(1.) That the images he worshipped should be cut off from their temple, the *graven image* and the *molten image out of the house of his gods*, which, some think, was fulfilled when Sennacherib was slain by his *two sons, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god*, by which barbarous parricide we may suppose the temple was looked upon as defiled, and was therefore disused, and the images were cut off from it, the worshippers of those images no longer attending there. Or it may be taken more generally to denote the utter ruin of Assyria; the army of the enemy shall lay all waste, and not spare even the images of their gods, by which God would intimate to them that one of the grounds of his controversy with them was their idolatry.

(2.) That Sennacherib's grave shall be made there, some think in the house of his god; there he is slain, and there he shall be buried, for *he is vile*; he lies under this perpetual mark of disgrace, that he had so far lost his interest in the natural affection of his own children that two of them murdered him. Or it may be meant of the ignominious fall of the Assyrian monarchy itself, upon the ruins of which that of Babylon was raised. What a noise was made about the grave of that once formidable state, but now despicable, is largely described, <sup>250B</sup>Ezekiel 31:3, 11, 15, 16. Note, Those that make themselves vile by scandalous sins God will make vile by shameful punishments.

**III.** The great deliverance which God would hereby work for his own people and the city that was called by his name. The ruin of the church's enemies is the salvation of the church, and a very great salvation it was that was wrought for Jerusalem by the overthrow of Sennacherib's army.

1. The siege shall hereby be raised: *“Now will I break his yoke from off thee, by which thou art kept in servitude, and will burst thy bonds asunder, by which thou seemest bound over to the Assyrian's wrath.”* That vast victorious army, when it forced free quarters for itself throughout all the land of Judah, and lived at discretion there, was as yokes and bonds upon them. Jerusalem, when it was besieged, was, as it were, bound and fettered by it; but, when the destroying angel had done his work, Jerusalem's bonds were burst asunder, and it was set at liberty again. This was a figure of the great salvation, by which the Jerusalem that is above is made free, is made free indeed.

2. The enemy shall be so weakened and dispirited that they shall never make any such attempt again, and the end of this trouble shall be so well gained by the grace of God that there shall be no more occasion for such a severe correction.

(1.) God will not again afflict Jerusalem; his anger is *turned away*, and he says, *It is enough*; for he has by this fright *accomplished his whole work upon Mount Zion* (<sup>250D</sup>Isaiah 10:12), and therefore *“though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more;”* the bitter portion shall not be repeated unless there be need and the patient's case call for it; for God *doth not afflict willingly*.

(2.) The enemy shall not dare again to attack Jerusalem (v. 15): *The wicked shall no more pass through thee* as they have done, to lay all

waste, *for he is utterly cut off* and disabled to do it. His army is cut off, his spirit cut off, and at length he himself is cut off.

**3.** The tidings of this great deliverance shall be published and welcomed with abundance of joy throughout the kingdom, v. 15. While Sennacherib prevailed, and carried all before him, every day brought bad news; but now, *behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, the feet of the evangelist*; he is seen coming at a distance upon the mountains, as fast as his feet will carry him; and how pleasant a sight is it once more to see a messenger of peace, after we have received so many of Job's messengers! We find these words made use of by another prophet to illustrate the mercy of the deliverance of the people of God out of Babylon (<sup><251P></sup>Isaiah 52:7), not that the prophets stole the word one from another (as those did, <sup><223P></sup>Jeremiah 23:30), but speaking by the same Spirit, they often used the same expressions; and it may be of good use for ministers to testify their consent to wholesome truths (<sup><548B></sup>1 Timothy 6:3) by concurring in the same forms of sound words, <sup><511B></sup>2 Timothy 1:13. These words are also quoted by the apostle, both from Isaiah and Nahum, and applied to the great redemption wrought out for us by our Lord Jesus, and the publishing of it to the world by the everlasting gospel, <sup><505></sup>Romans 10:15. Christ's ministers are those messengers of good tidings, that preach *peace by Jesus Christ. How beautiful are the feet of those messengers!* How welcome their message to those that see their misery and danger by reason of sin! And observe, He that brings these good tidings brings with them a call to Judah to *keep her solemn feasts and perform her vows*. During the trouble,

**(1.)** The ordinary feasts had been intermitted. *Inter arma silent leges* — *The voice of law cannot be heard amidst the shouts of battle*. While Jerusalem was *encompassed with armies* they could not go thither to worship; but now that the embargo is taken off they must return to the observance of their feasts; and the feasts of the Lord will be doubly sweet to the people of God when they have been for some time deprived of the benefit of them and God graciously restores them their opportunities again, for we are taught the worth of such mercies by the want of them.

**(2.)** They had made vows to God, that, if he would deliver them out of this distress, they would do something extraordinary in his service, to his honour; and now that the deliverance is wrought they are called upon to perform their vows; the promise they had then made must now be made good, for *better it is not to vow than to vow and not to pay*. And those

words, *The wicked shall no more pass through thee*, may be taken as a promise of the perfecting of the good work of reformation which Hezekiah had begun; the wicked shall not, as they have done, walk on every side, but they shall be cut off, and the baffling of the attempts from the wicked enemies abroad is a mercy indeed to a nation when it is accompanied with the restraint and reformation of the wicked at home, who are its more dangerous enemies.