

NAHUM: DOOM OF NINEVEH

THE GREAT FALL

Saturday, August 1

Reading: Nahum 3:8-19

Nahum 1:15 *Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!*

In 663 BC, the Assyrian army had sacked the city of Thebes, the magnificent capital of Upper Egypt. This was a startling development that no one anticipated. The Assyrians looted the city and took most of the population as captives. This ended the city's dominance as a political power. It occurred just a few years before Nahum wrote and was still fresh in people's minds. Thebes (or No-Amon after their chief god) had trusted in its defenses (3:8) and its allies (3:9) for salvation. But it all came to a miserable end. The prophet's point is: If Thebes could fall, so could Nineveh!

We can look at the image of a drunkard (3:11) in several ways. First, it could be a picture of the wrath of God. The prophet Isaiah spoke of "you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of His wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger" (Isaiah 51:17; see also Job 21:20; Jeremiah 25:15; Revelation 14:10). Second, it could be referring to their being drunk with power which led to their weakness and downfall that follows. Third, it could be a reference to the people's self-indulgence and lack of self-control that always brings disaster. Perhaps all these ideas are being alluded to by Nahum to show how easy it is for nations to fall!

Assyria thought they were strong. But God portrays their defenses as ripe figs easily shaken to the ground and their soldiers as weaklings (literally 'women') who cannot defend the gates of the city (3:12-13). No matter how diligently they prepare for attack or increase their financial power, they will be destroyed (3:14-16). The warriors are like locusts who are docile and lifeless when it is cold but fly away when the sun warms them. So, Nineveh's army would not stop God's judgment and they would flee as Nineveh fell (3:17).

Nahum closes with a taunt against the king of Nineveh (3:18-19). The shepherd was a common title for leaders in the ancient Near East. But Assyria's leaders are "asleep at the wheel." Meanwhile, without true leaders, the people are scattered.

As I read this passage, an old nursery rhyme comes to mind.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses and all the king's men / Could not put Humpty together again.

Nineveh had a great fall and soon the Assyrian Empire would follow. The funeral dirge for Nineveh is one of celebration! People and nations rejoice and clap their hands to see the cruel and wicked empire come to an end.

There are only two books in the Bible that end with a rhetorical question: Nahum and Jonah. God's question to Jonah focuses on His compassion – "Should I not have concern for Nineveh?" The closing question of Nahum points to God's justice – "Who has not felt your endless cruelty?" Nineveh is a warning to all of us. God is a God of love and justice. He longs for people to repent and He is ready to forgive. But time will run out and God will bring justice. The warning is: Don't presume on God's love! Repent now and be saved. "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).