

# Nahum

## 1

**Summary:** *Nahum 1 opens with a superscription identifying the book as an oracle against Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. What follows is a partial acrostic hymn celebrating the LORD as a God of vengeance who is slow to anger but overwhelming in power. The poem moves from cosmic theophany — mountains quaking, seas rebuked, the earth trembling — to a direct address distinguishing between those who take refuge in the LORD and those who plot against him. The chapter closes with an announcement of good news: Nineveh's yoke will be broken, and Judah can celebrate its festivals again.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The partial acrostic in verses 2-8 follows the Hebrew alphabet roughly from aleph through kaph, though the pattern breaks down after about eight letters — whether by design, textual corruption, or editorial revision remains debated. The theological tension is striking: the same God described as 'slow to anger' (v. 3, echoing Exodus 34:6) is here celebrated specifically for his fury against the wicked. This is not a contradiction but a completion — the God of chesed is also the God of justice, and patience exhausted becomes judgment unleashed. Nahum's name itself means 'comfort,' and the comfort he brings is the news that the oppressor will fall.*

**Translation Friction:** *The acrostic structure is fragmentary, and scholars disagree on its extent and original form. We rendered the text as it stands in the Masoretic tradition without attempting reconstruction. The shift between second-person addresses in verses 9-14 is ambiguous — sometimes addressing Nineveh, sometimes Judah — and we followed contextual clues to determine the referent, noting transitions. The word *beliyya'al* in verse 11 (rendered 'worthlessness') carries strong negative connotations and later became a proper name for evil personified.*

**Connections:** *The divine self-description in verse 3 echoes the foundational revelation of Exodus 34:6-7. The theophany language (Bashan withering, Carmel fading, Lebanon languishing) connects to similar cosmic-upheaval passages in Habakkuk 3, Psalm 18, and Judges 5. The 'good news on the mountains' of verse 15 is echoed in Isaiah 52:7. The entire oracle presupposes the historical memory of Assyria's destruction of the northern kingdom (722 BCE) and its siege of Jerusalem under Sennacherib (701 BCE).*

<sup>1</sup>An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. <sup>2</sup>The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is an avenger, full of wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and maintains his fury against his enemies. <sup>3</sup>The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, but he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. The LORD's

path is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. <sup>4</sup>He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades. <sup>5</sup>Mountains quake before him, and the hills dissolve. The earth heaves at his presence — the world and all who dwell in it. <sup>6</sup>Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure his burning anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are shattered before him. <sup>7</sup>The LORD is good, a refuge in the day of distress. He knows those who take shelter in him. <sup>8</sup>But with an overwhelming flood he will make a complete end of her place, and darkness will pursue his enemies. <sup>9</sup>What are you plotting against the LORD? He will bring total destruction. Distress will not rise a second time. <sup>10</sup>Though they are tangled like thorns and soaked with drink, they will be consumed like dry stubble. <sup>11</sup>From you has come one who plots evil against the LORD, a counselor of worthlessness. <sup>12</sup>This is what the LORD says: Though they are at full strength and many in number, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer. <sup>13</sup>Now I will break his yoke from upon you and snap your chains. <sup>14</sup>The LORD has decreed concerning you: No descendant will bear your name any longer. From the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the cast idol. I will prepare your grave, for you are contemptible. <sup>15</sup>Look! On the mountains — the feet of one who brings good news, who announces peace! Celebrate your festivals, Judah; fulfill your vows. For the worthless one will never again pass through you; he is completely cut off.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *massa* can mean 'burden' or 'oracle/pronouncement.' In prophetic literature it consistently introduces a weighty declaration of judgment, and we render it 'oracle' throughout the project. The location of Elkosh is unknown — proposals range from Galilee to Mesopotamia to southern Judah.
2. The threefold repetition of *noqem* ('avenger') is emphatic and deliberate — this is the keynote of the entire book. The word *qanno* ('jealous, zealous') is the same term used in Exodus 20:5 and 34:14 for God's exclusive covenantal claim on Israel. *Ba'al chemah* ('lord/master of wrath') is a striking construct — *chemah* is a burning, passionate rage. The verb *noter* ('maintains, keeps') means God stores up wrath against his enemies; their judgment is not forgotten but reserved.
3. This verse deliberately echoes Exodus 34:6-7, the most quoted divine self-description in the Hebrew Bible. Nahum's selection is theological: he takes the judgment clause and leaves the mercy clause, because his audience is the oppressor, not the covenant people. The imagery of storm-clouds as dust kicked up by God's feet portrays the LORD as a cosmic warrior whose mere walking generates tempests.
4. The verb *ga'ar* ('rebuke') recalls God's command over the waters at creation and the Red Sea. Bashan was known for its rich pastures, Carmel for its lush vegetation, and Lebanon for its cedars and flowers — the three most fertile regions of the Levant all wilt before God's approach. The acrostic pattern is visible here: this verse begins with gimel (ג).
5. The verb *hitmogagu* ('dissolve, melt') describes the hills losing their solidity, as if the landscape itself becomes liquid before the LORD. The verb *tissa* ('heaves, rises') has been variously read — some take it as 'is laid waste' (from *nasa* meaning 'to lift up in ruin'), others as 'rises up' in upheaval. The theophany intensifies from water (v. 4) to land (v. 5), encompassing all creation.
6. Two rhetorical questions with the implied answer: no one. The word *za'am* ('indignation') denotes explosive, righteous fury. *Chemah* ('wrath') is described as being 'poured out' (*nittekah*) like molten fire — the same verb used for casting molten metal. Even rocks, the most permanent features of the landscape, are *nittsetsu* ('shattered, broken apart') before him.
7. After six verses of terrifying divine power, this verse pivots abruptly to comfort. The word *ma'oz* ('refuge, stronghold') means a fortified place of safety — the same God whose power shatters rocks becomes a fortress for those who trust him. The verb *yode'a* ('knows') carries covenantal weight — God's 'knowing' is not mere awareness but intimate, relational recognition (cf. Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth').
8. The 'overwhelming flood' (*sheteph over*) likely alludes to the historical destruction of Nineveh in 612 BCE, when the Tigris River flooded and breached the city walls, enabling the Babylonian-Median coalition to enter. 'Her place' (*meqomah*) refers to Nineveh. Darkness as a pursuing agent inverts the normal imagery — usually people flee darkness, but here darkness hunts them down.
9. The address shifts to Nineveh's plotters. The verb *techashevun* ('plot, devise') suggests calculated scheming against God. The promise that distress 'will not rise a second time' means God's blow against Nineveh will be so complete that no second strike will be needed — one is enough.
10. The imagery piles up three metaphors of vulnerability: tangled thorns (easily kindled), drunken revelers (unable to defend themselves), and dry stubble (instantly combustible). The combination suggests Nineveh's forces will be caught unprepared, entangled in their own confusion, and burned up without resistance.
11. The address is to Nineveh. The 'counselor of worthlessness' (*yo'ets beliyya'al*) likely refers to the Assyrian king, perhaps Sennacherib specifically, whose campaign against Jerusalem in 701 BCE was an affront to the LORD. *Beliyya'al* literally means 'without profit/worthlessness' and later evolved into a proper name for the personification of wickedness (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:15, 'Belial').

12. The verse shifts address mid-sentence — the first half speaks about Assyria in the third person ('they'), while the second half addresses Judah in the second person ('you'). Shelemim ('at full strength, intact') emphasizes that Assyria's forces are not weakened — they will be destroyed at peak power. The promise to Judah reverses the affliction: God used Assyria as a rod of discipline (cf. Isaiah 10:5), but that chapter is closing.
13. God addresses Judah directly. The 'yoke' (motteh) and 'chains' (moserot) are metaphors for Assyrian domination — the imperial vassal system that extracted tribute and imposed foreign policy. 'Snap' (anatteq) is a violent verb, suggesting a sudden, forceful liberation.
14. The address shifts back to the Assyrian king or Nineveh personified. 'No descendant will bear your name' (lo yizzara' mishshimkha) means the dynasty ends — no seed will be sown from your name. The destruction of idols in the temple and the preparation of a grave are acts of total annihilation — both legacy and religion are obliterated. Qallota ('you are contemptible, light, worthless') is the opposite of kavod ('glory, weight').
15. This verse is nearly identical to Isaiah 52:7 and may share a common liturgical source. The 'feet of the herald' (raglei mevasser) is a vivid image of a runner cresting the mountain ridge, visible in silhouette, bringing the news of victory. The command to celebrate festivals and fulfill vows means the disruption of worship caused by Assyrian invasion is over — normal religious life can resume. Belyya'al here echoes verse 11, creating an inclusio around the chapter.

## 2

**Summary:** *Nahum 2 is a cinematic battle poem describing the siege and fall of Nineveh with extraordinary vividness. The chapter opens with the approach of the attacking army, then plunges into the chaos of battle — flashing chariots, scarlet-clad warriors, flooding gates, a fleeing queen, and panicked defenders. The middle section describes the looting of Nineveh's legendary wealth. The chapter climaxes with the lion's den taunt: Assyria, which once preyed on nations like a lion dragging prey to its den, now finds its den empty and its cubs destroyed.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The poetry here is among the most vivid war writing in ancient literature. Nahum uses rapid-fire imagery, staccato clauses, and sound effects embedded in the Hebrew to create an almost cinematic sequence of the city's fall. The lion metaphor (vv. 11-13) is devastating because Assyria itself used lion imagery extensively in its royal propaganda — colossal stone lions guarded palace gates, and kings were depicted hunting lions. Nahum turns Assyria's own self-image against it.*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse numbering differs between Hebrew (MT) and English traditions — the Hebrew counts 2:1 as what English Bibles number 1:15. We follow the English versification. The identity of the 'scatterer' (mephits) in verse 1 is debated — it could refer to the Babylonian-Median coalition or to God himself. The word Huzzab in verse 7 (KJV) is one of the most debated terms in the book — it could be a proper name, a verb form meaning 'it is decreed,' or a title. We follow the reading 'it is decreed' based on the verbal root y-ts-b.*

**Connections:** *The flooding of the river gates (v. 6) corresponds to ancient accounts of Nineveh's fall in 612 BCE. The lion imagery connects to Assyrian royal iconography and to Ezekiel 19's lion allegory for Judah's kings. The restoration promise for Jacob/Israel (v. 2) ties to the broader prophetic hope found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Twelve.*

<sup>1</sup>The one who shatters has advanced against you. Guard the rampart! Watch the road! Brace yourselves! Summon all your strength! <sup>2</sup>For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob, like the majesty of Israel, though plunderers have plundered them and ruined their vines. <sup>3</sup>The shields of his warriors are dyed red; the soldiers are clothed in scarlet. The chariots flash like fire on the day they are readied, and the cypress spears are brandished. <sup>4</sup>The chariots race madly through the streets; they rush back and forth through the squares. They look like torches; they dart like lightning. <sup>5</sup>He summons his officers — they stumble as they advance. They rush to the wall, but the siege shield is already set in place. <sup>6</sup>The river gates are thrown open, and the palace collapses. <sup>7</sup>It is decreed: she is stripped bare and carried away. Her maidservants moan like the sound of doves, beating on their breasts. <sup>8</sup>Nineveh has been like a pool of water from her earliest days, but now they are fleeing. 'Stop! Stop!' — but no one turns back. <sup>9</sup>Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! There is no end to the treasure — a wealth of every precious thing. <sup>10</sup>Emptied, drained, and devastated! Hearts melting, knees buckling, every body trembling, every face drained of color. <sup>11</sup>Where is the lions' den, the feeding ground of the young lions, where the lion and lioness prowled, where the cub roamed and no one disturbed them? <sup>12</sup>The lion tore enough prey for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses. He filled his lairs with kill and his dens with torn flesh. <sup>13</sup>I am against you, declares the LORD of Hosts. I will burn your chariots

in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers will be heard no more.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The 'scatterer' or 'shatterer' (mephits) is the invading force — likely the Babylonian-Median coalition that destroyed Nineveh in 612 BCE. The rapid imperatives ('guard, watch, brace, summon') are bitterly ironic — Nahum is taunting Nineveh, telling them to prepare for a defense that will fail. The staccato Hebrew rhythm mimics the urgency of battle preparation.
2. The verb shav can mean 'has turned away' or 'is restoring' (as in 'bringing back'). We follow the reading 'restoring' because the context is Nineveh's destruction as an act of deliverance for Israel. The mention of Jacob and Israel together may refer to both kingdoms or be synonymous parallelism for the covenant people. The vine image echoes Israel as God's vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7).
3. The red shields and scarlet uniforms likely describe the Babylonian-Median army, whose soldiers wore crimson. Peladot ('steel, fire-flashing metal') describes the metal fittings on chariots catching the light — a dazzling and terrifying sight. The beroshim ('cypress trees') most likely refers to cypress-wood spears or lances, not literal trees. Hor'alu ('brandished, made to quiver') captures the shaking of spears in readiness.
4. The Hebrew yitholelu ('race madly, act wildly') conveys chaos — the chariots are careening through the streets in violent, uncontrolled movement. Yishtaqshequn is an onomatopoeic verb mimicking the clattering and crashing of chariots colliding. The comparison to torches and lightning captures both the visual flash of metal and the terrifying speed of the assault.
5. The Assyrian commander calls up his elite troops (addirim, 'nobles, officers'), but they stumble — whether from haste, panic, or the chaos of battle. The sokek ('siege shield, protective covering') is a mobile battering shelter used by besiegers to approach walls under cover. By the time the defenders reach the wall, the attackers are already there.
6. Ancient sources confirm that the Tigris River flooded during the siege of Nineveh in 612 BCE, destroying a section of the walls and allowing the attackers to enter. The 'river gates' (sha'arei haneharot) are the sluice gates or water channels that pierced the walls where the Khosr River entered the city. Namog ('dissolves, collapses') echoes 1:5 where the hills dissolve before God — the palace melts just as the mountains did.
7. Hutsab is one of the most debated words in Nahum. The KJV took it as a proper name ('Huzzab'), but it is more likely a Hophal perfect of the root y-ts-b meaning 'it is established/decreed.' The 'she' who is stripped and carried away is Nineveh personified as a woman — or possibly the queen. The maidservants moaning like doves and beating their breasts is a mourning ritual. The dove sound (qol yonim) contrasts gentle innocence with the violence being enacted.
8. The pool metaphor may refer to Nineveh's elaborate canal and irrigation systems or to the gathered population now draining away like water from a breached pool. The desperate cry 'Stop! Stop!' (imdu, amodu) comes from the officers trying to rally the fleeing soldiers, but panic has taken hold — 'no one turns back' (ein mapneh).
9. The imperatives (bozzu, 'plunder!') address the conquering army. Nineveh was legendarily wealthy from centuries of imperial tribute, and its palace treasures were enormous — archaeological discoveries at Nineveh confirm vast royal storehouses. The word kavod ('glory, wealth') is used here in its material sense of abundance and weight of possessions.
10. The Hebrew buqah umevuqah umevullaqah is a brilliant triple wordplay — three words from the same root b-q-q ('to empty, devastate') building in intensity, each adding a syllable. The effect is onomatopoeic, mimicking the progressive stripping of the city. The physical symptoms — melting hearts, buckling knees, trembling loins, pale faces — describe soldiers paralyzed by terror. Pa'rur ('pallor, blackness') on the face indicates the draining of blood from terror.
11. The lion taunt begins. Assyrian kings proudly used lion imagery — palace walls at Nineveh were lined with reliefs of royal lion hunts, and colossal winged lions (lamassu) guarded the gates. Nahum uses four different Hebrew words for lion (aryeh, lavi, gur aryeh, kephirim) to paint the full pride — adult male, lioness, cubs, young lions — and then asks: where are they now? The rhetorical question is devastating.
12. The extended metaphor portrays Assyria's imperial economy as predation — the king (lion) tears apart nations (prey) to feed his court (lionesses) and enrich his cities (dens). The verbs taraph ('tear') and chanaq ('strangle') are specific hunting actions. The word terephah ('torn flesh, prey') appears twice, emphasizing the violence of Assyrian conquest.
13. The declaration hineni elayikh ('I am against you') is the most terrifying sentence a nation can hear from God. It is the covenant-threat formula applied to a foreign power. The 'messengers' (mal'akhekha) are the Assyrian envoys who delivered arrogant ultimatums to vassal states — like the Rabshakeh at Jerusalem's walls (2 Kings 18:17-37). Their voice being silenced means Assyria's diplomatic and military intimidation is permanently ended.

## 3

**Summary:** *Nahum 3 continues the oracle against Nineveh with unrelenting intensity. It opens with a woe cry against the 'city of blood,' then unleashes a barrage of battle imagery — the crack of whips, thundering hooves, heaps of corpses. The chapter then employs the prostitute metaphor: Nineveh has seduced nations through her sorceries and will be publicly shamed. Nahum taunts Nineveh by pointing to the fall of Thebes (No-Amon) in 663 BCE — if mighty Thebes could not stand, how will Nineveh? The book closes with a funeral dirge: Nineveh's wound is incurable, and all who hear the news will clap their hands in relief.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The prostitute metaphor (vv. 4-7) is one of the harshest uses of this imagery in the prophets, applied here to a foreign city rather than to Israel. The comparison with Thebes (No-Amon) is historically precise — Ashurbanipal destroyed Thebes in 663 BCE, barely fifty years before Nineveh's own destruction in 612 BCE. The irony is sharp: Assyria's greatest military triumph becomes the evidence that the same fate can befall Assyria itself. The final verse asks a rhetorical question that answers itself: everyone who hears of Nineveh's fall will celebrate, because everyone has suffered under Assyrian cruelty.*

**Translation Friction:** *The prostitute metaphor required faithful rendering without sanitizing — the Hebrew is deliberately explicit and shaming. No-Amon ('City of Amon') is the Egyptian city of Thebes; we retained the name 'Thebes' for clarity with a note on the Hebrew. The series of rhetorical questions in verses 8-19 required careful handling to maintain their taunting, sarcastic tone. The final question 'For upon whom has your unceasing cruelty not passed?' is one of the most powerful closing lines in prophetic literature.*

**Connections:** *The woe oracle (hoy) connects to the broader prophetic woe tradition (Isaiah 5:8-23, Habakkuk 2:6-20). The prostitute metaphor for a city parallels Isaiah 23:15-17 (Tyre) and Revelation 17-18 (Babylon). The fall of Thebes is documented in Assyrian annals and serves as a historical anchor for Nahum's dating. The clapping of hands at Nineveh's fall (v. 19) echoes the cosmic applause imagery found in Isaiah 55:12 and Psalm 98:8.*

<sup>1</sup>Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder — the prey never departs! <sup>2</sup>The crack of the whip! The rumble of wheels! Galloping horses! Bounding chariots! <sup>3</sup>Charging horsemen, flashing swords, gleaming spears! Masses of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end — they stumble over the dead! <sup>4</sup>Because of the countless harlotries of the prostitute, graceful and skilled in sorcery, who sells nations through her harlotries and peoples through her sorceries — <sup>5</sup>I am against you, declares the LORD of Hosts. I will lift your skirts over your face and show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame. <sup>6</sup>I will hurl filth at you and treat you with contempt, and I will make you a spectacle. <sup>7</sup>Then all who see you will recoil from you and say, 'Nineveh is devastated — who will grieve for her?' Where will I find anyone to comfort you? <sup>8</sup>Are you better than Thebes, who sat by the Nile channels, with water surrounding her — whose rampart was the sea, whose wall was water? <sup>9</sup>Cush was her strength, and Egypt — boundless! Put and Libya were her allies. <sup>10</sup>Yet even she went into exile; she was carried into captivity. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were bound in chains. <sup>11</sup>You too will drink until you stagger. You too will go into hiding. You too will seek refuge from the enemy. <sup>12</sup>All your fortresses are fig trees with early figs — when shaken, they fall right into the mouth of the eater. <sup>13</sup>Look — your troops have become like women among you. The gates of your land stand wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed your gate bars. <sup>14</sup>Draw water for the siege! Strengthen your fortresses! Go into the clay, tread the mortar, take hold of the brick mold! <sup>15</sup>There fire will consume you; the sword will cut you down. It will devour you like the locust. Multiply yourselves like locusts! Multiply like the swarming locust! <sup>16</sup>You multiplied your merchants more than the stars of the sky — but the locust strips the land and flies away. <sup>17</sup>Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of grasshoppers that settle on the walls on a cold day — but when the sun rises, they fly away, and no one knows where they have gone. <sup>18</sup>Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles lie still. Your people are scattered across the mountains, and there is no one to gather them. <sup>19</sup>There is no relief for your wound; your injury is fatal. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you — for upon whom has your unceasing cruelty not passed?

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The woe cry (hoy) opens a prophetic judgment oracle. 'City of blood' (ir haddamim) is Nineveh's epithet — a city built on bloodshed. The three charges — damim ('blood'), kachash ('lies, deception'), and pereq ('plunder, tearing') — summarize Assyria's imperial character: violence, treachery, and rapacious conquest. The final clause 'the prey never departs' means Nineveh never stops consuming other nations.
2. These are sound effects rendered as exclamatory fragments — Nahum creates an audio landscape of battle. The Hebrew is staccato, each phrase a burst of noise: qol shot ('crack of whip'), qol ra'ash ophan ('rumble of wheel'), sus doher ('horse galloping'), merkavah meraqedah ('chariot leaping'). The technique is cinematic, placing the reader in the middle of the attack.
3. The battle imagery accelerates: from sound (v. 2) to sight (v. 3). The Hebrew piles up nouns without finite verbs, creating a breathless, staccato effect. Rov chalal ('multitude of slain') and koved peger ('heaviness of corpses') — note that koved shares the root of kavod ('glory, weight'); the weight here is of dead bodies. The final image of soldiers tripping over corpses conveys battlefield horror with devastating economy.
4. Nineveh is personified as a seductive prostitute who enslaves nations through her allure. The word zenunim ('harlotries') refers metaphorically to Assyria's seductive diplomacy and trade alliances that ultimately enslaved its partners. Keshaphim ('sorceries') suggests the supernatural dimension of Assyrian power — their extensive practice of divination and magic was well documented. The combination of beauty (tovat chen, 'graceful, charming') and deadly power makes the metaphor pointed.
5. The punishment mirrors the metaphor — the prostitute's clothing is thrown over her head in public humiliation. This was an actual ancient Near Eastern punishment for sexual offenses. The verb gilleti ('I will uncover, expose') strips away the seductive disguise. God personally executes the shaming — 'I am against you' (hineni elayikh) repeats the formula from 2:13. Ma'rekh ('your nakedness') and qelonekh ('your shame') are the reality behind the 'grace' of verse 4.
6. The verbs intensify: hashlikhti ('hurl'), nibbalti ('treat with contempt, disgrace'), and samti kero'i ('make into a spectacle, something gazed at'). Shiqquttsim ('abominations, filth') is a word elsewhere used for idols — the irony is that Nineveh, who dealt in spiritual filth, will be covered in it. The progression from private shame (v. 5) to public degradation (v. 6) is deliberate.
7. The rhetorical question 'who will grieve for her?' expects the answer: no one. The verb yiddod ('recoil, flee') indicates not just departure but physical revulsion. Nineveh, who seduced nations, now repels everyone. The search for comforters (menachamim) ironically echoes Nahum's own name (nachum, 'comfort') — the prophet of comfort declares that there is no comfort for Nineveh.
8. No-Amon (literally 'City of Amon') is the Egyptian city of Thebes (modern Luxor), capital of Upper Egypt and home to the great temples of Karnak and Luxor. Ashurbanipal's Assyrian army sacked Thebes in 663 BCE — an event so shocking it echoed across the ancient world. Nahum's taunt is devastatingly ironic: Assyria's greatest victory is now the precedent for Assyria's own destruction. The 'sea' and 'water' refer to the Nile and its canals, which formed Thebes' natural defenses.
9. Thebes' alliance network was vast: Cush (Nubia/Ethiopia), Egypt itself, Put (possibly Punt or Libya), and the Lubim (Libyans). Despite this formidable coalition, Thebes still fell. The implied argument: if Thebes with four allies could not survive, what chance does Nineveh have? 'Boundless' (ein qetseh) echoes 2:9 where Nineveh's treasure was also 'without end' — both abundance and allies prove insufficient.
10. The atrocities described — dashing infants, casting lots for enslaved nobles, chaining leaders — were standard Assyrian military practices, well documented in their own royal inscriptions. The bitter irony is that Nahum describes what Assyria did to Thebes, and now the same will happen to Assyria. Yerutteshu ('dashed to pieces') is an unflinching verb; we do not soften it because the Hebrew does not.
11. The triple gam-att ('you too') hammers the comparison: what happened to Thebes will happen to you. The 'drinking' (tishkeri) refers to drinking the cup of God's wrath — a common prophetic image (Jeremiah 25:15-28, Isaiah 51:17). Na'alamah ('hidden, concealed') suggests a once-proud city reduced to hiding.
12. The simile is vivid and humiliating: Nineveh's supposedly impregnable fortresses will fall as easily as ripe figs shaken from a tree. Bikkurim ('early figs, first-ripe figs') are the most easily dislodged because they are heavy with ripeness. The image of figs falling directly into an open mouth emphasizes effortlessness — the conqueror barely has to try.
13. The comparison of warriors to women reflects the ancient patriarchal assumption that women are non-combatants and therefore vulnerable — the point is that Nineveh's soldiers will be helpless, not a statement about women's inherent nature. The gates 'standing wide open' (patoach niptachu, emphatic infinitive absolute) means the defenses have completely collapsed. Fire consuming the gate bars means the wooden crossbeams that secured the city gates have been burned away.
14. More bitter irony — Nahum taunts Nineveh to prepare for siege by making bricks to repair walls. The three-step process (mixing clay, treading mortar, molding bricks) is detailed and sarcastic: go ahead, prepare all you want. The imperatives are feminine singular, addressing Nineveh as a woman. The futility of the preparation is the point — all this effort will accomplish nothing.
15. The locust imagery shifts meaning mid-verse: first, destruction will consume Nineveh like locusts devour crops; then, Nahum taunts them to multiply their forces like locusts — it will not help. The words yeleq ('young locust') and arbeh ('swarming locust') are two of the Hebrew Bible's multiple terms for different locust species or stages. The irony deepens in the following verses.

- 16.** Nineveh was a center of international commerce, and its merchant class was vast. The comparison to the 'stars of the sky' echoes the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 15:5) but applied sarcastically to Nineveh's commercial expansion. The locust that 'strips and flies away' (pashat vayyaof) suggests that Nineveh's wealth, like a locust swarm, will strip everything bare and then vanish — leaving nothing behind.
- 17.** The metaphor is precise: grasshoppers cluster on stone walls for warmth in cold weather, but the moment the sun heats the air, they scatter and vanish. Nineveh's officials and military leaders will similarly disappear when the heat of battle arrives. Minnazarayikh ('your guards/crowned ones') may refer to officials who wear some kind of crown or insignia. Taphserayikh ('your scribes/officials') is likely an Akkadian loanword (tupšarru), reflecting Assyrian administrative vocabulary.
- 18.** The 'shepherds' (ro'ekha) are military commanders and governors — the metaphor of ruler-as-shepherd is standard ancient Near Eastern political language. 'Slumber' (namu) is a euphemism for death — they sleep the sleep from which there is no waking. 'Lie still' (yishkenu) reinforces the death imagery. The people scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them is the portrait of a permanently dissolved empire.
- 19.** The book closes with a devastating rhetorical question. Kehah ('relief, healing, dimming of pain') is denied — the wound is terminal. Nachlah makkah ('a grievous blow, a fatal wound') is medical language for an incurable condition. The clapping of hands (taqe'u kaph) is a gesture of joyful relief, not applause for a performance — the entire known world celebrates Nineveh's fall. The final question is unanswerable: there is no nation that has not suffered under Assyrian cruelty (ra'ah, 'evil, cruelty'). Tamid ('continually, unceasingly') emphasizes that Assyria's violence was not episodic but perpetual.