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## Preface

The name of this prophet signifies a *comforter*; for it was a charge given to all the prophets, *Comfort you, comfort you, my people*: and even this prophet, though wholly taken up in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh, which speaks terror to the Assyrians, is, even in that, comforter to the ten tribes of Israel, who, it is probable, were now lately carried captives into Assyria. It is very uncertain at what time he lived and prophesied, but it is most probable that he lived in the time of Hezekiah, and prophesied against Nineveh, after the captivity of Israel by the king of Assyria, which was in the ninth year of Hezekiah, and before Sennacherib's invading Judah, which was in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, for to that attempt, and the defeat of it, it is supposed, the first chapter has reference; and it is probable that it was delivered a little before it, for the encouragement of God's people in that day of treading down and perplexity. It is the conjecture of the learned Huetius that the two other chapters of this book were delivered by Nahum some years after, perhaps in the reign of Manasseh, and in that reign the Jewish chronologies generally place him, somewhat nearer to the time when Nineveh was conquered, and the Assyrian monarchy reduced, by Cyaxares and Nebuchadnezzar, some time before the first captivity of Judah. It is probable that Nahum did by word of mouth prophesy many things concerning Israel and Judah, as it is certain that Jonah did (2 Ki. 14:25), though we have nothing of either of them in writing, but what related to Nineveh, of which though a great and ancient city, yet probably we should never have heard in sacred writ if the Israel of God had not had some concern in it.

## 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).

### Verse 1

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, Jer. 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.

### Verses 2-8

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* (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 ungoverned passion (so he has said, *Fury is not in me*, Isa. 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*, Ps. 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, Deu. 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 (Ps. 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, Ps. 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, Ps. 11:6. Hell is the fierceness of God's anger, Rev. 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, Ps. 1:6.

### Verses 9-15

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 (Isa. 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*, Ps. 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 chronical 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, Eze. 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* (Isa. 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 (Isa. 52:7), not that the prophets stole the word one from another (as those did, Jer. 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 (1 Tim. 6:3) by concurring in the same forms of sound words, 2 Tim. 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, Rom. 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.

## 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.

### Verses 1-10

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*, Jer. 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* (Eze. 7:16), noted for their *mourning*, Isa. 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*, Rev. 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 (Jonah 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, 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, Dan. 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.

### **Verses 11-13**

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*, Ps. 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, Isa. 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.

### Chapter 3

This chapter goes on with the burden of Nineveh, and concludes it. I. The sins of that great city are charged upon it, murder (v. 1), whoredom and witchcraft (v. 4), and a general extent of wickedness (v. 19). II. Judgments are here threatened against it, blood for blood (v. 2, 3), and shame for shameful sins (v. 5-7). III. Instances are given of the like desolations brought upon other places for the like sins (v. 8-11). IV. The overthrow of all those things which they depended upon, and put confidence in, is foretold (v. 12-19).

#### Verses 1-7

Here is, I. Nineveh arraigned and indicted. It is a high charge that is here drawn up against that great city, and neither her numbers nor her grandeur shall secure her from prosecution. 1. It is a *city of blood*, in which a great deal of innocent blood is shed by unrighteous war, or under colour and pretence of public justice, or by suffering barbarous murders to go unpunished; for this the righteous God will make inquisition. 2. *It is all full of lies*; truth is banished from among them; there is no such thing as honesty; one knows not whom to believe nor whom to trust. 3. It is all full of *robbery* and rapine; no man cares what mischief he does, nor to whom he does it: *The prey departs not*, that is, they never know when they have got enough by spoil and oppression. They shed blood, and told lies, in pursuit of the prey, that they might enrich themselves. 4. There is a *multitude of whoredoms* in it, that is, idolatries, spiritual whoredoms, by which she defiled herself, and to which she seduced the neighbouring nations, as a well-favoured harlot, and sold and ruined *nations through her whoredoms*. 5. She is a *mistress of witchcrafts*, and by them she *sells families*, v. 4. That which Nineveh aimed at was a universal monarchy, to be the metropolis of the world, and to have all her neighbours under her feet; to compass this, she used not only arms, but arts, compelling some, deluding others, into subjection to her, and wheedling them as a harlot by her charms to lay their necks under her yoke, suggesting to them that it would be for their advantage. She courted them to join with her in her idolatrous rites, to tie them the faster to her interests, and made use of her wealth, power, and greatness, to draw people into alliances with her, by which she gained advantages over them, and made a hand of them. These were her whoredoms, like those of Tyre, Isa. 23:15, 17. These were her witchcrafts, with which she unaccountably gained dominion. And for this that God has a quarrel with her who, having *made of one blood all nations of men*, never designed one to be a nation of tyrants and another of slaves, and who claims it as his own prerogative to be universal Monarch.

II. Nineveh condemned to ruin upon this indictment. Woe to this bloody city! v. 1. See what this woe is.

1. Nineveh had with her cruelties been a terror and destruction to others, and therefore destruction and terror shall be brought upon her. Those that are for overthrowing all that come in their way will, sooner or later, meet with their match. (1.) Hear the alarm with which Nineveh shall be terrified, v. 2. It is a formidable army that advances against it; you may hear them at a distance, the *noise of the whip*, driving the chariot-horses with fury; you may hear the noise of the *rattling of the wheels, the prancing horses, and the jumping chariots*; the very noise is frightful, but much more so when they know that all this force is coming with all this speed against them, and they are not able to make head against it. (2.) See the slaughter with which

Nineveh shall be laid waste (v. 3), the sword drawn with which execution shall be done, *the bright sword lifted up and the glittering spear*, the dazzling brightness of which is very terrible to those whom they are lifted up against. See what havoc these make when they are commissioned to slay: *There is a great number of carcasses*, for the slain of the land shall be many; *there is no end of their corpses*; there is such a *multitude of slain* that it is in vain to go about to take the number of them; they lie so thick that passers are ready to stumble *upon their corpses* at every step. The destruction of Sennacherib's army, which, in the morning, were *all dead corpses*, is perhaps looked upon here as a figure of the like destruction that should afterwards be in Nineveh; for those that will not take warning by judgments at a distance shall have them come nearer.

2. Nineveh had with her whoredoms and witchcrafts drawn others to shameful wickedness, and therefore God will load her with shame and contempt (v. 5-7): *The Lord of hosts is against her*, and then she shall be exposed to the highest degree of disgrace and ignominy, shall not only lose all her charms, but shall be made to appear very odious. When it shall be seen that while she courted her neighbours it was with design to ruin their liberty and property, when all her wicked artifices shall be brought to light, then her *shame is discovered to the nations*. When her proud pretensions are baffled, and her vain towering hopes of an absolute and universal dominion brought to nought, and she appears not to have been so strong and considerable as she would have been thought to be, then *to see the nakedness of the land do they come*, and it appears ridiculous. Then do they *cast abominable filth upon her*, as upon a carted strumpet, and *make her vile* as the offscouring of all things; that great city, which all nations had made court to and coveted an alliance with, has become a gazing-stock, a laughing stock. Those that formerly looked upon her, and fled to her, in hopes of protection from her, now *look upon her and flee from her*, for fear of being ruined with her. Note, Those that abuse their honour and interest will justly be disgraced and abandoned, and, because miserable, will be made contemptible, and thereby be made more miserable. When Nineveh is laid waste *who will bemoan her?* Her trouble will be so great, and her sense of it so deep, as not to admit relief from sympathy, or any comforting considerations; or, if it would, none shall do any such good office: *When shall I seek comforters for thee?* Note, Those that showed no pity in the day of their power can expect to find no pity in the day of their fall. When those about Nineveh, that had been deceived by her wiles, come to be undeceived in her ruin, every one shall insult over her, and none bemoan her. This was Nineveh's fate, when she was made a spectacle, or gazing-stock. Note, The greater men's show was in the day of their abused prosperity the greater will their shame be in the day of their deserved destruction. *I will make thee an example*; so Drusus reads it. Note, When proud sinners are humbled and brought down it is designed that others should take example by them not to lift up themselves in security and insolence when they prosper in the world.

### **Verses 8-19**

Nineveh has been told that God is against her, and then none can be for her, to stand her in any stead; yet she sets God himself at defiance, and his power and justice, and says, *I shall have peace*. Threatened folks live long; therefore here the prophet largely shows how vain her confidences would prove and insufficient to ward off the judgment of God. To convince them of this,

I. He shows them that other places, which had been as strong and as secure as they, could not keep their ground against the

judgments of God. Nineveh shall fall unpitied and uncomforted (for miserable comforters will those prove who speak peace to those on whom God will fasten trouble), and she shall not be able to help herself: *Art thou better than populous No?* v. 8. He takes them off from their vain confidences by quoting precedents. The city mentioned is *No*, a great city in the land of Egypt (Jer. 46:25), *No-Ammon*, so some read it both there and here. We read of it, Eze. 30:14–16. Some think it was *Diospolis*, others *Alexandria*. As God said to Jerusalem, *Go, see what I did to Shiloh* (Jer. 7:12), so to Nineveh that great city, *Go, see what I did to populous No*. Note, It will help to keep us in a holy fear of the judgments of God to consider that we are not better than those that have fallen under those judgments before us. We deserve them as much, and are as little able to grapple with them. This also should help to reconcile us to afflictions. Are we better than such and such, who were in like manner exercised? Nay, were not they better than we, and less likely to be afflicted? Now, concerning *No*, observe, 1. How firm her standing seemed to be, v. 8. She was fortified both by nature and art, was *situate among the rivers*. Nile, in several branches, not only watered her fields, but guarded her wall. *Her rampart was the sea, the lake of Mareotis*, an Egyptian sea, like the sea of Tiberias. *Her wall was from the sea*; it was fenced with a wall which was thought to make the place impregnable. It was also supported by its interests and alliances abroad, v. 9. *Ethiopia*, or Arabia, *was her strength*, either by the wealth brought to her in a way of trade or by the auxiliary forces furnished for military service. The whole country of Egypt also contributed to the strength of this populous city; so that it was *infinite, and there was no end of it* (so it might be rendered); She set no bounds to her ambition and knew no end of her wealth and strength; people flocked to her endlessly, and she thought there never would be any end of it; but it is God's prerogative to be infinite. *Put and Lubim were thy helpers*, two neighbouring countries of Africa, Mauritania and Libya, that is, Libya Cyrenica, a country that Egypt had much dependence upon. *No*, thus helped, seemed to sit as a queen, and was not likely to see any sorrow. But, 2. See how fatal her fall proved to be (v. 10): *Yet was she carried away*, and her strength failed her; even she that was so strong, so secure, yet *went into captivity*. This refers to some destruction of that city which was then well-known, and probably fresh in memory, though not recorded in history; for the destruction of it by Nebuchadnezzar (if we should understand this prophetically) could not be made an example to Nineveh; for the reducing of Nineveh was one of the first of his victories and that of Egypt one of the last. The strength and grandeur of that great city could not be its protection from military execution. (1.) Not from that which was most barbarous; for *her young children* had no compassion shown them, but were *dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets* by the merciless conquerors. (2.) Not from that which was most inglorious and disgraceful: *They cast lots for her honourable men* that were made prisoners of war, who should have them for their slaves. So many had they of them that they knew not what to do with them, but they made sport with throwing dice for them; *all her great men*, that used to be adorned on state-days with chains of gold, *were now bound in chains of iron*; they were *pinioned or handcuffed* (so the word properly signifies), not only as slaves, but as condemned malefactors. What a mortification was this to *populous No*, to have her honourable men and great men, that were her pride and confidence, thus abused! Now hence he infers against Nineveh (v. 11), "Thou also shalt be intoxicated, infatuated; thou also shalt reel and stagger, as drunk with the cup of the Lord's fury, that shall be put into thy hand" (see Jer. 25:17, 27); "*Thou shalt fall and rise no more*. The cup shall go round, and come to thy turn, O Nineveh! to drink off at last, and shall be to thee as the

waters of jealousy."

II. He shows them that all those things which they reposed a confidence in should fail them. 1. Did the men of Nineveh trust to their own magnanimity and bravery? Their hearts should sink and fail them. *They shall be hid*, shall abscond for shame, being in disgrace, abscond for fear, being in distress and danger, and not able to face the enemies, because of whose strength and terror, having no strength of their own, they shall *seek strength*, shall come sneaking to their neighbours to beg their assistance in a time of need. Thus God can *cut off the spirit* of princes, and *take away their heart*. 2. Did they depend upon their barrier, the garrisons and strongholds they had, which were regularly fortified and bravely manned? Those shall prove but paper-walls, and *like the first-ripe figs*, which, if you give the tree but a little shake, will *fall into the mouth of the eater* that gapes for them; so easily will all their strongholds be made to surrender to the advancing enemy, upon the first summons, v. 12. Note, Strongholds, even the strongest, are no fence against the judgments of God, when they come with commission. *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and a high wall*, but only *in his own conceit*, Prov. 18:10. They are supposed to make their strongholds as strong as possible, and are challenged to do their utmost to make them tenable, and serviceable to them against the invader (v. 14): *Draw thee water for the siege*; lay in great quantities of water, that that which is so necessary to the support of human life may not be wanting; it is put here for all manner of provision, with which Nineveh is ironically told to furnish herself, in expectation of a siege. "Take ever so much care that thou mayest not be starved out, and forced by famine to surrender, yet that shall not avail. *Fortify the strongholds*, by adding out-works to them, or putting men and arms into them," as with us by planting cannon upon them. *Go into clay, and tread the mortar, and make strong the brick-kiln*; take all the pains thou canst in erecting new fortifications; but it shall be all in vain, for (v. 15) there shall even *the fire devour thee* if it be taken by storm." It is by fire and sword that in time of war the great devastations are made. 3. Did they put confidence in the multitude of their inhabitants? Were they, from their number and valour, reckoned their strongest walls and fortifications? Alas! these shall stand them in no stead; they shall but sink the sooner under the weight of their own numbers (v. 13): *Thy people in the midst of thee are women*; they have no wisdom, no courage; they shall be fickle, feeble, and faint-hearted, as women commonly are in such times of danger and distress; they shall be at their wits' end, adding to their griefs and fears by the power of their own imagination, and utterly unable to do any thing for themselves; the valiant men shall become cowards. *O verè Phrygiae, neque enim Phryges—Phrygian dames, not Phrygian men*. Though they *make themselves many* (v. 15), as the *canker-worm* and *as the locust*, that come in vast swarms, *though thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven*, though thy exchange be thronged with wealthy traders, who, having so much money to stand up in defence of and so much to lay out in the means of their defence, should, one would think, give the enemy a warm reception, yet their hearts shall fail them too; though they be numerous as caterpillars, yet the fire and sword shall eat them up easily and irresistibly as the canker-worm, v. 15. They are as numerous as those wasting insects, but their enemies shall be mischievous like them. He adds (v. 16), *The canker-worm spoils, or spreads herself, and flies away*. Both the merchants and the enemies were compared to canker-worms. The enemies shall spoil Nineveh, and carry away the spoil, without opposition, or any hope of recovering it. Or the rich merchants, who have come from abroad to settle in Nineveh, and have raised vast estates there, out of which it was

hoped they would contribute largely for the defence of the city, when they see the country invaded and the city likely to be besieged, will send away their effects, and remove to some other place, will *spread their wings* and *fly away* where they may be safe, and Nineveh shall be never the better for them. Note, It is rare to find even those that have shared with us in our joys willing to share with us in our griefs too. The canker-worms will continue upon the field while there is any thing to be had, but they are gone when all is gone. Those that men have got by they do not care to lose by. Nineveh's merchants bid her farewell in her distress. Riches themselves are as the canker-worms, which on a sudden *fly away as the eagle towards heaven*, Prov. 23:5.

4. Did they put a confidence in the strength of their gates and bars? What fence will those be against the force of the judgments of God? v. 13. *The gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thy enemies*, the gates of thy rivers (ch. 2:6), the flood-gates, or the passes and avenues, by which the enemy would make his entrance into the country, or the gates of the cities; these, though ever so strong and well-guarded, shall not answer their end: *The fire shall devour thy bars*, the bars of thy gates, and then they shall fly open. 5. Did they put a confidence in their king and princes? They should do them no service (v. 17): *Thy crowned heads are as the locusts*; those that had pomp and power, as crowned heads, were enfeebled, and had no power to make resistance, when the enemy came in like a flood. *"Thy captains*, that should lead thy forces into the field, are great indeed, and look great, but they are as the great *grasshoppers*, the *maximum quod sic—the largest specimens* of that *species*; still they are but grasshoppers, worthless things, that can do no service. *They encamp in the hedges, in the cold day*, the cold weather, *but, when the sun arises, they flee away*, and are gone, nobody knows whither. So these mercenary soldiers that lay slumbering about Nineveh, when any trouble arises, flee away, and shift for their own safety. *The hireling flees, because he is a hireling.*" The *king of Assyria* is told, and it is a shame he needs to be told it (who might observe it himself), that *his shepherds slumber*; they have no life or spirit to appear for the flock, and are very remiss in the discharge of the duty of their place and the trust reposed in them: *Thy nobles shall dwell in the dust*, and be buried in silence. 6. Did they hope that they should yet recover themselves and rally again? In this also they should be disappointed; for, when the shepherds are smitten, *the sheep are scattered*; the people are dispersed *upon the mountains* and *no man gathers them*, nor will they ever come together of themselves, but will wander endlessly, as scattered sheep do. The judgment they are under is as a wound, and it is incurable; there is no relief for it, *"no healing of thy bruise*, no possibility that the wound, which is so grievous and painful to thee, should be so much as skinned over; thy case is desperate (v. 19) and thy neighbours, instead of lending a hand to help thee, shall *clap their hands over thee*, and triumph in thy fall; and the reason is, because thou hast been one way or other injurious to them all: *Upon whom has not thy wickedness passed continually?* Thou hast been always doing mischief to those about thee; there is none of them but what thou hast abused and insulted; and therefore they shall be so far from pitying thee that they shall be glad to see thee reckoned with." Note, Those that have been abusive to their neighbours will, one time or another, find it come home to them; they are but preparing enemies to themselves against their day comes to fall: and those that dare not lay hands on them themselves will *clap their hands over them*, and upbraid them with their former wickedness, for which they are now well enough served and paid in their own coin. *The troublers shall be troubled* will be the burden of many, as it is here *the burden of Nineveh*.