

# Nahum

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

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Singular was the reproach of the Jews in the time of our Lord (John 7: 52); for there were prophets who had arisen out of Galilee. Jonah and Nahum were both Galileans. There is nothing in which men are apt to be so blind as in reading the Bible; and even the facts of scripture are too commonly passed over with greater carelessness than those of any other book. People readily forget what it does not suit them to remember.

"Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,  
Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quae  
Ipsae sibi tradit spectator."

Affections too govern the judgment. Hence the tendency to forget the plainest facts, and to find some artificial means of exalting whatever to our minds takes the highest place in religious matters. As once by God's appointment Jerusalem had such a place, the Jews spite of their reversed sentence were striving hard to exaggerate whatever invested it with halo, and to deny what God had wrought elsewhere. But God loves to work in unexpected grace; and hence I do not doubt that there was a fitness in the call of these two prophets both of them having to do with Nineveh. Galilee was a district which both bordered on the Gentiles, and had not a few dwelling in its midst. Hence people there, though prejudiced as everywhere, could not but be open to thoughts and exercises of heart about the Gentiles. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Jonah, there might be a feeling as decidedly Jewish as in any prophet that God ever raised up even in Jerusalem itself.

First of all Nahum brings before us the character of God in remarkably vivid terms, and indeed with a majesty of utterance most suitable to the subject God entrusted to him. "The burden of Nineveh" means the heavy sentence of God against that famous city, a phrase customary in the prophets. In Isaiah we may remember the burden of Babylon, and of one place after another; that is, a strain of judgment which was therefore called a "burden." "The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. A God jealous and avenging is Jehovah; Jehovah revengeth, and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. Jehovah is slow to anger." Are we not all of us apt to set these things against one another? But it is not so in truth; for the stronger the feeling of God against that which destroys His own glory, the more worthy is it that He should be slow to act on His indignation, as we should be for quite different reasons. Indeed slowness to anger is ordinarily the proof of moral greatness, though there are extreme cases where waiting would bespeak want of right feeling. Scripture shows us both the rule and the exceptions. Not that it is of God or even of man that there should be slowness to feel; but to act on feeling is another thing. I am persuaded that the more there is the sense of the presence of God, and of what becomes Him, and consequently of what becomes us who are His children — to have the interest of His kingdom at heart, and also the sense of His honour dear to us, yea, dearer to us than any other consideration — so much the more ought we to cultivate in presence of evil a patient spirit.

Yet is it certain that anger in the true and godly sense of abhorrence of evil formed part of the moral nature of our Lord Jesus. There is no greater fallacy of modern times among not a few Christians than the exclusion of, holy anger from that which is morally perfect. Our Lord Jesus on one occasion looked round about with anger; on another He used a scourge of small cords with indignation; so also

He thundered from time to time at religious hypocrites who stood high in popular estimation. The Christian who does not share such feelings is altogether wanting in what is of God, and also in what becomes a man of God. I grant you that anger is too apt to take a personal shape, and consequently to slide into vindictive as well as wounded feeling. It is not necessary for me to say that there was an entire absence of this in our Lord Jesus. He came to do the will of God; He never did anything but that will — not only what was consistent with it, but only that. But for this very reason He too was slow, not of course to form a judgment, but to execute it on man; indeed, as we know, He refused it absolutely when here below. He could await the due time. God was then displaying His grace, and, as part of His grace, His long-suffering in the midst of evil. And there is nothing finer, nothing more truly of God, than this display of grace in patience.

Here too it seems a remarkable feature that, even when the prophet proclaims the approaching judgment of God, he takes such particular pains to assert, not only the certainty of His avenging Himself on His adversaries, but His slowness to anger. "Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit [the wicked]: Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." It is clear that the expression "holding pure he will not hold pure" is not at all inconsistent with His justifying the believer in Jesus up to that time without God and ungodly. It was not yet the fit and destined occasion to reveal the grace of God in justifying; but even so there is no acquitting any one as wicked. And this it is important to hold clearly. His not imputing iniquity is a very different thing from acquitting. He never acquits the wicked as such. There is no stronger condemnation of wickedness than when He does not impute iniquity, because the ground of His not imputing iniquity to the believer is that He has not only imputed it, but dealt with it according to His own horror of evil and just judgment of all in the cross of Christ. More manifestly when it is a question, as here, not of His grace but of His righteous government on earth, it always remains true that God does not treat the wicked as innocent.

Now the believer has to imitate the character of God; for we must remember that it is our point as Christians. Anything else becomes self-righteousness. But there is nothing more important than being true to the character of God, who is our Father, whose nature we have now, who has revealed Himself perfectly in Christ. And we find this most beautifully in His servant Paul, who puts patience above all the other signs of an apostle. It is as eminently Christ-like as any quality manward. There is nothing that more thoroughly shows superiority to all that Satan can do. It had of course also a more trying character in the midst of those who should have known better, as, for instance, among the Corinthians. For they were souls which took the place of serving the Lord and bore His name; but it is exactly to them he says that truly the signs of an apostle were shown by him in all patience. He brings in afterwards in their place miracles and extraordinary revelations; but patience takes precedence, and justly so, because it supposes evil and this in power, and nevertheless proves superior to it. How can you deal with a man whom nothing can overthrow, and who, no matter what you do or he may suffer, cannot be driven from the line of Christ? Now this, I think, is exactly what shone in Paul so very conspicuously. No doubt there were qualities from the Spirit's operation most blessed and refreshing in Peter, John, Barnabas, and in others, whether apostles or not; but I do not think anyone approached Paul in the draught made upon his patience in circumstances calculated to try to the uttermost, and provoke to the quick. Although Paul had like passions with the rest, still there was such a sense of Christ as made him thus practically more than conqueror.

So here, in respect of His government of man on earth, Jehovah is revealed in certain qualities; and this is to be heeded, because Jehovah is that special revelation of God which was meant for His people as one who governed them. Even so He was "slow to anger and great in power, and would not

at all hold as guiltless. Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and crieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him:" of course a figure, the word "mountains" being used to indicate the great seats of power on earth. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

But this is not all. "Jehovah is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble." Now we come to that which is in relation to the righteous. He is patient even as respects the wicked, whom He will finally judge, but He has given a strong hold. "He knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies." Then comes a challenge "What do ye imagine against Jehovah? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time." There may be perhaps an allusion here to a blow which had already fallen on the Assyrian. "Affliction shall not rise up the second time; for while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." But we must bear in mind that the Spirit of prophecy sees and declares things that are not as though they were. I have therefore said "perhaps;" for either way the believer need feel no difficulty. The destruction of Nineveh by Cyaxares and Nabopolassar is generally put B.C. 625; as Nahum is by most considered to have flourished near a century before.

After this comes a direct allusion to the enemy, which draws out this magnificent description. "There is one come out of thee that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counsellor. Thus saith Jehovah; Though they be complete, and ever so many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass away." It is thus plain that there are two elements God has combined in these revelations — the judgment on the one hand of what was wrong in His own people, and on the other of merciless adversaries, who knew not the gracious purpose of God to chasten His people. He would not leave them unpunished; but could He permit a full end? Thus on the one hand the chastening was measured, and its end was according to the goodness of God. On the other hand, God lets the adversary pour out without scruple or bound hatred on His people; but He does not merely use their animosity against them for the good of His own people, and for the punishment of their unfaithfulness, but would surely turn on the malignant foe when His purpose was accomplished. For does God sanction implacable hatred of Israel? utter indifference not to pity only but righteousness, nay, contempt and pride against Himself? turning the fact that God permitted them so to ravage the land and people of Israel into a delusion that there was no God at all, or that they had gained an advantage against the true God? Jehovah accordingly would righteously turn round on the adversaries and destroy them, as surely as He had used them in the first instance to deal with what was faulty in Israel. This we may find everywhere in the prophets, and in none more conspicuously than in the use made of the Assyrian. Nahum also looks like the rest to the end.

Thus the first blow was, I suppose, Sennacherib; the second would be not from the threatening of the Assyrian rebuked but the destruction of Nineveh; and the destruction of Nineveh is the type of the final judgment of the great Assyrian in the last days, the king of the north. Though Jehovah had broken down Israel by the enemy for their good, there would be no such trouble more. The passage looking onward to the end: "Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. And Jehovah hath given a commandment concerning thee," — now He turns to the Assyrian, and addresses him, — "Jehovah hath given a command concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown. Out of the house of thy gods will I cut

off the graven image and the molten image: I will make [it] thy grave; for thou art vile." I think that "thee" in verse 12 means Israel, and in verse 13 means the Assyrian. Hence Jehovah is represented as addressing each personally in turn.

Then in the last verse, or, as some prefer, forming the beginning of the second chapter, the chapter is wound up by the beautiful words, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" for the judgment of the Assyrian will be the established peace of Israel, and the proclamation of it everywhere when Jehovah shall have completed His full work in Jerusalem. That is, when the moral work is complete there, He will do His last deed of judgment in principle on the Assyrian, and then will come the reign of peace, of which there is the announcement here.

It would appear that Israelites will go out to the nations with the testimony of the kingdom after the destruction of the Assyrian and their settlement in the land. Thus the word of Jehovah will spread far and wide, backed by the power which has interfered on behalf of His people so conspicuously. For the knowledge of Jehovah and of His glory is to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea; and Israel will be the messengers of it among the nations. There will be, I think, a Jewish testimony both before and after they are settled in the land. It appears clear that there will be an active preaching during the period between the rapture of the saints and their appearing with Christ from heaven in glory; but there is ground to believe this will not be given up though its form may change, after the Lord will have come.

For be it observed that there are two great transitions in prophecy, which are apt to be confounded in many minds, and yet must be distinguished in order to have anything like a grasp of the subject. There is a transition after Christ takes saints to meet Him above, before He displays Himself and destroys antichrist; that is between the translation of those destined to heavenly glory, and the manifestation of the Lord and His own before the world. During this time when providential judgments fall on guilty Christendom, the Lord is mainly occupied, as far as the earth is concerned, with preparing a remnant of the Jews, some of whom will be put to death, afterwards by grace to be raised up in the first resurrection. Having suffered with Christ, they shall reign together. This is the invariable principle of God. But others who will not suffer thus will be delivered, and have a distinguished place of honour in the kingdom on earth. But when the Lord shall have appeared and destroyed the beast with the false prophet, and their adherents Jewish or Gentile, there will be another transition in which Jehovah will have set the ten tribes in due order, as He had done for the two tribes in the first transition, when in fact He will reunite and re-establish the people as a whole. Thus the two transitions have mainly for their object the setting right, first the Jews as such, and next Ephraim, making finally the two sticks one in His hand (Ezekiel 37), and the destruction of the Assyrian holds a similar relation to the ten tribes that the destruction of antichrist does to the two. The one is before He shall have appeared; the other is the interval that takes place after He has appeared, but before He establishes the millennial reign of peace, properly so called. There will be the public message given and heard. It will be still a time of proclamation before all is fully accomplished.

But further, in the millennium, I think the Jews specially will go out to the nations with the word of Jehovah. (Isaiah 2; Micah 4) No doubt glory will be manifest in the land of Israel, but still there will be a certain testimony, I suppose, for the conversion of the nations. (Isaiah 66) Of this there would seem to be little doubt. There will be, particularly during the period of the second transition, as well as during the first. The first will have "the gospel of the kingdom" going out; but there seems to be a further message. "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows" — Israel may not be fully gathered; — "for

the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." Thus if all be not yet established in peace as far as the whole people are concerned, the fall of the last Assyrian is the sign of stable peace ensuing. (Compare Micah 5: 5.)

There is another passage which refers to something like the ministry of the heavenly saints. The nations shall walk in the light. "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." I have not the slightest doubt that the glorified saints will exercise a beneficent action or ministry of grace over the world in general, although the light of the heavenly state may be more general, perhaps, than this. The leaves of the tree seem to represent special means that the Lord will use for the healthful condition of men on the earth during the millennium; the fruit is, so to speak figuratively, for lips of heavenly taste.

In Nahum 2 and Nahum 3 we have very distinctly and fully the prime object of the prophecy of Nahum, to which the first chapter is a preface, though in the latter part of it quite without reference to the direct subject matter, namely, the Assyrian. But now the great city comes most prominently before us. "He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily." The challenge is forthwith given to Nineveh to defend herself as best she may; for there is the utmost danger staring her in the face. "For Jehovah hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches." Thus we see the collateral subject, namely, the judgment of Israel by their enemies; but inasmuch as the Assyrians executed that judgment in such a way as to insult God Himself, and not only to chasten His guilty people, they must be prepared for their own doom. Thus we see the combined truth brought before us — the destruction of Nineveh, but not apart from the discipline of Israel. Jehovah does judge Israel, and if He judges His own people who had at any rate the knowledge and after a larger measure the responsibility of righteousness, how must the ungodly and the sinner appear? Nineveh had been a godless city which had no thought nor care, still less formal profession, of doing the will of God. But the people of Israel had, and they suffered the consequence.

Here follows the most animated description of the preparations of the Ninevites to defend themselves against their enemies. Historically the foes that destroyed Nineveh were, as is known, the Medes; and though there is little information in human history about the circumstances, it appears certain that Babylon helped. Though a city as old if not older than Nineveh, it was not until God had overthrown Assyria and Egypt that Babylon was permitted to leave the background. It was hundreds of years, like an animal in training, kept in the leash till the right moment arrived, when it shot forth beyond all competitors. Other cities or races might show a speedier maturity; but Babylon in due time, after having been thus held in check from remote antiquity, was brought out into the first place of imperial supremacy in this world. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was quite a distinct power.

As to all this it will be found, I think, that the heathen authors are a mass of confusion; and there cannot be a greater contrast in early history than the precision of scripture and the blundering of the best lights of Pagan antiquity as to these powers. The ignorance even of the Greeks is something astonishing. The celebrated Xenophon passed within a few miles of the city of Nineveh, but does not seem to have known anything about it. He shows the greatest want of acquaintance with such facts before his day. Possibly he stumbled on some of the outworks of Nineveh without knowing it. He calls it merely a Median city, erected in later times no doubt out of some remains of ancient Nineveh. I merely mention this to show what a wonderful book the Bible is, even as a book, and how deeply we are indebted to God. The man who uses the Bible with simplicity will have the certainty of knowledge not merely of divine things, but even of the nations of the world, with which not all the books that ever

were written outside the Bible could supply him. In fact, one of the worst historians in point of trustworthiness was a man who ought to have known best, if knowledge depended on long residence in the east (as physician to Artaxerxes Mnemon); but he is almost a fabulist, and his intermingling of what was intended to hide the dishonour of the Assyrians and to exalt the greatness of his Persian master led him, if not to falsify, certainly to propagate the Persian view of their policy, habits, etc. This naturally misled others, as for instance historians of note who wrote on this subject at a later day adopted some extravagant errors of this man. Ctesias was the name of the physician; and Diodorus Siculus followed suite. He consequently has given us a statement of alleged facts which can be disproved by other writers of antiquity. The consequence is that the Greeks who were the nearest, and the Romans who usually followed the Greeks, are in the greatest confusion on this head; and hence those who are trained in subjection to the classics, and taught to look up to these historians as authorities on the subject, are led astray. Who are more confused in these matters than men of letters? The reason is because they look up to such as were themselves in the dark. Hence all these authors are apt to confound Assyria with Babylon. Never will any distinct light be enjoyed, as far as we may speak of others, in any ancient human historian on this subject; but the divine light, when used firmly, enables us to sift out remarkable confirmations.

Were there an adequate examination of Genesis 10 we might gain not a little historically from its copious early details, and be shown the different lines that penetrated through the earth, tracing them forward to their ultimate developments. It would be of considerable interest, but would require a goodly volume to itself. It is certain that there is unerring light in scripture and nothing else; but it may be doubted much whether a continuous history could be made of a genealogical line. This would be just the difficulty. Completeness men would like, if it could be; but I do not think it is according to what may be called the moral system of the word of God to give that kind of unbroken continuity. Thus, even in the life of our Lord Jesus, it would be an exceedingly precarious task to form out of the four Gospels a continuous history of the ministry of Christ. I have not the slightest doubt that everything stated there is exactly and divinely true; that is, it is not merely true according to man's observation, but according to God's perfect knowledge of all the facts; yet for this very reason it is much above man, as also it is on a different principle from man's; for there is no thought of continuity in the Gospels, but only of facts selected for a moral purpose. I suppose it is the same thing in the glimpses of the Old Testament history: first, the beginning, the sources; next, perhaps after hundreds of years, another glance at their collision with Israel, and then finally the judgment, which concludes all.

I conceive that the great object of scripture is to show us the sources in order to compare them with the final scene and not with the continuous line between, this being the proper work of history. Hence would be just the difficulty of the matter; but it is a difficulty in the main due to the want of historic materials found outside the Bible. Undoubtedly Damascus is mentioned in an early part of Genesis, and is frequently referred to in the time of David, and at various other epochs of scripture. Thus it is one of the oldest cities in the world, and on the other hand it is a city flourishing now in a certain way. Again, several of the primeval cities in Genesis 10 have been identified within the last few years; and of course it would have its interest, more or less, to point this out clearly with the proofs of each. At the same time it would be a task of considerable delicacy, and of enormous labour, even supposing it possible, to do it well.

"The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings. He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their

walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved." This is certainly a striking picture of the last scenes; for it is not only that we have minutely enough that which recent discoveries have shown as to the abundance of scarlet and of chariots, and all the preparation of war which was characteristic of Nineveh, but the manner in which Nineveh was to fall is most vividly and exactly foreshown; and the more so because of its contrast with, as well as resemblance to, Babylon; for the city in the plain of Shinar was a capital not inferior in extent, and even superior in magnificence, to Nineveh; both being built upon famous rivers — rivers of Paradise. Nevertheless, although both were typical, and the fall of the one like that of the other has in either case a most important character (Babylon even more than Nineveh), and the river in each played a very important element in the capture of the two cities, yet there is a contrast quite as much as a resemblance. For the special means of the destruction of Babylon was by laying the bed of the river dry by turning the river off; whereas the crisis which led directly towards the destruction of Nineveh was the irruption of the river in — not turning it out. This was surely remarkable; at the same time it convicts of singular dulness those who failed to see the differences clearly. The whole is a good lesson for human nature, and no unimportant hint for us to read the word of God a little more closely. He who wrote scripture had no difficulty. It was all as plain as possible to Him. The real obstacle does not arise in general from its language, save in very exceptional cases, but from our own slowness of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

"The gates of the rivers shall be opened" — not merely the gates of the city. A gate of the city was opened in the case of Babylon; and we know the splendid description of it in Isaiah, with its doors of brass and bars of iron, which must yield to righteousness from the east; for God called Cyrus to his foot, and gave kings as the dust of his sword, as driven stubble to his bow. When the moment came, the difficulty vanished, and the Persians entered the imperial city through the dried bed of the Euphrates, which was turned into another channel. Thus the doors were opened for the rest, when the drunken guards were despatched. But in the case of Nineveh it was the waters of the river which dissolved the palatial dwellings and defences. It was not the place taken by an army which stealthily crept up the emptied bed of the river, and then let in the main body through the gates. The converse of this happened to Nineveh. The Euphrates was turned off from Babylon but the Tigris burst its bounds and swamped and otherwise destroyed a vast portion of Nineveh; so that the very foundations, and not the walls only, were swept away. In vain then does the king summon his nobles: they stumble in their march; they hasten to the wall; and the defence is prepared. The flood-gates are opened and the palace is dissolved. "And Huzzab\* shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness." That is, all the vast store of what contributes to the pride of life, all that ministered to selfish enjoyment and vanity, was now shown to be so much laid up for the conquerors — so much gathered together for utter destruction, if not carried away by the captors. Such indeed is the history of man generally.

{\*This word has led to great discussion. On the one hand Gesenius takes it as "and made to flow away;" on the other hand Dr. Henderson prefers, "though firmly established;" both construe it with the preceding phrase. Mr. Leeser translates "And the queen." Ewald among recent Hebraists adheres to Huzzab as the name literal or symbolical of the queen. }

Then comes the prophet's exultation over the city that had been the terror of Israel, the old enemy

that had triumphed over them so haughtily and persistently; for Assyria was the principal enemy which God had used in the days of the kings to check or crush the pride of His people by their own pride.

"Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?" This is a most animated picture of the lordly place among the nations which Assyria had long possessed up to the moment of its ruin.

"The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions; and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard."

At the same time we must carefully remember that, whatever might be the greatness of Nineveh, and what ever the terror the city inspired among the nations, imperial power never had belonged to it. Those who say so mistake the facts, and confound the position of Assyria with Babylon. It will be found on examination of scripture that Assyria was only the greatest among confederate or independent powers. But this is not the true meaning of an empire, which really means a power that is not only greater than any other, but that keeps the kings and nations as vassals, not simply towering above a crowd of compeers, but rather a lord and master of all others. Such was the position to which Babylon subsequently rose by divine appointment, to which Assyria, like Egypt, had long aspired in vain. The desire was in no way new; the accomplishment was. The old taskmistress of Israel, Egypt, would have liked well to have it, and so would the Assyrian, as we find in the prophet Ezekiel. These both strove hard and long for the mastery. They no doubt thought it morally certain that supreme dominion must fall to one or other of the two; and so they fought to the death, Egypt succumbing first, and then Assyria. A power which neither suspected or feared was held in reserve: for it the God of heaven kept the highest place from the beginning. Nebuchadnezzar became the "head of gold." Babel was the cradle of the Babylonish empire.

In Nahum 3 says the prophet, "Woe to the bloody city." Such had Nineveh been to Israel above all. "It is all full of lies and robbery" — rather violence, the usual twofold form of iniquity. "The prey departeth not." The allusion is no doubt to the people carried off and not restored.

Then is given (verses 2, 3) a most animated sketch of the enemies' advance to assail and slay. "The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horsemen lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses." And this carnage and ruin are attributed to the idolatry of Nineveh, and their efforts, too successful, to entice others. "Because of the multitudes of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts."

Next follows the stern condemnation of Jehovah, who once spared but now would have Nineveh know that it was no mere jealousy of others, but His own resolve to disgrace her who had so enjoyed herself and misled others. "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and will make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that shall look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?"

Verses 8-10 set forth as a warning to Nineveh the awful desolation of the famous No-Amon. This was neither Alexandria nor Egypt, but Thebes with its hundred gates; which was the more pointed

because the Assyrians themselves ravaged it both before the prophet's days and later, till Cambyses caused it to drink the cup of Persian insolence to the dregs. "Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains."

Then from verse 11 the prophet addresses Nineveh once more, and declares that she must fare no better. "Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou shalt seek strength because of the enemy." Indeed Nineveh should fall more easily still as they are told in verses 12, 13. "All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars." Prepare as they might (and the crisis called for it), fire and sword should take their course over the devoted city. "Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln." Merchants, princes, satraps, viceroys, nobles, people, all should vanish, save those who should remain only to sink irreparably.

Like Babylon afterwards, Nineveh is never to reappear as a capital city; but the kind of power which prevailed in the Assyrian and Babylonish monarchies will each have its representative in the last days. At that time the order will be just the converse, as prophecy shows, of what it was in history. And this is a very important means of demonstrating that they are altogether mistaken who think that we have only to do with Babylon and Nineveh in the past. For the fact historically is that Nineveh fell first. Indeed the overthrow of the Assyrian capital was no unimportant step in God's providence for the remarkable position, unique at that time, into which Babylon was allowed to rise, as Nebuchadnezzar saw in vision and Daniel recalled and expounded according to the sovereign will of the God of heaven. Consequently the order of old was Nineveh towering up into its own place as the chief among a number of distinct powers; then, according to the prophetic warning, it fell utterly as Egypt had done before. Next Babylon was raised by God to be the head of gold, the first great representative of imperial power in the earth. The fall of Babylon, the first which attained such a character, typifies the fall of the last of these imperial powers. The final holder of the system which began with Babylon will be the beast, or Roman empire revived, and in its final apostate state at the end of this age. The beast then answers to the Chaldean monarchy, or Babylon viewed as an imperial power.

I do not mean by it of course Babylon in the Revelation; because this is clearly corrupt ecclesiastical power. But, the last holder of imperial power being typified to a certain extent by the first holder of it, the judgment of the Babylonish empire shadows to no insignificant extent the judgment of the fourth empire in its resuscitated form when it goes to destruction. But it is plain as it is important to observe in the prophetic account of the future, that what answers to Assyria will be after Babylon's destruction, not before it. In history the fall of Assyria was before Babylon. In the future, according to prophecy, the fall of Assyria will be after the power that represents the imperial system of Babylon. Therefore the distinction between the two excludes controversy for such as read prophecy believingly; and those who contend that all is done with Babylon and Assyria are really without excuse.

The same conclusion results from the very plain words of Isaiah. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." That is, the Lord employed him as a means of beating

down the pride of Israel. "Howbeit he meaneth not so." He only seeks to gratify his own pride. O that Israel had stood for their true boast, even Jehovah, and humbly looked to Him to plead their cause. But no, they sought what the Gentiles sought; and their God gave them up to the haughty and cruel foe. But assuredly if the Lord chastise the faults of His people, He will not fail to punish the overbearing iniquity of His enemies. "But it is in his heart to cut off and destroy nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings?" This he valued, and would have liked yet more, but God did not allow the Assyrian to have all he wished. Supreme dominion was his ambition; but Babylon was given it by the sovereign will of God. "Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria: shall I not as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom."

This is all recalled for the purpose of clearing as much as possible the final character of the judgment to be executed on the Assyrian. It is when the Lord shall have performed His *whole* work. Consequently we gather here an important item of divine truth, namely, that the Assyrian (speaking now in a general manner) is the last. It is the closing operation before the millennium in the full sense of the reign of peace, which accordingly is given just after in Isaiah 11. But in the description there given we have the introduction by the way of the Antichrist. He is destroyed, as it is said, by the breath of Jehovah's lips, but the time is not defined like the Assyrian. When we advance a little after we have more. In Isa. 14 for instance it is said, "Jehovah will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land." It is now evidently, therefore, a question of settling the people in the land of Palestine, — not merely a part of them, but the whole. Then follow the standing types of the final enemies of the people. "It shall come to pass in the day that Jehovah shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou hast been made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruleth the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth."

Then we find the earth at rest, and even Hades full of congratulation over the fall of the king of Babylon, — a highly figurative picture, of course, but as exact as sublime. The empire of Babylon or first beast so far shadows the fourth beast, which was, is not, and shall be present. The beast, as we know, has extremely intimate associations with the Antichrist of St. John; so that it is very difficult indeed to distinguish between these two allies in lawlessness at the end. Prophetic students differ immensely as to this; and I do not wonder at it, because the two are so closely combined in their policy. The main features are these: they both claim to be objects of divine worship, and both play a great and combined part in the great apostacy of the future. The beast is of course the empire of the West, but he is also closely connected with Jerusalem, where the man of sin sits in the temple of God. They are seen as the two beasts in Rev. 13. But the false prophet will be in Jerusalem, whereas the beast's central seat of power is Rome. Whether he lives there or not, it is not for any man to say; but it is plain enough, no matter where he resides, that he will possess the old capital of imperial Rome, as Jerusalem will be that of apostate religious power. They are therefore so leagued and similar in policy and objects that one must not be surprised if many confound them, though it is not meant that each has not his own distinctive place and dignity in the future crisis.

But the connection of the beasts is so close that the difficulty of drawing the line is often great. Thus many think that the description of Lucifer in Isaiah 14 points to Antichrist, whereas it appears really to be the king of Babylon as he is energized by Satan. Nevertheless the most subtle power of Satan will be shown in the false prophet, and not in the beast; but inasmuch as they both work into one another's hands, it is sometimes a delicate task to discriminate between them. In point of fact they are both judged at the very same instant, both cast alive into the lake of fire together. Therefore, even if somewhat confounded, such a mistake does not matter as to their doom; it is of more consequence when it is a question of their character, work, and usual sphere. But it would seem that the true distinction between them is that the beast is greater politically, and that the false prophet is higher religiously, and that they divide the spoil between them, in this way accommodating each other in their bad eminence and little dreaming of the common doom that awaits them. The beast exalts the false prophet, and the false prophet exalts the beast; and thus they consequently are as friendly as wicked powers can be to each other, Satan being the head of both and employing them variously and together in his efforts against God and His Christ.

In the end of the same Isa. 14, when the prophet has done with the subtle king of Babylon as the type of the haughty imperial power, we read what it is well particularly to observe: "Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders." It is what was promised in Nahum 1: "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" I consider therefore that it is plain, both from Isaiah 10 and from Isaiah 14, that the future fall of the Assyrian is distinct from, and subsequent to, that of the king of Babylon. But beyond doubt in history this was not the case. For in the past the destruction of Nineveh took place before Nebuchadnezzar became the head of the golden image. The general impression among chronologists is that the fall of Nineveh took place more than six hundred years before Christ. Indeed, if I mistake not, Sir Henry Rawlinson and others are of opinion that it took place nearly twenty years before the commonly assigned date. Even this, however, suffices; and we shall leave the archaeologists to sift the question more fully among themselves. It is a matter of no great moment to my object now. We know that it took place at any rate before Babylon's supremacy, which was consequently subsequent to either of those dates, and that is the main point, and the only one essential — a point confessed on all sides. If so, it is surely evident that, if there must be the fall of the king of Babylon, and then the destruction of the Assyrian, it is quite impossible to refer to the past as the complete accomplishment of prophecy.

God has taken particular pains to cast us on the future for the exact fulfilment; and nothing can be more admirable than the perfectness of the word of God in this. It was essential that prophecy should have an accomplishment in the days in which it was written. This was needful for the comfort of the people of God. In order to mark that this was not the whole exhaustive scope of the prophecy, the very order is changed, and yet there is no dwelling on the fact nor an explanation. Thus, we see, God has pity upon His people, and would guard us against the miserable principle of regarding prophecy as little better than an old almanac — as that which has been accomplished, and is of no direct use longer. The reverse is true. Prophecy has been accomplished; but the most important bearing of its predictions is yet to be in the future.

There is no need of dwelling particularly on the various forms of Nineveh's wickedness here brought before the mind of the prophetic Spirit. "Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou

also shalt seek strength because of the enemy. All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of them are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars." So great should be Nineveh's weakness when the hour struck for her doom.

It seems that even the figure of drunkenness is not without a literal import; for although one may conceive that the charge of drunkenness does in a figurative sense take in that false security in which Nineveh lay, like Babylon afterwards in a later day, yet as a fact it is notorious that there was a surprise at Nineveh during a religious festival of their gods, which may remind us of the infamous feast of Belshazzar the very night that Babylon was taken. Thus there was an unholy revelry, not without either impious honour to their false gods on the one hand, or impious dishonour to the true God on the other hand. In short, a feast with the drunkenness that attended them was bound up with the siege of Nineveh, just as with Babylon's. But the way so far differed, as the camp of Nineveh seems to have been surprised before the city was taken. Consequently we hear in Nahum 1 how they were caught as thorns folded in drunkenness. All this is described before the account of taking the bloody city. But if such was the case with Nineveh, not so with Babylon: notoriously the drunken feast of King Belshazzar took place on the night when it was taken. At Nineveh the surprise of the camp was without the city before its fall. Thus each has its own peculiar features; and both show the admirable perfectness of the word of God.

Again the interval between the fall of Babylon and that of Nineveh may be set down at less than ninety years in round numbers. The captivity of Israel measures the supremacy of Babylon. This was seventy years; and we may allow a margin of some few years in consequence of the inability of chronologists to settle the exact time when Nineveh fell. It was certainly taken before Nebuchadnezzar acquired his imperial power, and therefore more than six centuries before Christ.

Do what they might, the prophetic sentence is, "There shall the fire devour thee." Just so it is a matter of common history that, when the king found he could not defend himself, he set fire to the place himself. It was not the enemies that did it, as in the case of the Chaldean capital. In Babylon the enemy secured the victory in this way, but it was otherwise with Nineveh. Again only a partial fire consumed Babylon, which therefore remained an humbled but proud city long after the days of Alexander the Great, who in fact died there. But the Assyrian city perished then. Nineveh fell, not only never to rise again, but not even to survive in any measure. The hand that chiefly effected its conflagration was that of the unhappy prince who saw the hopelessness of escape, and therefore, surrounding himself with his wives and concubines, his jewels, gold and silver, and every other valuable, set fire in desperation to the whole.

Hence we have this described as regards Nineveh in a way not found in the description of Babylon's fall. "Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strongholds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln." Alas! no care should avail. "There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm,\* make thyself many as the locusts.\* Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers,\* which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; thy nobles shall lie down." It is a completeness of ruin for its grandeur unexampled in history. "Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is fatal: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually? "

{\*Some as Dr. Henderson take these as "the licking locust," "the swarming locust," and "the largest locust" [literally "locust of locust"] respectively.}

Nevertheless there is this difference to be seen, that Assyria will certainly have a place in the millennium and a distinguished place — not Nineveh indeed but Assyria. (Isaiah 19) As for Babylon or Chaldea, we never hear of either when the kingdom comes. Jehovah in the midst of His judgment will remember mercy; and Egypt and Assyria are particularly mentioned as having a leading place along with Israel in that day.