

Nahum 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.

Analysis

Nahum pronounces Nineveh's epitaph: 'Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust' (namu ro'eyka melek Ashur yishkenu addirekha). Shepherds (ro'im) represent leaders and rulers. They 'slumber' (namu)—sleep the sleep of death. Nobles 'dwell in the dust' (yishkenu)—inhabit graves. Leadership is dead. 'Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them' (nafotzû ammekha al-heharim ve'eyn meqabbez). The population, like sheep without shepherds, scatters across mountains with none to gather them. This complete dissolution of national cohesion demonstrates total judgment. Not merely military defeat but national extinction—leaders dead, people scattered, no one to restore or rebuild. The verse prophesies what historically occurred: Assyrian power collapsed so completely that the empire ceased to exist, its people assimilated into other populations, its language and culture dying out. This is ultimate judgment—not just punishment but erasure from history.

Historical Context

The Assyrian Empire's collapse was remarkably swift and complete. Within a generation of Nineveh's fall (612 BC), Assyria effectively ceased to exist as distinct entity. Unlike other conquered empires that maintained cultural identity (Egypt, Babylon), Assyria vanished. Its last king died in Nineveh's flames. Its armies scattered. Its people were absorbed into other nations. Aramaic replaced Akkadian. Within decades, even memory of Assyrian greatness faded. This

unprecedented national dissolution fulfilled Nahum's prophecy exactly. Modern archaeology recovered Assyrian history, but for over 2,000 years, the empire that terrorized the ancient world was largely forgotten. This demonstrates the totality of divine judgment and the impermanence of human empires built on violence and oppression.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Assyria's complete national extinction demonstrate the ultimate futility of building power on violence and oppression?
2. What does this passage teach about divine justice not merely punishing but completely overturning wickedness?
3. How should the certainty that all earthly kingdoms eventually fall affect Christian engagement with politics and nationalism?

Interlinear Text

נִפְשׁוּ אֲדִיכָּיִם יְבָשָׁתָן אֲדִיכָּיִם יְבָשָׁתָן
slumber Thy shepherds O king of Assyria shall dwell thy nobles is scattered
H5123 H7462 H4428 H804 H7931 H117 H6335

מִקְרָבֶךָ: אֵין הַבָּרִים עַל עַמְּךָ
and no man gathereth in the dust thy people upon the mountains
H369 H2022 H5971 H5921 H6908

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 22:17 (Parallel theme): And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

Isaiah 13:14 (Parallel theme): And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.

Jeremiah 50:18 (Kingdom): Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.

Jeremiah 51:57 (Kingdom): And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.

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