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**C1116 – May 11, 2011 – Nahum 2:3-7**  
**The Destruction Of Ninevah**

Alright, let's get to the text. I'm going to forego discussion of the problem of evil this week and jump right into the text. One of the important concepts to grab a hold of in Nahum is that God's wrath is reserved for His enemies. This is stated in 1:2 and it's important to grasp because later in the NT it will clarify passages that talk about wrath and Christians not destined for wrath, that kind of a thing. If you don't get the principle here in the OT then you're subject to really botching it when you get to NT passages about the Christian and whether he will enter the wrath of the day of the Lord. So understand that God has enemies and that they are under His wrath, all the time they're under His wrath, but He doesn't just burst forth in judgment. He reserves it, meaning He stores it up and it builds and builds and builds and then suddenly it's like He explodes and judges His enemies with wrath. For those who are in Christ they are out from under His wrath.

Well, Nineveh was the central city where God's enemies had conglomerated in Nahum's day; all 3 chapters of Nahum center on God's justice in pouring out wrath on Nineveh. By His grace He patiently waited to pour it out but finally in 612BC it came forth. So this is a past day of the Lord, when He entered into judgment of His enemies on the banks of the Tigris River in modern day Iraq. It prefigures the future day of the Lord and all the judgments on His enemies described in the Book of Revelation. This is a famous past battle and it's one you want to write down in your memory as one of the major turning points in world history. We hear little of Assyria in our history classes. But Assyria was the world superpower at the time. She had been on top of the world for 100 years and she was the first kingdom to expand and rule over such a large region. Egypt hadn't conquered anything like this, neither had Israel during the monarchies of David or Solomon. This is the largest expanse, geographically speaking, any kingdom had conquered

as far as I know in world history. Later kingdoms will expand further but the Assyrian kingdom reaches West all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, North into Turkey and on up to the Black Sea, East into modern day Iran and South into Saudi Arabia and even into Africa along the Nile River of Egypt. So this is quite a bit of territory to rule without modern technology. You don't just call up the army general and find out what's going on. You have to have cavalry men who serve as couriers to keep contact between your armies way out there and the central headquarters back in Nineveh.

And they obviously did that quite well because they built a tremendous empire. These people were ruthless conquerors. They would use their military machine to defeat you and then they would deport you to some other enemy land they had defeated. They had you march hundreds and hundreds of miles. So they're moving one defeated people into another defeated people's land and vice versa. Then they would send some of their own people into the land as colonists; people who would be loyal to the Assyrian empire who could levy taxes, train troops, raise horses and control the local population against rebellions.

This strategy of deportation and colonization served several purposes for the Assyrian kingdom. First it psyched people out; it was a form of psychological warfare. People are terrorized by the idea of being deported to a foreign land, separated from family and friends. The possibility of that kind of thing happening goes a long way in keeping a people under your thumb and this was one of the tactics the Assyrians used, psychological warfare. Second, it curbed national zeal. It did this because once you are deported into some other land you are now in a multi-ethnic population and so national sentiments are curbed. It makes it easier to control this kind of a population because they can't get any large scale rebellion organized, they speak different languages so you can enforce everyone to learn the Assyrian language, which was Aramaic by the way, and that destroys national unity. Further, over time the multi-ethnic population would intermarry and that would further destroy national unity. And so the second tactic of deportation was to curb national sentiment which would make it much easier to run the kingdom. Third, deportation and colonization preserved human resources. Rather than just butchering everybody, which they did at times, they could use the people as slave labor or as military personnel were killed off they could conscript them into the military. The Assyrians needed a lot of

resources, particularly military personnel and trained horses to support their large military machine and so there was a great need for human resources and that was a third reason they used deportation and colonization.

So we have it being used to psyche out the enemy, curb national sentiment and preserve human resources and all three of these tactics were used against the northern and southern kingdom; the northern kingdom more completely because they were defeated at Samaria in 721BC and Sargon II deported all ten tribes into the areas I showed you last time. Of course, there were stragglers and natives left behind in the land and when the Assyrians defeated other people and deported them into the northern kingdom of Israel there was intermarriage between these Gentiles and Jews and that's what led to the group called Samaritans in the NT. They were considered half-breeds and so the Jews from the southern kingdom wouldn't have anything to do with them, they were second class citizens. But even though large portions of the ten tribes were deported they weren't lost because Jesus says that the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes in the Messianic kingdom, there are also NT epistles written to the twelve tribes. For example, James is addressed to the twelve tribes and in the Book of Revelation you have the 144,000 sealed, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and so they're still around, we may not be able to identify them but God is able, He knows exactly where their genetics are and He made promises to them.

Now, at this time the two tribes from the southern kingdom, Judah and part of Benjamin, were suffering under this Assyrian kingdom and they were crying out against the evil. Remember, they didn't always just deport people, they often slaughtered them, particularly if they rebelled. The tactic they used for those who rebelled was to brutally crush them so that they learned the lesson and never rebelled again. Some of those brutal tactics originated with the Assyrians and here you'll see how depravity works out. Remember that all men are totally depraved but that doesn't mean that all men are as bad as they possibly could be. But if sin goes unchecked in our lives then it begins to work out in complex patterns, terrible things begin to develop, sin can develop into a patch of tangled briars and the Assyrians had developed complex sin patterns for killing people. For example, flaying - they would flay their victims, alive or dead, and nail the skins to the wall of the city as a warning to anyone who would defy their power. In more extreme cases they

would torture the young children of parents by flaying them right in front of their eyes. Another method the Assyrians originated was impalement. In this act of brutality they would take a six to eight foot spike and insert it through your rectum or somewhere else we won't mention and use a sledgehammer to force it up through your organs and out your mouth, sometimes resting it on the jaw of your mouth so you wouldn't slide down the pole. Then they would hoist it up into a vertical position where you were left to die. Other brutal tactics I won't describe include beheading, if you were lucky, burning victims alive, ripping out eyeballs, cutting off fingers, noses and ears, raping women, mutilating men until death. And after death they weren't through because they liked to get theatrical with their sin so they would place heads, arms, hands and even lower lips on the conquered city's walls, they would mount skulls and noses atop stakes at the city gates or in a pile or even cut up the human bodies and feed them to dogs. On some occasions it was reported that they would blind people but leave them alive so they would wander around the land speaking of Assyrian terrors and psychologically put fear into the people.

Now these terrorist tactics were so effective that when the Assyrians would march up to a city most cities would immediately surrender, which is what the Assyrians wanted. They preferred the easy route, but if you rebelled they pulled all kinds of nasty evil out and crushed you. So that's the kind of evil we're talking about, the kind of desecration of the image of God that was carefully thought through, utilized details of anatomical and physiological stresses on the human body were systematically carried out and that's why the Jews were crying out against this, how long O, Lord, how long will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood? This is evil, pure evil.<sup>i</sup>

Well, it wouldn't be long. God allowed this evil to persist until 612BC and that's what we want to look at today in Nahum 2. It would be a grand day when Nineveh was defeated. Leading up to this, historically speaking we have seen the rise of the Assyrian kingdom to power from the years of Jonah in the 760's to 721 when they defeated Samaria. Then we saw the reign of the Assyrian kingdom from 721 to 612BC. But toward the end of this period we have the Assyrian kingdom diminishing in power and a new power rising, the Babylonians. So the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal was pretty powerful but when he died in 627BC and his son Ashur-etil-ilani comes to the throne there seems to be some confusion. Most scholars admit that what went wrong is

still an unsolved puzzle. But I would suggest that what went wrong was God had had enough of Assyria and so He was going to take care of them and so God is raising up the Babylonians to take care of the Assyrians. To do this you have changes in political administration in both Assyria and Babylon. In Assyria Ashurbanipal dies and his son Ashur-etil-ilani comes to the throne in 627 and the Babylonians decided to revolt against him. In Babylon Nabopolassar comes to the throne in 625BC and so a situation arises where Babylon is attempting to escape the Assyrian stronghold.

This results in conflict of course. In 616 “the army of Assyria prepared for battle in Gablini and Nabopolassar went up against them...he did battle against the army of Assyria and the army of Assyria retreated before him.” Assyria suffered a major defeat and they were plundered which meant that they lost a lot of their military supplies and that was critical to Assyria and so the Babylonians were eating away at their strength through a series of battles in the Fertile Crescent. That entire region around the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers is the Fertile Crescent.

The Assyrians tried to reach out to Egypt for support and Pharaoh Psammetichus I came to his aid for fear that after the Babylonians defeated Assyria they would come and attack Egypt. In 614BC Nabopolassar went up against Assyria at the city of Ashur, South of Nineveh but was pushed back. Then came the Medes from the East, led by Cyaxerxes, they also came up against Ashur in 614BC and they were successful; they inflicted a terrible defeat, plundered and sacked the city. Nabopolassar heard about the battle and came to lend support but got there too late. Nevertheless, he and Cyaxerxes entered into an alliance at that point. They did it by marriage: the daughter of Cyaxerxes married the son of Nabopolassar. That’s how they sealed treaties in those days. This proved to be the beginning of the end for Assyria. In 612 the Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, and Cyaxerxes, king of the Medes joined forces and marched along the banks of the Tigris River and camped against Nineveh. At this point I’ll read you the Babylonian Chronicle itself. This comes from what is known as Chronicle 3 and is a text that was discovered, broken into four pieces and with the surface marred. There are gaps in the account, but what we can read is as follows, and when we read you’ll see the king of Akkad...Akkad is the same as Babylonian, it’s just another name for Babylon, so that’s who it’s referring to.

“From the month Simanu until the month Âbu -for three months- they subjected the city to a heavy siege. On the Nth day of the month Âbu they inflicted a major defeat upon a great people. At that time Sin-šar-iškun, king of Assyria, died. They carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple and turned the city into a ruin heap. The [lacuna] of Assyria escaped from the enemy and, to save his life, seized the feet of the king of Akkad.

On the twentieth day of the month Ulûlu [14 September 612] Cyaxares and his army went home. After he had gone, the king of Akkad dispatched his army and they marched to Nasibina. Plunder and exiles [lacuna] and they brought the people of Rusapu to the king of Akkad at Nineveh. On the [lacuna] of the month [lacuna] Aššur-uballit [II] ascended to the throne in Harran to rule Assyria. Up until the [lacuna] day of the month [lacuna] the king of Akkad set out and in [lacuna].”

And now I want to take you inside the battle of Nineveh through the eyes of Nahum. This is one of the most vivid descriptions of battle in the ancient world. It sounds like an eyewitness account and the reason it sounds that way is because Nahum did watch the battle in a vision given to him by God. So let your creative imagination flow because here we're getting a highly visual account; let all your senses engage, the sound of roaring chariots and clashing swords, the smell of death, the site of battle, the feeling of total war and the loss of defeat, as far as the Ninevites are concerned.

Verse 3, **The shields of his mighty men are *colored* red, The warriors are dressed in scarlet, The chariots are *enveloped* in flashing steel When he is prepared to march, And the cypress spears are brandished. <sup>4</sup>The chariots race madly in the streets, They rush wildly in the squares, Their appearance is like torches, They dash to and fro like lightning flashes. <sup>5</sup>He remembers his nobles; They stumble in their march, They hurry to her wall, And the mantelet is set up. <sup>6</sup>The gates of the rivers are opened And the palace is dissolved. <sup>7</sup>It is fixed: She is stripped, she is carried away, And her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves, Beating on their breasts.**

See how that reads? It makes you sense that you're in the battle. In verse 3 we have the Babylonians and Medes preparing for the attack. **The shields of his mighty men are colored red, *colored*** is not original, it just says **red**.



**red...shields.** So here we have the infantry, foot soldiers, they carry **red...shields.** The shields were typically covered in animal skins and these are colored red. Why are they colored red? Are they red because of blood from prior military engagements or are they red because they've been dyed? We don't know for sure, they were probably dyed red to give the impression of blood and put fear in the enemy but it's possible that they were stained with blood from prior military battles. In any case red is the color of death and would strike fear in the Ninevites.

He goes on, as for their battle garments, **The warriors are dressed in scarlet,** so they have red shields and red garments, one great army of soldiers coming in the appearance of a sea of blood.

As for **The chariots they are enveloped in flashing steel,** literally fire of steel and what it means is that these were scythed chariots.



A scythed chariot had multiple long, curved scythe blades coming out from them at right angles to the axle and often coming out from the ends of the axles. These were terrifying weapons of war that cut down everyone who came near them. We know that scythed chariots were in use at this time and so you have scythed chariots and on the chariot platform you had the driver and the archer or archers standing well-protected, and as the chariot moved

the sunlight reflected off the steel scythes making the chariot appear like it was on fire. These could be lighter chariots that carried a driver and an archer or heavy chariots that carried up to four men, a driver and three archers, probably these are the heavier chariots and they could cut people to pieces, they could smash enemy formations and disperse infantry. And so we see the infantry and the chariots all prepared as a sea of blood to lay siege to Nineveh for the purpose, God's purpose of eliminating evil.

**When he is prepared to march**, when the army is prepared and in formation, **And the cypress spears are brandished**, the infantry had shields and long spears with the shafts made of **cypress** wood. These were important weapons because they could penetrate and attack the enemy at a longer range than a sword or a dagger. And here they are brandishing them, holding them up and waving them before the city to show their readiness and eagerness to engage in combat.

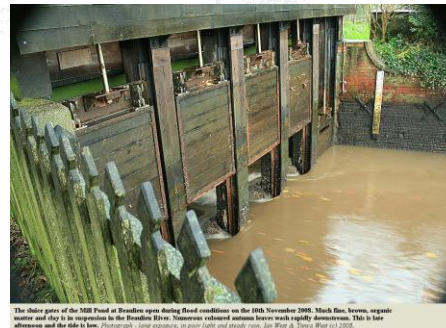
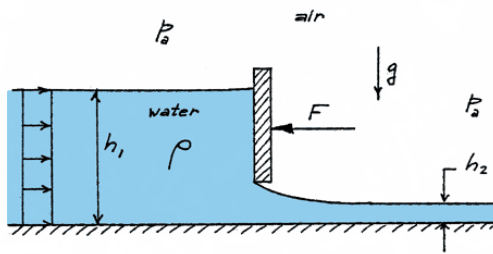
In verse 4 we have the army having laid siege and already within the city gates, **The chariots race madly in the streets**, the streets of Nineveh had been widened by Esarhaddon and so there was plenty of room for the chariots to **They rush wildly in the squares**, it's combat, all out combat and chaos in the streets, **Their appearance is like torches**, as the sun reflects off of the steel envelope of the chariots it appears like flashing torches of fire as **They dash to and fro like lightning flashes**. Chariots were a blitzkrieg weapon, rapid, mobile, heavy and very dangerous.

Verse 5, **He remembers his nobles**; So here's Sin-shar-ishkun, the king of Assyria and he's desperately reviewing his officers so he can assign them specific duties for defense of the city, particularly along the wall. He assigns them and sends them off. **They stumble in their march**, probably because they're drunk, remember, they had been drinking because they had some initial success repelling the invaders, but now they are stumbling to the wall to stop the incoming army. **They hurry to her wall, And the mantelet is set up**. The mantelet is a portable cover or screen that would protect the soldiers from the arrows and rocks that were undoubtedly coming over the walls of Nineveh.





Verse 6, **The gates of the rivers are opened** they had a special ops unit that was dedicated to the mission of opening the gates of the Rivers. Nineveh had one large river, the Tigris running along its western side as a protective barrier. Because of that the armies directed the siege from the South, on the East side of the city there were two rivers that channeled down to the Tigris that came through the city, the Tebiltu River to the North and the Husur or Khosr River to the South, these were both managed by sluice gates.



The sluice gates of the SBR Pond at Bradlow open during flood conditions on the 19th November 2005. Mark Ben, senior, organic water and they fit in suspension in the Bradlow River. Numerous released animals have washed up downstream. This is late afternoon and the tide is low. Photograph - long exposure, no post light and steady state. Jim Watt & Tonya Watt (c) 2005.

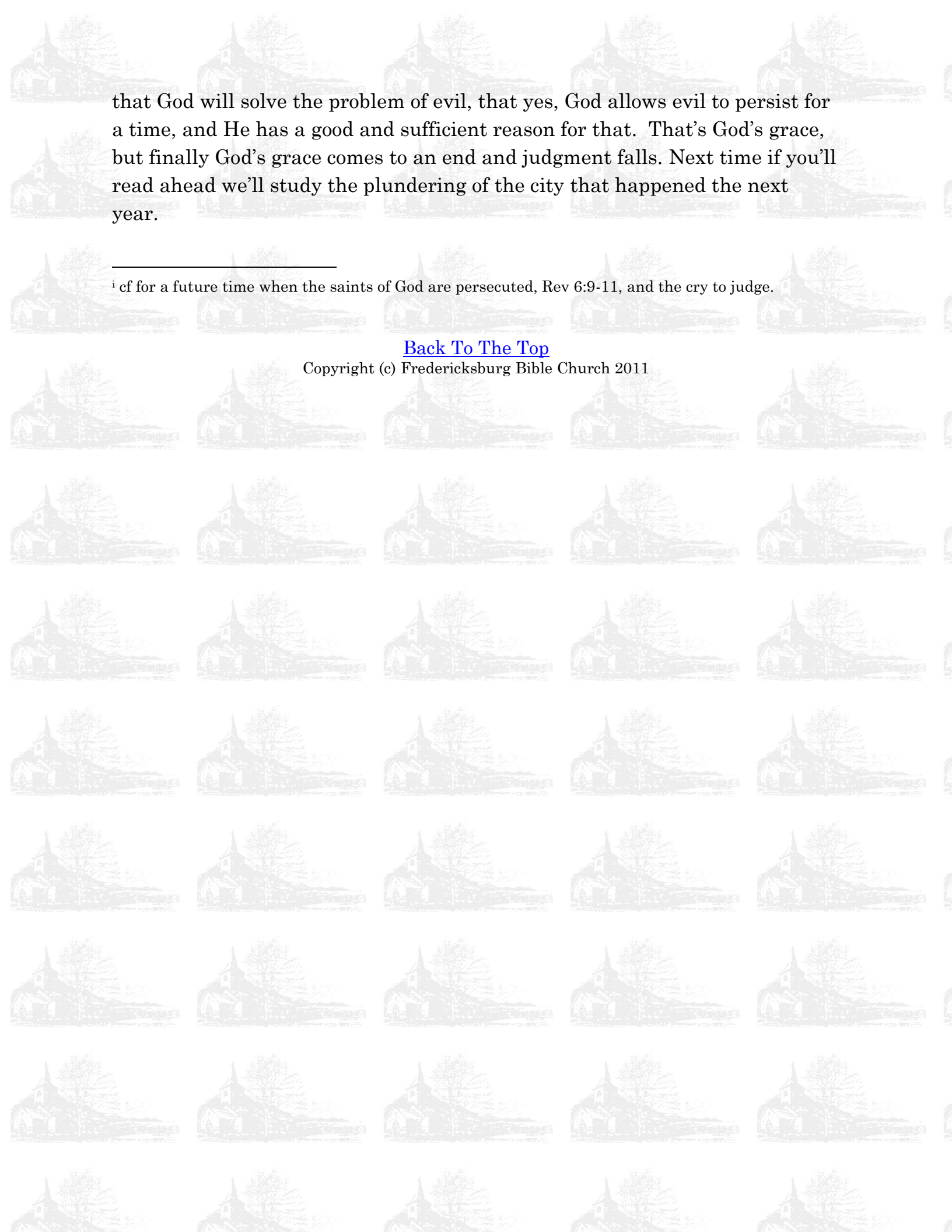
A sluice gate is used to regulate water level in an open channel. Here you can see four sluice gates and how they fit into grooves on the sides and can be raised and lowered to regulate water levels. Diodorus wrote that heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood. Perhaps the sluice gates were regulating the flooded river but when the special ops team opened the sluice gates the water flooded into the city causing massive damage. And so you have massive amounts of hydrodynamic energy flooding the city and it says, **the palace is dissolved**. Which palace I don't know, it could have been the palace of Ashurbanipal or Sennacherib, but it was eroded by the flood of water.

Verse 7, **It is fixed:** strange word, in the Hophal, the passive voice and it means the destruction of Nineveh was fixed from the outside, it's destruction was determined and the one who determined it was God. He is the one whose justice is being meted out in Nineveh's destruction.

**She is stripped, she is carried away,** stripped means "to remove," and some say its a reference to the queen of Nineveh, usually not mentioned, usually they were kept out of public in secret chambers, but here she is rapidly being removed and carried away by chariot. Or it could just be the city personified as a female, being stripped of its wealth and carried away. If it's the queen then **her handmaids** are with her and they **are moaning like the sound of doves, Beating on their breasts.** However you approach the text it's the end of Nineveh, it's chaos in the streets of Nineveh and people are lamenting the destruction of the city.

Verse 8, **Though Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days,** it was a place of luxury, a resort city with beautiful gardens and pools, but **Now they are fleeing;** As they flee the call goes forth, "**Stop, stop,**" **But no one turns back.** The destruction is too much; they are fleeing for their lives. Such was the destruction of Nineveh in 612BC. Such was the way that God handled the little evil problem in Assyria. The point of the narrative is to give it in brief, vivid language to emphasize that Nineveh's end would come quickly. It was the end of her reign of terror, impalement, beheadings, burning alive, raping and desecrating the image of God and the gospel would be heralded throughout Judah. Nineveh the evil empire had fallen and they could now celebrate their feasts, pay their vows and rejoice. Never would Assyria rise to such power again. Nineveh was never rebuilt. It was so utterly destroyed Xenophon and 10,000 Greeks marched right past Nineveh and didn't even see it. Alexander the Great fought the great battle of Arbela in 331 BC without knowing that Nineveh was nearby. It disappeared in the sands of time until in 1845 Austen H Layard discovered and identified it. It had lain there untouched for 2,500 years covered by a 30-metre high, 100-acre mound.

Alright, that's the destruction of Nineveh and it's a detailed prophecy of how the destruction would take place given 40 years before it took place. And it shows that the LORD is slow to anger and great in power. And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. We now have historical verification



that God will solve the problem of evil, that yes, God allows evil to persist for a time, and He has a good and sufficient reason for that. That's God's grace, but finally God's grace comes to an end and judgment falls. Next time if you'll read ahead we'll study the plundering of the city that happened the next year.

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if for a future time when the saints of God are persecuted, Rev 6:9-11, and the cry to judge.

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