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**C1117 – May 18, 2011 – Nahum 2:8-13**  
**Description Of Ninevah's Plundering**

Tonight I want to work through the text and then we want to conclude with some basic rules for interpreting Scripture. Nahum makes two major contributions. One is to the problem of evil and so far we've said there are two major things that come into play. One, undermine the atheist attack by challenging them to give an account for morals and ethics in their worldview, without borrowing absolute standards of justice from the God of the Bible. Two, as creatures we are no position at all to question whether God has a good and sufficient reason for suffering. So, number one - atheism can't account for evil and suffering and two - it is in no position to evaluate whether God has a good and sufficient purpose for it.

Later tonight we want to look at another contribution Nahum makes and that's how to interpret prophecy. Really, all of the Bible, but prophecy in particular because Nahum is a prophecy that has already been fulfilled. So Nahum is a test case. There are people with a lot of letters behind their name arguing that prophecy should be interpreted differently than past-fulfilled prophecy, that we have different principles of interpretation at work between past prophecy and prophecy.

But first let's go to the text. Nahum 2:8 brings us to the plundering of the city of Nineveh. It came to an end in 612BC. It began within 50-100 years after the Flood, say 2300BC. It was built by a famous son of Ham, evidently one of the great architects of the post-diluvian world. His name was Nimrod. He built eight cities; Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, all in the southern portion of modern Iraq. On toward the northern portion he built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, and Resen. These were ancient and great cities founded in the world after the Flood and we're studying one that was destroyed by a flood, though lesser scale, in the year 612BC, the city of

Nineveh. It sat right on the eastern bank of the Tigris River and it had two tributaries flowing through it which fed into the Tigris. There was plenty of water at hand to destroy the city, particularly because ancient historians note that during the siege heavy rains caused a nearby river to flood. Surely they had floods now and then and so to manage these floods the Ninevites had constructed sluice gates which could be raised and lowered to regulate the amount of water that entered and passed through the city. It was an elaborate canal system designed by Sennacherib who built a great park beside his palace and planted all kinds of herbs and fruit trees that had been imported from Babylon. Through these irrigation canals he could water his gardens and make it blossom like an extravagant resort. That's what is being referred to in verse 8, **Nineveh was like a pool of water**, the Hebrew word for **pool** doesn't refer to natural ponds, it refers to man made reservoirs fed by irrigation canals. **Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days**, it looks back in time and reports it was like a resort villa with plenty of flowing water, cool pools and magnificent gardens. Everyone wanted to be there, people flocked to Nineveh to enjoy the luxurious lifestyle.

But **Now they are fleeing**, literally, the people are flowing out of the city just as water flowed out of the city, it's very picturesque, it picks up the imagery of this beautiful resort city with water flowing through it to describe how the people are flowing out of it in the heat of the attack. In 3:17 we get the picture that the military officers on the wall are chaotically abandoning their posts and fleeing in all directions and so the top officers cry, **Stop, Stop**, presumably calling the soldiers back to defend the city **But no one turns back**. There's no hope, only fear and chaos, they had ruled others with fear and chaos, now they were in fear and chaos. Diodorus records that the king, Sin-shar-ishkun, realizing his defeat "sent away his three sons and two daughters with much treasure into Paphlagonia," that's in northern Turkey, "to the governor of Kattos, the most loyal of his subjects." The Babylonian Chronicles record, "At that time Sin-šar-iškun, king of Assyria, died."

The victory being secured, commands are now issued in verse 9, God commands the invading armies of the Babylonians and the Medes to **Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! For there is no limit to the treasure—Wealth from every kind of desirable object.** <sup>10</sup>**She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste!** According to the Babylonian Chronicle "They carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple and

turned the city into a ruin heap.” Reports from ancient historians indicate it was the richest city in the ancient Near East in the seventh century BC, the treasures reported were so immense they border on the fabulous. “In the time of Ctesias the riches of Nineveh were estimated at an infinitely greater amount than the enormous treasures accumulated in the treasuries of the Persian empire...the conquerors of Nineveh, the Medes and Chaldaeans...furnished Ecbatana and Babylon with gold and silver from the booty of Nineveh to an extent unparalleled in all history.”<sup>1</sup> This is considered, literally, the greatest plundering of treasure ever in the history of the world. They had accumulated these treasures through their strategy of deportation, colonization and plundering. Remember they used deportation and colonization as a form of psychological warfare; it was easier for them if their enemies surrendered out of fear and paid annual tribute of gold and silver into their storehouses. If the enemy wasn’t psyched out by the possibility of deportation and colonization then they would be attacked, the old people and rebels would be slaughtered, those who succumbed would be deported and colonized to preserve human resources. In the lands they were deported to they would send their own native Assyrians to rule over the captives and so they could use them as slave labor, they could levy taxes from them and all of that wealth would go into these storehouses. Of course, if they defeated your city and deported you they would plunder your city of all its assets. Fourth, they controlled the trade routes all in the region that sat at the middle of the world, trade routes from Africa into Asia and Europe, and they could tax the transportation of goods and services and so they had these four means of becoming the richest city in the ancient Near East in the seventh century BC.

Now, when we read the historical reports of the Assyrians and the Babylonians we discover that the plundering occurred in two phases. There was the plundering immediately after the battle, probably anything that was easy to grab, later on there was a second plundering where they had the time to go through the wreckage and find storehouses of treasure. But the OT just records here that the plundering would occur and that it did.

Verse 10, **She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste!** The once lush resort city was totally plundered and left in ruins. As the Babylonian Chronicle reports, “The city [they turned] into a mound and ruin heap.” The lesson here is that when God destroys evil He destroys it completely. This is a foreshadowing of when God completely separates good from evil forever. It’s a

complete destruction, not a partial one. When God judges His enemies He finishes it completely, He pursues them into darkness and wipes them out thoroughly. Like Jericho, there was no one left except Rahab and her house, a perfect discrimination between good and evil, everyone outside of Rahab's house was totally destroyed. But it's more than just physical evil that God takes care of. For example, in the end times evil is portrayed primarily as economic. Economics evil? Yeah, there are principles of economics that are evil. It all gets developed in Daniel 2 evil where the statue signifies the four kingdoms; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Each of those kingdoms makes a contribution to Gentile kingdoms, one contributes an economic system, another contributes a legal system, another contributes a philosophical system and another contributes a military system. And then comes this stone cut out without hands and it smashes the whole statue. The point, one of the points of that destruction of the whole statue, is to impress upon us that evil is embedded in the structure of Gentile economics, the structure of Gentile legality, the structure of Gentile philosophy and the structure of Gentile military. At heart they are all evil and so when God's kingdom comes on earth the structure of His kingdom is not going to syncretize with the structure of man's kingdom. He's going to smash all of it and establish a whole new system that is 100% good. And that's the kind of separation that is being described here, it's a total destruction of evil, Nineveh was evil and we can be joyful that when our God destroys evil he doesn't just destroy part of it, He destroys all of it. It's like cancer, if you have cancer and it's supposed to be surgically removed do you want all of it removed or just part of it? You want all of it. Why? Because if you don't remove all of it then the little bit that remains behind will rear its ugly head again and kill you. Same principle at work here, when God destroys evil He destroys it all.

So look at the destruction in verse 10. If we knew Hebrew we could see that a literary device was being used here. There are three words, those you can see, **emptied, desolate and waste**, in the Hebrew these three words sound like water flowing out of a bottle when read aloud. It's supposed to heighten the destruction of Nineveh, it will come like a flow of water, rapid, destructive, total. So I'll try to do a rendition of this so you can hear what a Hebrew reader of the Scripture would hear. It's supposed to sound like pouring water out of a bottle, so here it goes, *buqah umevuqah umevullaqah*. It's water going glub, glub, glub and you can tell there are some things lost in

translation. That's why your Bible teacher needs to know some of the language so he can bring out what's lost. Now some translators have tried to preserve this and so they've translated it "destruction, devastation, desolation" and that's about as good as you can do to preserve this onomatopoeia in the text. Nineveh would come to destruction like a flood of water coming out of a bottle.

Now in response to the *buqah umevuqah umevullaqah* there's a series of four anatomical and physiological reactions among the Ninevites. What happens physiologically, when *buqah umevuqah umevullaqah* comes upon you is you fear and when we're afraid adrenaline is released by our adrenal glands which sit on top of our kidneys and it produces a flight or fight response. Which way are you going to go, it's a life and death situation, are you going to fight or are you going to take flight. Well it was producing a flight response in this scenario and it you can see the physiological response in four areas. First their **hearts, their hearts are melting**. These are quick in the Hebrew, real quick, terse descriptions. There's a literary power to these verses in the original. **Hearts melting**, that means they have no will left to fight, no confidence left, their hearts are melting. Second their **knees, their knees are knocking**, they're trembling with fear, they're having a hard time standing up. Third, **also anguish is in the whole body** or better, their stomach's are churning, their stomachs are upset, the stomach get's upset when it can't digest food and it can't digest food when all the blood is supplying other parts of the body. And that's the picture here. And fourth, **all their faces are grown pale!** They've gone white as a sheet and you can imagine if this was happening you to the adrenaline would be pumping and you'd face some of these physiological reactions. **hearts melting...knees knocking...stomachs churning...faces turning pale!** This is the flight response.

Now in verse 11, **Where is the den of the lions And the feeding place of the young lions, Where the lion, lioness and lions cub prowled, With nothing to disturb them? 12The lion tore enough for his cubs, Killed enough for his lionesses, And filled his lairs with prey And his dens with torn flesh.** Now Nineveh is here pictured as a lion's den. The lion is an apex predator. This means that they are at the top of the food chain and they don't have any predators of their own. This was the position of Assyria. They were at the top and considered themselves free from any predators. They

would go out from the den of Nineveh and kill their prey then return to the den. And now a mockery of questions comes, **where is the den of the lions?** You thought you were invincible at the top of the food chain. Where is **the feeding place of the young lions**, the young Assyrian warriors would remain in the city and feast on the plunder of their enemies brought back by the top warriors. **Where is the den where the lion, lioness and lions cub prowled?** Nineveh was safe and secure, or so they thought. That's what pride does to you. It gives you a sense of overconfidence and you think you're such a big boy and then one day bam, you fall on your face. Pride cometh before a fall. So where is Nineveh now, where is the nice den you used to sit in so comfortably **with nothing to disturb** you? Huh, huh, and its mockery, where are you now? Dead or fleeing. That's where.

And vv 12-13 give the reason. **The lion tore enough for his cubs, Killed enough for his lionesses, And filled his lairs with prey And his dens with torn flesh.** The lion is also a keystone species" and this means it plays a critical role in maintaining a region, keeping it healthy, and Assyria was given the chance to serve this role but they overstepped their bounds and destroyed the region. They did not fulfill the role of keystone nation properly. They killed too much, they went too far, they killed with brutality, they killed with terrorism, they destroyed to great degree and I've taken you through some of their techniques. They developed impalement. That was an Assyrian idea. It wasn't just a stick in the chest and you die, that's not theatrical enough, they impaled you through your anal orifice with a dull point, using a sledgehammer so it didn't pierce your organs but rather worked its way through your body, behind your sternum and up to your jawbone where they rested it so you wouldn't slide down the pole. That way it took you a long time to die because the pole sealed off internal blood flow. Think about how much study of human anatomy and physiology it takes to come up with that, think about how much time it takes to actually impale someone. I'm sure they got adept at it but this is depravity thought out thoroughly. They went too far. It's one thing to be a keystone nation and preserve and maintain freedoms through killing bad guys, it's another thing to go in and rip innocent people to shreds. **The lion tore enough for his cubs, Killed enough for his lionesses, And filled his lairs with prey. And his dens with torn flesh.** They destroyed and plundered too much, they went too far and when that happens God finally says, that's it, and boom, He judges.

Verse 13, **Behold, I am against you,” declares the LORD of armies,** hosts means armies and it usually refers to angelic armies, the angelic hosts, but it can refer to any instrument of war the LORD uses to wage war. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It’s a bad idea to be an enemy of God because now you’re talking about facing someone with unbridled strength, unlimited power, infinite resources, so it is not a good day when the LORD is against you because it means your time has run out, grace has come to an end and doom has arrived, judgment has come. There’s always grace before judgment but you want to respond to the grace. Today is a time of grace but what happens is people are lulled to sleep by the ethics of common grace, common meaning God extends grace to everyone, He gives them food and water and air to breathe, it’s all common grace and people love the ethics of common grace because they can sin and sin and seemingly get away with it. And what happens is people think, well, if there is any such thing as the ethics of judgment they probably will never come so I’m going to keep on sinning and sinning and sinning. And that’s dangerous because the ethics of judgment will come, they will fall. They fell on Nineveh and they will fall on the world, at some unknown time, suddenly, without warning, boom it’s going to all collapse, everything you see around you, from the physical structure of our world to the spiritual structure underneath it, it will all come tumbling down. And they will come tumbling down when the Lord of armies says that’s it. Then it’s going to be man against man, it’s going to be angels against man, it’s going to be angels through nature against man.

Their time has come out. **Behold I am against you, declares the LORD of armies. “I will burn up her chariots in smoke,** the chariots were her most deadly military machine, I’ll burn them up says the Lord, **a sword will devour your young lions;** the young lions are the warriors, death by sword, **I will cut off your prey from the land, and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard.”** They sent out messengers to terrorize with propaganda. They had a big propaganda machine. Remember Rabshekah and his boys coming up to Jerusalem from Lachish? They came with loud boasting. It was one of the tactics of the Assyrians to use propaganda to put fear into people. So he says no more will your propaganda machine run around causing fear. You’re cut off from the prey of the land.

Now, to conclude let's make some application to interpreting Scripture. Nahum contributes to this because Nahum is prophecy that has been fulfilled. There are certain principles that we can draw out of Scripture that will help us interpret Scripture. And Nahum is important because it is prophecy. So what we want to do is draw out a principle for interpreting prophecy from the Book of Nahum. How do we interpret prophecy? What can we learn from the fact that Nahum is a prophecy and Nahum has been fulfilled? Does that lay down a rule for all time so far as interpreting other prophecy passages? Here we have a clear case of a very detailed prophecy and a detailed fulfillment of the prophecy. And so can we look at this as a basis for how to interpret other prophecy passages? I see no valid reason why we should not take a previously established pattern and not follow that pattern. What pattern is laid down in Nahum? Well let's ask some questions? Does Nahum use what we might call literal fulfillment? Take verse 9 of chapter 2. Is this literal? "Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! For there is no limit to the treasure—is that literal silver, literal gold and literal treasure? Or is it spiritual silver, spiritual gold and spiritual treasure? What was an Israelite reading this supposed to understand by it? I think literal silver, literal gold, literal treasure, I can't see what he could possibly have seen beyond literal silver, gold and treasure. However, does Nahum use what we might call figures of speech? Take chapter 2, verse 11. "Where is the den of the lions And the feeding place of the young lions, Where the lion, lioness and lion's cub prowled..." Now is this literal lions or figurative lions? Figurative. How do we know that? We know that from the context don't we. We're not denying that figures of speech are used in prophetic portions of Scripture, we're affirming that. But the only way to know whether it's to be taken as literal as verse 9 or figurative as verse 11 is to look at the context. God's not talking about some lions that lived around Nineveh that were killing too much food. He's talking about people that are lion-like in their appetites for killing, in fact, they're over-eating. And how do we know that? From context. So it's not that all prophecy is just straight literal interpretation. Prophecy can and does contain figures of speech. Who are the lions? The Assyrians. Where is their den? It was Nineveh. Are the Assyrians and Nineveh, are they literal? Yes. Literal people and a literal city.

So one basic principle of Bible interpretation is context, context, context, a text taken out of context is not a proof text but a pre-text. And it's probably the most abused principle simply. People say, well you can make the Bible



mean anything you want. And yes, you can if you're an idiot and you disregard context. The Bible is not a list of blurbs. More commonly what happens is this principle is abused because people memorize verses rather than paragraphs. That's why I try to encourage you to memorize paragraphs, not verses. When you read or memorize a verse you are taking it out of a context. You may pick up verse 11 here and just start reading and then you might think it's a historical narrative about a lion that was causing havoc to some people or tribe. That one's obvious but there are others that are much less obvious and people abuse all the time. So memorize paragraphs because at least the paragraph provides an overall context for interpreting the individual verses. So you have the principle of context. Of course you have what we call circles of context. The verse must be interpreted in light of the verse before and the verse after, then those verses have to be interpreted in light of the paragraph, the paragraph has to be interpreted in light of the whole book, the book has to be interpreted in light of the testament, new or old and so there are ever enlarging circles of context. That's one principle we can learn from prophetic passages, they must be interpreted in context.

A second principle we have to learn is the literal principle. Sometimes called the golden rule of interpretation. "When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise." In other words, the literal principle. You have to be careful here for a few reasons. One, what may be "plain", "ordinary" or "usual" to you may not have been to the original audience. Two, there are often several literal meanings of a word. For example if I use the word silver in verse 9, what's the first meaning that comes to mind? The real object, the element, the bright shiny metal. But there are other literal meanings to silver. For example silver is also a color. That's an equally literal meaning of silver. However, is that what they mean in verse 9, plunder the color silver? Plunder the color gold? No. So in this case there is more than one literal interpretation. How do I conclude that the right literal interpretation is the bright, shiny metal and not the color? The context. So be aware that there can be more than one quote "literal meaning" of a word under investigation. But that the decisive factor is the context it is arranged in. Is it sometimes hard to determine which literal usage is being used? Yes. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's easy, it depends on how close

the meanings of the word are and the context at hand. So that's why I'm not too happy with everything in this principle. It's not as straight forward as it sounds. Do you see that?

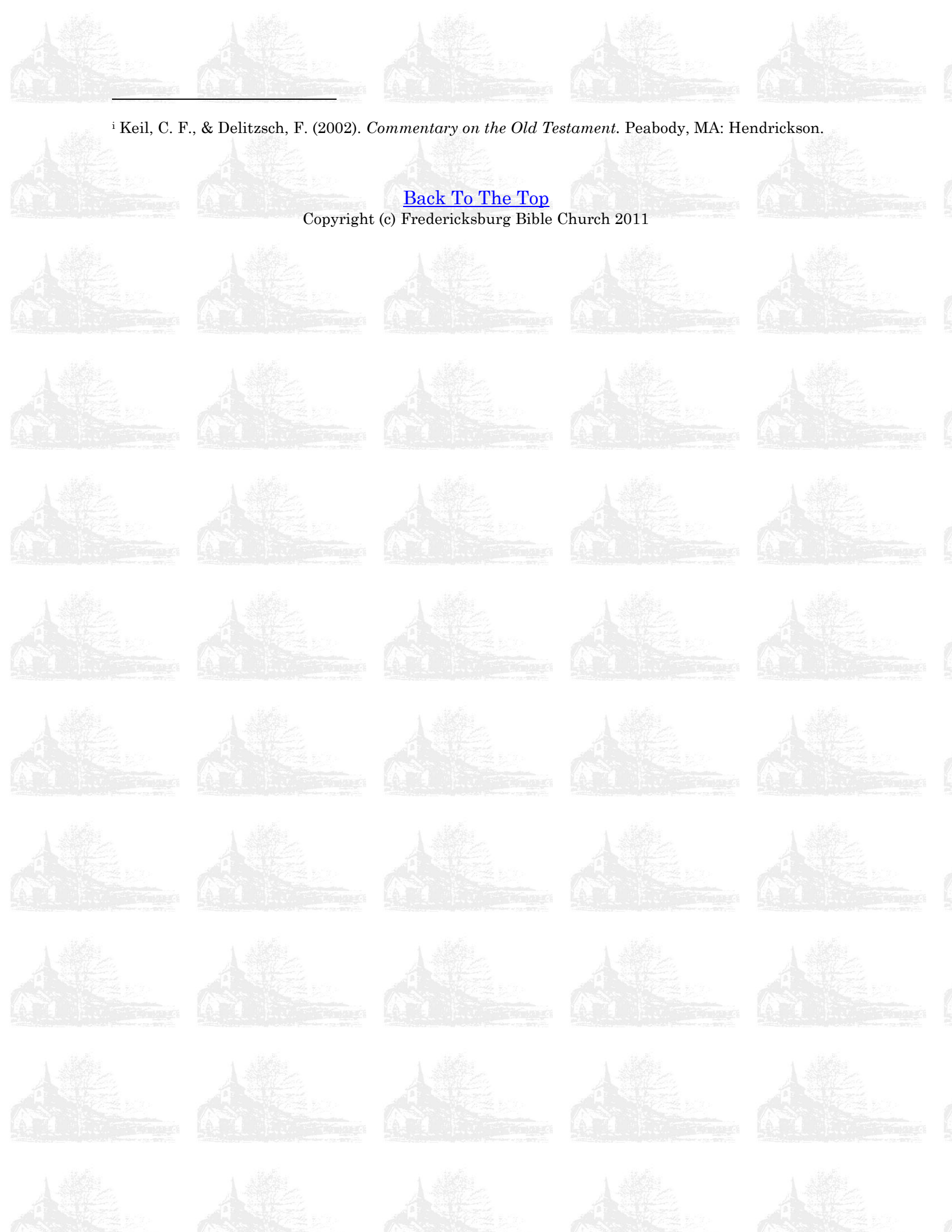
So let's say we're going on the other side of this and the plain sense doesn't make common sense, so we want to seek another sense. What other sense could there be than the literal sense? A figurative sense. By figurative we mean that it takes the real object or idea of the word and borrows one or more of its characteristics and applies it to some other object. This is completely valid. We have no problem with this. Every language uses figures of speech in this way. For an example let's use lion again in verse 11. What's the real object called a "lion." It's the animal. Okay, fine, now, how do we know this isn't the real object, the animal lion in verse 11? How do we know we should seek another sense? Because that doesn't make sense in the context. We keep going back to that rule. But if it's not the animal lion or another literal meaning then what other kinds of meanings are there? Figurative. Lions are characterized as ferocious animals. So if I see a person that is ferocious I can refer to them as a lion in a figurative way. So that's a figurative usage of lion and we have no problem with that. That's in the lexicon under the word lion. It's a valid use. So both literal and figurative language are common in prophetic literature and both are valid and we recognize them.

However, that said we have to make a qualification by the principle of continuity of usage. What do we mean by that? Continuity of usage. We mean that the ways the word was used in the original lexicon limit how you can understand it. Words do change meanings over time but you can't read later meanings back into earlier writings. That's something that is very critical to understand. If you could do that then the meaning of the text would be changing over time, as words changed the meaning would change and in that case the meaning you assign could not possibly be the meaning the original audience got. So this protects against losing the original meaning of the text. So continuity of usage is a principle. If I read Israel what does Israel mean to the people of Israel? Does that mean Church? Or is Church a modern meaning of Israel to specific theological camps?

That said we should never spiritualize or allegorize the text. I never saw Nahum do that. People will say, but there are symbols. Yeah, there are symbols, that's figurative speech, we have no problem with that. Figurative

usage we're good with, that's valid, spiritualizing or allegorizing is not figurative usage. It's something different than figurative usage. It's redefining a word, assigning a meaning, imputing a meaning to a word that is not the real object or even a characteristic of the real object. And this is what I'm talking about when people say Israel is the Church. What's going on is they're not respecting continuity of usage and they're saying that later revelation adds new meaning or changes the meaning of the original. So if I were an OT Israelite and I read Israel I knew that referred to the 12 Jewish tribes, now in the NT when I see Israel a new dimension is added to the original and now includes Gentiles or the meaning in the NT is changed altogether and when I see Israel it simply means the Church and then I read the Church back into the OT because I'm committed to one people of God, the elect. The problem with that is it violates continuity of usage and you can't do that because this is legal material, these are legal documents, that's why we call them old and new testaments, they're testimonies and testimonies lose their validity if they're changing from century to century. How do I know if promises have been kept if the meaning is changing? I can't. So people violate this and they say, well, yeah, land meant the physical real estate of Canaan to Abraham but later we learn that land really meant heaven, it was a spiritual land the text was talking about. So that's spiritualizing or allegorizing the text and I'm saying that if the text is going to do that they tell you. I know of two places they tell you, hey, right here I am allegorically interpreting the text, Gal 4:24 and Rev 11 this is spiritually speaking. So when the author is going to do that he tells you he's going to do it. We don't have the authority to do that. We aren't inspired to interpret the text that way. They were; they were carried along by the Holy Spirit in that procedure.

So there are a few basic principles of hermeneutics and Nahum can help us see that prophecy is fulfilled by using these principles; one, interpreting in context which you can train yourself to do by memorizing paragraphs, two, the golden rule of literal interpretation, three, the use of figurative or symbolic meanings. Four, continuity of usage across time, don't change or add to what the original author or audience intended and five, don't spiritualize or allegorize the text, that's assigning meaning to the text, it miss-identifies things simply because you want to find something in the text that's not there.



<sup>1</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (2002). *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

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