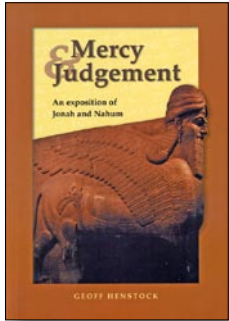


# Contrasting prophecies about the Assyrians

John Nicholls



***Mercy and Judgement:  
An Exposition of Jonah  
and Nahum.***

**Geoff Henstock.**

**106 pages.**

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**B**ROTHER GEOFF Henstock has written many fine articles on various subjects in several magazines circulating in the Brotherhood, and now we have his book on the prophecies of Jonah and Nahum. It is an excellent exposition. Our brother's use of English and his style of writing are attractive, and this book is the fruit of much research into the meaning of the text and into the archaeology of Assyria. But it is more than that. Brother Geoff has brought out the exhortation that is implicit in these ancient prophecies so that we who live so long after they were written can be helped as we live out our lives. It is also well illustrated with maps and pictures, and includes a helpful bibliography.

The theme of the exposition is accurately reflected in the title: *Mercy and Judgement*. The goodness and severity of God are very evident in His dealings with Nineveh, the book of Jonah demonstrating His grace and the book of Nahum showing His wrath. Brother Geoff begins with a fairly lengthy introduction. Assyria features over a long period of Bible history, beginning with Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-12. Nimrod was the first king, founding not only Babylon but Nineveh too as the basis of the kingdom of men. According

to Josephus, Nimrod inspired a humanistic approach to life. Assyria appears again in Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24, and later in the times of the kings of Israel and Judah. There is much archaeology to verify the Bible accounts, and Brother Geoff refers frequently to the Assyrian records.

## **Jonah**

He begins his exposition of Jonah by considering the date of the prophecy. We are told in 2 Kings 14:25 that the prophet lived in the time of Jeroboam II, and, according to Brother W. H. Boulton, the Assyrians were consumed by internal unrest then, which gave Israel the opportunity to extend her borders and become prosperous.

The reasons for Jonah disobeying God's charge to preach to Nineveh are discussed at length, and Brother Geoff concludes: "Jonah was hopeful that his disobedience would prevent Nineveh from repenting and by implication give Israel more time for repentance. He was willing to perish in order that Israel might live. That is why we should not be too harsh on Jonah. He sinned, but his motives were high—misplaced, but selfless. When we sin are our motives always selfless, or are they selfish?" (p. 30).

Jonah 2 is a remarkable prayer and psalm, which Brother Geoff suggests was spoken after Jonah had been vomited out by the great fish. The words are considered in detail by Brother Geoff, including the puzzling statement in verse 8, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy".

Chapter 3 of Jonah sees Jonah "not yet fully converted but . . . now resolved to obey God's command" (p. 41). The phrase "that great city" (1:2) is shown to be entirely accurate, for Nineveh comprised a complex of cities over 500 square kilometres in area, where a large number of people and also much cattle could have lived. The repentance of Nineveh, which included both man and beast being covered with sackcloth, is shown to be entirely in keeping with the practices of the age. It was even the case that the king of Assyria at that time, Adad-Nirari III, was monotheistic,

and therefore more likely to respond to Yahweh God of Israel than other Assyrian kings. Again there is much careful study of words and balanced exposition in this chapter for the reader to enjoy.

In the last chapter of the prophecy Jonah challenges the righteousness of God (v. 2). Brother Geoff comments: "In this there is a powerful lesson. Jonah challenged the righteousness of Yahweh in his complaint, which is wrong. But how many of us when we fail to understand something or feel angered by events around us take our queries and concerns to God? It is better to pour out our concerns to God than to bottle them up; but we must also learn to acknowledge and seek to understand His righteousness" (p. 49).

After the incident with the gourd, Jonah is still, like Elijah, wanting to die. Brother Geoff writes, "Of course Yahweh should have saved Nineveh! As servants we have no right to question the actions of our master. Like Jonah we have been commanded to preach the gospel. Our commission is to the world, not just to Assyria. Let us then learn the lesson of Jonah, and enthusiastically launch ourselves into the work of Yahweh, without attempting to twist it to our own ends" (p. 52).

"Jonah in the New Testament" is the title of the final chapter of the exposition of Jonah. Nineveh repented when Jonah was saved from the belly of the great fish after three days and nights. The Gentiles have repented at the preaching of Christ, and there will be many Ninevites found worthy at the judgement seat, as Jesus said (Lk. 11:30-32). A suggestion is made on page 58 that Jonah was a type of the Apostle Paul.

## Nahum

The prophecy of Nahum is a very different book from Jonah, and Brother Geoff suggests that Isaiah 10 forms a link between the two books, for God spared Nineveh so that they could be used later as the rod of His anger against His wayward nation of Israel.

Written over 100 years after Jonah, Nahum (meaning 'the comforter') predicts the overthrow of the seemingly impregnable Assyria. The Assyrians, the repentant ones excepted, were generally cruel, oppressive, drunken and militaristic. They were at the zenith of their power when Nahum prophesied of their sudden and total collapse. Brother Geoff begins by considering the word "burden" and the meaning of the term "Nahum the Elkoshite".



Picture: Lawrence Cave

### **Tiglath-pileser III, one of the most powerful and cruel of the Assyrian monarchs.**

Apparently Nahum 1:2-8 is an acrostic poem (just as Psalm 119 is acrostic), but only up to the eleventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet. These verses are grand, and one can understand the use of the acrostic form as an *aide-mémoire*, but why are not many other scriptures also in this form?

On pages 70-71 Brother Geoff considers why the Ninevites were the enemies of God. Firstly, they opposed Israel, His people. Secondly, their attitude to the grace of God was offensive. They had apostatised from the faith they had developed under the teaching of Jonah, and, in the words of Paul, they were 'frustrating the grace of God'. Brother Geoff makes the point that there is a powerful exhortation in this for all who have experienced the grace of God, that we should not live unfaithfully. 1:10 rebukes the Ninevites for their heavy drinking, and Brother Geoff quotes ancient historians who say that Nineveh fell because they were having a wild party celebrating their supposed success. Chapter 1 of Nahum ends with an indictment of the "counsellor of Belial" (v. 11, mg.), possibly the Rabshakeh of Isaiah 36, and the Assyrian gods. The last verse of the chapter is clearly Messianic, for it is very similar to Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace". Probably Josiah, who came to the throne when Assyria lost their control of Judah, was the primary fulfilment, but only under the Lord Jesus Christ will the prophecy receive complete fulfilment.

Nahum 2:1 speaks of a single person destroying Nineveh, but it was the Medes and Bab-

ylonians who brought the nation to an end. In reality it was our God Who broke their power, as the "hammer" (mg.). Verses 3 to 7 describe the battle in detail, and Brother Geoff shows us how accurate that detail is. The result was that Nineveh was destroyed so thoroughly that at one time scholars did not know the whereabouts of the ruins of the city.

The third chapter of Nahum's prophecy comments on the cruelty of the Assyrians. Brother Geoff helps us to appreciate the Hebrew text better. He says about verses 2 and 3 that they "are written in short, sharp, jolting sentences" (p. 86), and quotes the Jerusalem Bible rendering. The Assyrians were not only a cruel people, but they were idolatrous too, like Russia today with the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church. And God condemns them for this idolatry. Parallels are drawn with Thebes (the "populous No" of verse 8) and its destruction, which would have taken place shortly before Nahum wrote his prophecy. The prophet says that the Ninevites would become like "women" (v. 13) as their morale collapsed in the overthrow by the Medes and Babylonians.

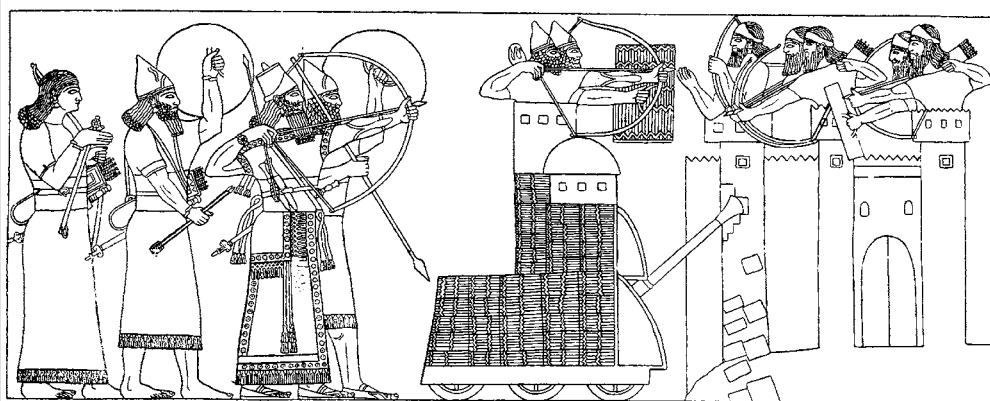
### Concluding observations

Brother Geoff ends his exposition with two major observations. The first is that its remains were excavated by the French archaeologist Botta and

the English archaeologist Henry Layard. This confirmed the accuracy of the Scriptures at a time when the critics were casting doubt on it, and when Darwin was developing his atheistic evolution theory. He quotes Brother W. H. Boulton as saying that the discovery of the ruins of Nineveh at this time is proof of Divine overruling.

His second observation takes the form of a final chapter, "The Latter-day Assyrian". On page 95 he cites Brother Thomas in *Eureka* volume 1: "Israel's deliverance from the Assyrian by the fall of Nineveh was only the **type** of a greater deliverance at the apocalypse of Messiah". Looking at Nahum 1, Isaiah 30 and 31, Micah 5, Numbers 24 and Isaiah 8, Brother Geoff makes a good case for there being a latter-day Assyrian (Russia and her allies, who might include Iraq) who will be destroyed by Jesus and his brethren. He also suggests that Rome could be part of the latter-day Assyrian, and gives his reasons. This last chapter is particularly interesting in view of developing events in Russia, Europe and the Middle East, heralding the return of our Lord.

In conclusion, the reviewer thanks Brother Geoff for two fine expositions, which are well reasoned, beautifully written and illustrated, and full of exhortation, and commends the book to the Brotherhood worldwide and all its friends and young people.



**Assur-nasir-pal II, king of Assyria B.C. 885-860, besieging a city.**

*Drawing taken from Light from the East, or The Witness of the Monuments, C. J. Ball, M.A.*