

How Archaeology Helps Us Understand the Bible

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The Book of Nahum is one of the most stirring denunciations to be found anywhere in literature. In it God pictures the wickedness of the Assyrians and His determination to destroy them. This prediction was fulfilled in a most terrible way in the year 612 B.C. when the enemies of Assyria overwhelmed Nineveh, which was then the capital of a great part of the world, and left it a heap of ruins. Seldom has a great capital been so thoroughly demolished as Nineveh (it has never been rebuilt), yet God predicted it in advance through his prophet Nahum.

In the King James Version the first part of Nahum 1:12 is translated as follows: "Thus saith the LORD; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through." This seems like a strange verse. Why would it be more difficult for God to conquer the Assyrians if they were quiet? The Hebrew word used here is translated "perfect" fifteen times in the King James Version, "full" four times, and besides these there are a few miscellaneous renderings, among which "quiet" occurs only this one time. Thus the basic meaning of the word is "perfect," but this would hardly seem to fit the context.

The American Standard Version of 1901 translates the clause "though they be in full strength and likewise many," but although this seems to make better sense, it is not what the Hebrew says. Similarly, the Revised Standard Version of 1952 says "though they be strong and many," leaving out "likewise" and trying to guess from the context instead of following the Hebrew, as the word involved is never known to mean either "strong" or "full strength."

Is the interpreter of the Bible to be guided by what seems to him to make sense, or is he to seek to find out what God actually said? We at Biblical School of Theology believe the latter is our objective. God has given us His wonderful Word. It is free from error, so we can depend upon it, but we have a duty to interpret it carefully and see exactly what it means.