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The prophet Nahum wrote triumphantly about the destruction of the city of Ninevah in the year 612 BC. With its great city fallen, the Assyrian Empire's long and brutal oppression of its neighbors would come to an end.

Much of Nahum's prophecy taunts the Assyrians, telling them that their overthrow is well-deserved. His closing words are, "There is no assuaging your hurt, your wound is grievous. All who hear the news of you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?"

Nahum also seems to tell the Assyrians that laziness contributed to their downfall: "Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber" (3:18a.). This theme of dangerous laziness comes up again in the New Testament, in II Thessalonians 2: 13-18.

In the first chapter of this second letter to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul offers his thanks that God "chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification" (2: 13). Many of those he is addressing are new converts, so he urges them to hold fast to the teaching they have received by his preaching or his letters. There are those among them, he cautions, who do not have faith. But he reassures them that despite these faithless people, "God is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil" (3: 3).

Paul had preached in Thessalonica's synagogue, as he did in every place he stopped, for several weeks. Working with Timothy and Silas, he had attracted many Jewish converts. There were also Gentiles who had joined the Jewish faith, but were convinced by his preaching to become Christians.

This created a serious problem; some resentful Jewish leaders maligned Paul and accused him of all sorts of moral and ethical failings. The new converts felt surrounded by hostile opponents.

Another problem was that some of the new Christians had been misled into believing that the Day of the Lord had already come. Therefore, there was no need to prepare for it, and no need to do any work. Paul tells the Thessalonians they must "keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition you received from us" (3:6). He offers the example of his own life: "...with toil and labor we worked night and day" (3: 8).

He refers to these idlers as "mere busybodies." They are so lazy that rather than find something productive to do, they spend their time interfering with others' work. Paul has no patience with these people. He commands that everyone should work and earn an honest living. He urges those who are working as they should to keep away from those who refuse to do so.

Kontakion - Tone 2

Illumined by the Spirit,
your heart was a vessel of illustrious prophecy,
seeing far-off things as though they were present.

Yet Paul truly wants every one of God's beloved to be saved. So he tells the Thessalonians not to treat an idle busybody as an enemy, "but to warn him as a brother" (3: 15).