

THE BOOK OF NAHUM
Lesson 5, Chapter 2 Continued

Although we opened Nahum chapter 2 last time, we didn't get entirely through the 1st verse. So, I want to revisit it. It said:

CJB Nahum 2:1 *Look! On the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, proclaiming shalom. Keep your festivals, Y'hudah, fulfill your vows; for B'liya'al will never pass through you again; he has been completely destroyed.*

Most Christians who have some good Bible knowledge and read this want to (rightly) associate this with Zechariah chapter 14.

CJB Zechariah 14:1-4 *Look, a day is coming for Yehoveh when your plunder, [Yerushalayim], will be divided right there within you. ² "For I will gather all the nations against Yerushalayim for war. The city will be taken, the houses will be rifled, the women will be raped, and half the city will go into exile; but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city." ³ Then Yehoveh will go out and fight against those nations, fighting as on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of Yerushalayim; and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, to make a huge valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*

So, here in Zechariah we see God setting His feet on the mountains of Jerusalem in the End Times. However, we have to be cautious and nuanced as to how we connect it to Nahum 2:1. To review what I told you last week, from a biblical standpoint we have to be careful to not organically attach the two English words "deliverance" and "salvation". Although Christian scholars have a bad tendency to flip back and forth between the two words deliverance and salvation making them synonymous, in reality that is not the case. Most often the Hebrew word that means to rescue or deliver from trouble, is **yasha**. But the Hebrew word for salvation in a spiritual sense is **yashua** or **yeshua**.

Sometimes the word can be *teshuah*, which seems to combine some elements of both of those meanings.

Therefore, when we read books in the Tanakh that seem to speak about salvation in the form of Yeshua the Messiah, that is only the case IF the word *yashua* is used. When we read *yasha*, it more heavily means deliverance from oppression of a physical enemy. None of these terms for deliverance or salvation are used in our Nahum passage; it is only implied. And now that we have the ability to look into our rearview mirrors of history, we can see how Nahum 2:1 (about the feet of him who brings good news), will apply differently depending on the era we are dealing with. In Nahum's era, and for the next few centuries, this is NOT the *yashua*, the spiritual kind of salvation. Rather, it is of the *yasha*, the deliverance from an enemy military force. Thus, as Nahum and the Israelites in general would have taken it, it means that the feet on the mountain bringing good news is a human sentinel, a messenger, sent from an Israelite army general to tell the people of Jerusalem that they have been victorious, and thus delivered from that invading military force. Only a long time later does it apply as *yashua*, the spiritual salvation of Israel. Let's re-read chapter 2 and then we will continue with the 2nd half of verse 1.

RE-READ NAHUM CHAPTER 2 all

The key message of the 2nd part of verse 1 is that Israel can resume its biblically mandated festivals. Clearly, Assyria had shut them down or greatly impeded them, and then later on Babylon did as well. Since this message is specifically to Judah, the southern Israelite Kingdom of Judah, then this must be speaking of deliverance from the attempted invasion of Judah by Assyria that God intervened in and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, thus not ever allowing Assyria to fully control Judah and Jerusalem. Be aware, that this is speaking of a time many decades after Assyria successfully invaded the northern Israelite Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel and sent its residents into exile.

Notice that the summons of the Lord for Judah to now begin keeping their festivals (their appointed times), is to also complete their vows. That is, when completing a vow, it was necessary to perform a specific ritual along with a sacrifice, and the only place that could happen was at the Jerusalem Temple. I

want to draw attention that despite the false Church teaching that Yeshua had ended the sacrificial system, Paul certainly did not think so, nor did he teach such a thing.

CJB Acts 21:18-24 ***¹⁸ The next day Sha'ul and the rest of us went in to Ya'akov, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ After greeting them, Sha'ul described in detail each of the things God had done among the Gentiles through his efforts. ²⁰ On hearing it, they praised God; but they also said to him, "You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans, and they are all zealots for the Torah. ²¹ Now what they have been told about you is that you are teaching all the Jews living among the Goyim to apostatize from Moshe, telling them not to have a b'rit-milah for their sons and not to follow the traditions. ²² "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. ²⁴ Take them with you, be purified with them, and pay the expenses connected with having their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that there is nothing to these rumors which they have heard about you; but that, on the contrary, you yourself stay in line and keep the Torah.***

Again, the word Belial pops up to end this first verse. This stanza of the Hebrew poem begins with **ki** (in English, it's the word "for"). We've already discussed how **ki** works in Hebrew poetry. Here, it introduces the meaning of, and explains the great change that is coming for, Judah. Essentially, Assyria is belial. And belial is used as a personification of evil. So, once God has finished His business with Assyria, Assyria is finished existing as an empire. Therefore, God promises Judah that Assyria will never again be their oppressors, because their existence is going to be terminated once and for all.

Let me be clear, though: this in no way means that the former Assyrian empire won't again be reconstituted under a different nation with a different and non-Assyrian king at its head. And essentially Babylon took Assyria's empire away from Assyria. And in later centuries, several independent nations have sprung up where the Assyrian Empire used to exist. Nations come and

go; old ones cease to exist, and new ones arise in their absence, and most often with different national boundaries.

CJB Nahum 2:2 *A destroyer has risen in front of your face; guard the ramparts, keep watch on the road, brace yourselves, marshal all your strength.*

The YLT Bible version puts this verse in a better way.

YLT Nahum 2:1 *Come up hath a scatterer to thy face, Keep the bulwark, watch the way, Strengthen the loins, strengthen power mightily.*

Notice, first how the YLT call this verse, verse 1, whereas the CJB calls it verse 2. It is just a choice of the translator which chapter to put this verse into, but it doesn't harm the context or meaning either way.

What has happened is that from speaking to Judah, now the oracle switches back to speaking to Assyria. The Hebrew word to begin this verse is *mepis*, which means scatterer, and not destroyer. It is meant to describe Yehoveh's effect on His enemy. However, only in the extended spiritual sense is this scatterer that is going to confront Assyria, Yehoveh. Rather, this scatterer must be Babylon and its ally Medea. This is because God is going to use the Babylon/Medea alliance to exert His wrath upon Assyria. Babylon, then, will do to Assyria, what they did to Ephraim/Israel to conquer and then scatter them.

In God's warning to Assyria of what is coming, the tone isn't far from sarcasm. So, what we read is closer to satire. When He tells Assyria to "keep" or to "guard" the bulwark, and to watch the way, and to strengthen their loins, and to strengthen their power, it is to give the King of Assyria advice... knowing he won't follow it until it is too late. There's lively debate over precisely how to translate each of these words in this poetic satire towards Assyria, but pretty much any of the various Bible versions do it well enough to make the point. There's no reason for scholarly debates on such matters because we are dealing with Hebrew poetry anyway, and the precise meaning... and therefore how to try to find the perfect English word to translate the Hebrew words for

of each of these actions... was chosen less by Nahum for its accurate depiction and more for its usefulness in the poetic structure for the purpose of line length, the number of words and letters, the total numeric value of those words, and other such nuances.

That said I will point out one of God's warnings because it will help us to understand a rather common Hebrew phrase that is used in both the Old and New Testaments. That phrase is: gird up (or strengthen) your loins. It was believed in ancient times that the source of a man's strength and vitality was literally in his loins. Just as the source of various kinds of human emotional or intellectual attributes were believed to be centered in various of our organs. So, to gird up and strengthen loins was just a way of saying to make yourself strong, physically and mentally, to prepare for combat.

No doubt this warning seemed absurd to King Sennacherib. Nineveh was a fortress, with an army second to none. The armory grounds of Nineveh alone were over 40 acres... bigger than most walled cities in that era. They had more chariots, horses, bows, spears than any nation on earth. But, for God, none of that matters. Once He has determined your fate... good or bad... it is set in stone.

CJB Nahum 2:3 *For Yehoveh is restoring the pride of Ya'akov, along with the pride of Isra'el; because plunderers have plundered them and ravaged their vines.*

Again the first word of this first stanza is ***ki***. Here it is causal; that is, because of what God just pronounced, what follows is going to happen. What was perhaps the greatest city on earth... a wonder of the world at that time... Nineveh was going to be destroyed, and the glory of that place would now be set aside and given over to Israel. A reversal of fortune that was impossible to even imagine under the circumstances. Just as Egypt had to be destroyed in order for Israel to be redeemed, so Assyria had to be ruined for Israel to be restored. This is such an important God-principle. God's justice demands that those who harm His people will themselves be harmed. And what we find is that the punishment usually follows closely along the lines of how the enemy harmed Israel. Not only is this an issue of God's nature as concerns justice,

but as it concerns Israel, it is to fulfill the promise God made to Abraham so long ago.

CJB Genesis 12:1-3 *Now Yehoveh said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

So, for God, His favor upon them amounts far less to the actual righteousness of Israel (at any point in history) than to the righteousness of the Patriarchs that God will watch over Israel and care for them. Here in Nahum, the overriding reason for His determination to exterminate Assyria, remains the same. Thus, it isn't surprising that these words from Nahum invokes the name of a Patriarch when speaking about God restoring Israel's pride. This stanza literally says "Jacob" (*Ya'acov*). It is interesting that the Hebrew word that is being translated here as restoring, is *sab*. *Sab* is a form of the root word *swb*, and *swb* means to turn or to return. Thus, there is a connection in Hebrew vocabulary between the concepts of restoration and returning.

Again, employing the Patriarch Jacob's name is important to understanding why this word was chosen, but in actual practice Jacob's pride represents the land Israel that was given to them by God. So, this is by no means speaking of the return of the exiles, but rather a recovery of the land itself. The next stanza that is "along with the pride of Israel" it serves to make a play on words. Once again, the YLT version can help us to see the connections and the better sense of what is being said.

YLT Nahum 2:2 *For turned back hath Jehovah to the excellency of Jacob, As to the excellency of Israel, For emptied them out have emptiers, And their branches they have marred.*

By using the word Israel, the meaning now expands to mean all of Israel. Both kingdoms; the northern and the southern. Up to now the prophecy primarily

addressed only Judah. The word that some Bibles translate as destroyers and others as scatterers is **boqaq**, and it means to scatter (not to destroy, which indeed might be a result of scattering, but it is not the scattering itself.) So, whether we go with the YLT's "emptiers" or the more literal "scatterers", the result is the same. The land is emptied by means of scattering the people. But who exactly are the emptiers who did it? Because that then determines whose branches have been marred as the final half of verse 2 speaks of. There are 2 scholarly points of view. First, they are Assyria. Second, they are Babylon who scattered the former scatterers, Assyria.

Israel (and Judah) are regularly called "the vine" in the Bible. Yet here I don't think anyone is being called a name (like "the vine") but rather it is descriptive of vineyards that were ravaged and destroyed. In the end, for me, since the references to Israel as "the vine" are so predominant in the entire Bible, I conclude that the vineyards are Israel's vineyards, and so, the scattered was Israel. To put it another way; the scatterers was Assyria; and the ravaged vines are Israel's vineyards, which doubles as meaning the Israelites themselves.

CJB Nahum 2:4 *The shields of [Ninveh's] warriors are [dyed] red; the soldiers are wearing scarlet. The steel of the chariots flashes like fire as they prepare for battle. The cypress [spears] are poisoned.*

First of all, I have yet to find even 2 Bible versions that word this verse the same. There are a few reasons for this including, once again, grammar that doesn't work correctly as one might expect in normal prose or in Western style poetry. But, as we have discussed numerous times, Nahum is not normal prose; it is Hebrew poetry from his era of history. Once we set that issue aside, then instead of trying find an answer that in the end doesn't even match the surrounding context of the Nahum prophecy, we can bypass that problem and not see it as a problem at all and see this stanza better for what it is trying to tell us.

Here in verse 4 is the swift advance of the enemy forces that are coming to invade Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh. So, this is military oriented in its nature. Yet, this battle has a cosmic element to it... that is, it also blends into

the earthly happenings, matters of the spirit world. We begin with removing the word “Nineveh” that the CJB has added in. Nineveh doesn’t appear here... only the translator thinks that it is Nineveh’s soldiers that are being spoken about. That’s incorrect. These are Babylon’s and the Mede’s soldiers.

The shields are just as we would think of them. They are for defending against their enemies’ arrows and swords. That these shields are red does NOT mean that they are soaked in the blood of their enemy. Rather, it is either they have been painted red, or more likely, they are made from copper. Copper that is polished has a definite reddish color to it. When we encounter what is often translated as “warrior” to mean the soldiers carrying the shields, the Hebrew is ***gibborehu***. It is a form of the Hebrew ***gibbor***, which more means mighty men, hero, a warrior leader... something like that. Not every soldier had a metal shield; the common foot soldier had a shield made from matted reeds covered with an animal hide, or something similar. It was the special warriors and their leaders who had the privilege of having metal shields, as they were far more effective.

Here’s the thing: this term ***gibbor*** (or ***gibbore***) is in rare occasions in the Bible used for the mighty ones of Heaven: the angel warriors. Psalm 103 is a great example of this.

CJB Psalm 103:20 *Bless Yehoveh, you angels of his, you mighty warriors who obey his word, who carry out his orders!*

The second time that warriors are referred to in this verse from Nahum is where we read “the soldiers are wearing scarlet”. An entirely different Hebrew word is used here: it is ***anse-hayil*** (which is often translated as men of valor, but I think that misses the point). These are the regular, common soldiers. And in Heaven, these are the warrior angels that follow the chief warrior angels (the ***gibbore***). In other words, we have here a typically described army consisting of its leaders (who are the best and mightiest of them), as well as the vast number of them who are the common soldiers. And this applies to whether we’re speaking of earthly or Heavenly armies.

These common soldiers are said to be dressed in scarlet. However, there is little agreement among scholars as to a correct translation of the Hebrew *matulla-im*. This word does seem to speak of dyed cloth, but whether it means to speak of the color scarlet is another matter. It is interesting that in Ezekiel 23 we find reference to the Assyrian soldiers wearing purple clothing, and also the Babylonians depicted in a similar fashion. So, whatever color is meant here, it is eye-catching and must be an impressive sight on a battlefield. Some researchers think that the use of a red color is meant to look like blood. Others opine that in the fierce, muddled, close-quarter masses of hand-to-hand combatants, the red of their garments made it easier to distinguish friend from foe.

Next, we read of the steel of the chariots flashing like fire. The YLT probably resolves this the best by retaining a word for word literal translation that is:

^{YLT} **Nahum 2:3** *With fiery torches is the chariot in a day of his preparation*

Whether the word “steel” appears in the verse depends on whether the translator is drawing from the Masoretic Hebrew text or the Septuagint. The Hebrew is *baesh peladot*, which literally means “the metal flashes”. The assumption that it was steel and not just iron is unwarranted. It certainly was metal of some sort that was shiny enough that when the chariots were in full charge, the ambient daytime light would make them have the appearance of torches of fire. Although, once again, I remind us that this is poetry and not just a straightforward historical account that we are reading, so some amount of hyperbole and embellishment is par for the course.

Even so, there were only certain areas on a chariot where we might find metal. Generally speaking, chariots were quite lightweight 2 wheeled carts pulled by a pair of horses. Usually a minimum of 2, and often 3, soldiers stood on it. One to drive, and the other 1 or 2 to use their weapons. They were the tanks of their era. They were most effective and terrifying. But, the weight of a chariot was critical, and so the heaviness of metal had to be used only for things like the axle hubs. And, very probably, the crudely made hubs that made contact

with the metal wheel inserts where they mounted to the chariot axle, threw off sparks as they dashed into battle.

The final part of this verse, which is that the cypress spears are poisoned (according to the CJB), is quite off the mark. The word poisoned is not present, and not even appropriate. Further, the word spears is not present. That these are likely spears is true. What we're being told is that these weapons are made of cypress wood... which I can only assume was common in that day.

Without doubt, this poetic description is meant to invoke the awesome image of the Heavenly hosts of Yehoveh going into battle, even though the prophet also knows that this coming battle will be among human soldiers. But such was the mind of the Hebrews of that era that most predicted things occurred within a reality of duality: it happens on earth and in Heaven, more or less in parallel. The descriptions we are reading are meant to depict these cosmic chariots of fire coming with the unstoppable force of a storm, along with the terrifying shaking of an earthquake (things which traditionally accompany a theophany of God appearing).

CJB Nahum 2:5 *The chariots rush madly about in the streets, jostling each other in the open places; their appearance is like torches, they run here and there like lightning.*

Here we have the invasion of Nineveh happening. What is pictured is the frantic and panicked reaction of the Assyrian military inside the city. They discounted what God said was going to happen, believing in their own invincibility, and now, suddenly, the enemy is already at their gates and in enormous numbers. The RSV Bible version adds some helpful nuances to the meaning of the Hebrew words used.

RSV Nahum 2:4 *The chariots rage in the streets, they rush to and fro through the squares; they gleam like torches, they dart like lightning.*

This again, is what is happening inside the city. It is not that the Babylonians have already breached the walls; but rather that the Assyrians are rushing to

their walls, gates, and vulnerable places to shore up their defenses. So, we have the chariots racing through the city streets and also to and through the various city squares no doubt to assemble in open places. Interestingly, some of the reason we see some variation in translation for this verse has to do with a belief among translators that ancient city streets could in no way accommodate chariots. And it seems that at one time, the enormous city of Nineveh did, indeed, have far too narrow of streets for chariots to navigate.

However, King Sennacherib changed that. Assyrian records about Sennacherib say this: "I (Sennacherib) widened the squares, made bright the avenues and streets... I made its market streets wide enough to run a royal road". So, Nahum paints an accurate and completely plausible description of the military moving about rapidly as the invaders approached.

Once again, the poetic and cosmic descriptive words of what the chariots looked like as they dashed around, combine the earthly chaos with the Heavenly; it is the reality of duality. But the Assyrians needed a miracle, which, of course, never came. The outcome was certain from the moment Nahum uttered his words. I want to repeat something that I've said for each biblical prophet that we've studied. It is that the prophetic future has already been worked out and determined in Heaven, and is, in a certain way, already begun there. However, it is only when Yehoveh gives that prophecy to a human prophet to pronounce to Israel, that on earth the process of fulfillment begins. It is at that moment that prophecy gets transferred from Heaven to earth. It is like a huge boulder that sits atop a tall hill, with a town below in a valley, that gets its first push. Once pushed, nothing can stop that boulder from wreaking its havoc. The prophetic words first spoken by the prophet are what pushes that boulder of fulfillment. From that point forward, the rest is just process that will be carried out over time until its inalterable climax.

CJB Nahum 2:6 *[The king of Ninveh] assigns his officers; they stumble as they march; they hurry to its wall and set up shields to protect the battering ram.*

Although it is awkward sounding, the YLT Bible version re-inserts words that many English versions (such as the CJB) leave out.

^{YLT} **Nahum 2:5** *He doth remember his honourable ones, They stumble in their goings, They hasten to its wall, and prepared is the covering.*

I want to put this in modern English form but keeping those words that are originally there. It is: "His powerful ones are brought to remembrance". I'm rather confident of this because the great 19th century Bible scholar Kiel says this verse means: "He remembers his glorious ones". Although the CJB inserts the words "the king of Nineveh", which are not there, this gloss is true. The "He" to begin this verse is referring to the king of Assyria.

Interestingly, probably half of Bible scholars believe this scene is not of the King of Assyria and his top soldiers, but of the attacking Babylonian forces. Why? Because they get lost in trying to correct grammar or trying to repair what they see as corrupted text... once again ignoring, or not aware of, the workings of this Hebrew poetry. Once the words can be accepted as they are, and the poetic structure is recognized, then sense can be made of it.

The first Hebrew word is **yizkor** and it means "he remembers". Next is **addirayw** that means "powerful ones". This means the King of Assyria remembers (or better, calls to mind) and calls upon and depends on his generals and his top warriors (not just his common foot soldiers) to save the day. Up to now, they have been wildly successful. The stumbling is because of the panicked hurry these warriors are in as they race to reinforce areas of the walls and gates that are being attacked. When next this verse speaks of "prepared is the covering", this is referring to the battering ram the enemy has pulled up close to the city gates. The Hebrew word for covering is **sokek**. It is called in old English a mantelet. When a battering ram is used by the attackers, the defenders will stand on the walls above the gates and pour hot oil down on those using the battering ram, or they rain rocks or arrows on them. So, a covering made of wood and tough animal hides is placed over the battering ram, like a roof, to help protect the soldiers.

Therefore, this scene is of the enemy already in process of breaching the city gates before the city can set its defenses. The result is going to be a swift and bloody end, and full submission of Nineveh into Babylon's hands.

CJB Nahum 2:7 *The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace melts away.*

I prefer the way the Young's Literal Translation puts it:

YLT Nahum 2:6 *Gates of the rivers have been opened, And the palace is dissolved.*

Dissolved is better than melts away, because this speaks of something that happens due to water, rather than of something that melts because of fire. Although I have mentioned this to a small degree in an earlier Nahum lesson, I will take a bit longer quote that Diodorus Siculus made around 2 decades before the birth of Yeshua. It corroborates what Nahum says will happen.

“In the third year, a succession of heavy downpours swelled the Euphrates River, flooded part of the city, and cast down the wall to a length of 20 stades. Thereupon, the king realized that the oracle had been fulfilled, and that the river had manifestly declared war upon the city. Despairing of his fate, but resolved not to fall into the hands of his enemies, he prepared a gigantic pyre in the royal precincts, heaped up all his gold and silver and his kingly raiment as well upon it, shut up his concubines and eunuchs in the chamber he had made in the midst of the pyre, and burnt himself and the palace together with all of them.”

Although indeed heavy downpours swelled the Euphrates River, it was the swelling of the nearby Tigris that overflowed into Nineveh. The person this is referring to is in most likelihood King Sinsharishun. Understand: even though the biblical portrait is of a sudden attack and a swift victory for the invaders, swift is relative to the times. Invasions on well-defended walled cities took months, typically. Sometimes years since fighting could only take place in the dry and warm season. The picture the Bible paints about the fall of Nineveh, combined with the words of Diodorus Siculus, seems to indicate that the Babylonians assaulted the city and damaged it, but in the end it was the flood

that undermined nearly 2 miles of city walls along the Tigris River, allowing them in to sack to the city.

Whether the story of King Sinsharishun's demise is historically accurate or a legend, the amount of booty that Babylon and Medea captured was enormous. Even if the king had tried to burn it up (and thereby take it with him to the netherworld of the dead for a good, comfortable afterlife), that wouldn't have worked. The gold and silver would have remained even if it was now in cooled pools of melted silver and gold, made so by the heat of the fire.

CJB Nahum 2:8 *Its mistress is stripped and carried away; her handmaids moan, they sound like doves, as they beat their breasts.*

Here is the ultimate consequence of Assyria's actions; the people are captured and sent away... some in chains. The exile from their country that was their standing operating procedure on nations they overthrew, is now their own fate. Here is another verse that no 2 Bible versions I've come across agree upon. So, let's again look to a more literal translation and see what we can gain.

YLT Nahum 2:7 *And it is established -- she hath removed, She hath been brought up, And her handmaids are leading as the voice of doves, Tabering on their hearts.*

So, the CJB is among a few versions that eliminates the first Hebrew words of this verse. The Hebrew word to begin it is **hussab**, which comes from a root word that means to "take one's stand". While "it is established" is good, a more concise English term would be "determined" ... "it is determined" ... in the sense that a question or situation has occurred requiring a response, and a decision was made. The KJV takes **hussab** to be a proper noun... a person's office or their personal name... which is not the case, here. In truth, it was Jewish Tradition, found in the Targum, that **hussab** was a person's name.

The range of interpretations of this difficult verse is long. W.A. Maier, some 60 years ago, put together a list with 12 different translations, most of them centered around the meaning of **hussab**. The reality is that this is one of

those ancient biblical Hebrew words that is so obscure and rarely used that only speculation is possible, although some speculations comport better with the overall context than others. So, we're not going to do much better than to understand that this is all about the results of the Babylonian conquest over Assyria as meaning exile for many Assyrians. We'll pause here, and resume with verse 8 next time.