

**The Minor Prophets – volume 2**  
(Explanation on the books of Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk)



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**(Explanation on the books of Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk)**



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São Paulo – SP – Brazil – November 2018

This book is dedicated to the true prophets of God.

Thanks to the Lord for His strength and fidelity to His promises, giving me perseverance, always showing me His truth and broadening my inner vision to see His greatness and sovereignty over all His Creation.

“Do not my words do good to one who walks uprightly?” (Mic. 2: 7b).

“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3: 18).

## Introduction

This book follows volume 1 (about Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah). It arose in the sequence of the study of the book of Isaiah as a curiosity on my part concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, with the thirst to know more deeply what they meant in each verse. I sought to know how to situate prophecy in History, what characters they were referring to, the location of the cities there, and the figures of speech used at the time to give me more insight about the writings of the prophets.

All the prophets were used by God to prophesy about the coming of Jesus, in whom the prophecies were fulfilled. In fact, the coming of Christ was a plan of God the Father that astonished mankind in what it thought about His righteousness and His ability to restore His children. Although they were used by God to reveal His designs to men, the prophets of that time had their thoughts permeated with human opinion and limited vision of something they could not understand or imagine (1 Cor. 14: 32). In other words, they could not imagine that the Father would send Jesus the way He sent, emphasizing His spiritual reign and showing mankind that it needed to be restored from something far greater than it had lost in the material sense such as houses, lands and the power to govern subjects; man needed to understand that the most precious thing he had lost was his intimacy with God and the innocence that once was present in a being similar to him in Eden. He also needed to know his true enemy.

Jesus brought a new dispensation to mankind, which was like an ‘Apocalypse’ to the people of that time (Isaiah is an example of this), like a new Creation. Apocalypse means ‘revelation.’ Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Joel and others have undoubtedly left something about eschatological events, but it is Jesus who gives us the certainty of present and future events through His prophecy set forth in the Gospels. What happens today and will happen at His second coming is a result of what He prophesied about the end times. His prophecy is being fulfilled. Under this point of view, little of the prophets of the OT remained to be fulfilled still as an apocalyptic (eschatological) event, especially for those who already have salvation in Christ. Most prophecies have already been fulfilled. Jesus left, so to speak, what is important for us to know about His second coming; and His apostles John and Paul left their complementation on the subject, using the words of the OT prophets to corroborate their writings and the revelations given by God to them. In relation to the Jews it is another story.

In the writings of the Minor Prophets we can see practically the same message being delivered in many different ways: to seek God, to leave idolatry and to believe in His ever-present righteousness, obeying Him in all things not to provoke His wrath and His judgment, which infallibly come on those who commit perversity. We can see, above all, His mercy and patience, always giving man a chance to repent and be blessed. None of the prophets minced their words but exhorted the people as watchmen of the Lord, making them aware of their sin.

May the Holy Spirit be your guide and teacher in this reading!

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995). The New International Version (NIV) will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand.
- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [ ] or parenthesis ( ), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- In some texts we'll use 'Lexicon Strong's Concordance.' Strong's Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong's Concordance properly it's necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong's numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: Wikipedia.org).

Source of research:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.
- Wikipedia.org and crystalinks.com (for some images).
- Email: [relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com](mailto:relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com)

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Volumes 1 and 3 of this book:

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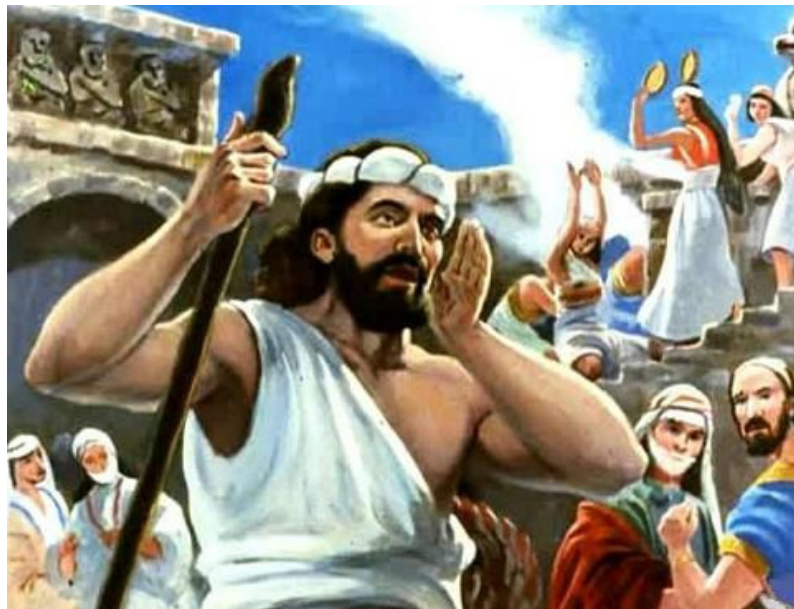
<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets3.pdf>



## Jonah

Jonah (from the Hebrew יוֹנָה, Yonah; in Latin, Ionas) means ‘dove.’ He was prophet of the northern kingdom and acted between 785 and 750 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC). His father was called Amittai (2 Kin. 14: 25; Jon. 1: 1). Jonah was born in Gath Hepher (gath-hahepher, ‘winepress of (the) well’ or ‘hole’), on the border of Zebulun with Naphtali (Josh. 19: 13). It is identified with the present village of el-Meshhed, five kilometers northeast of Nazareth. Jerome (4<sup>th</sup> century AD) said that his tomb was about two miles from Sepphoris, which could be coincident Gath Hepher.

Jonah also prophesied in the period of the Assyrian kings: Adad-nirari III (811-783 BC), Shalmaneser IV (783-773 BC); Ashur-dan III (773-755 BC) and Ashur-nirari V (755-745 BC), when Israel was still without interference from Assyria. It is not known at what period the preaching in Nineveh was done.



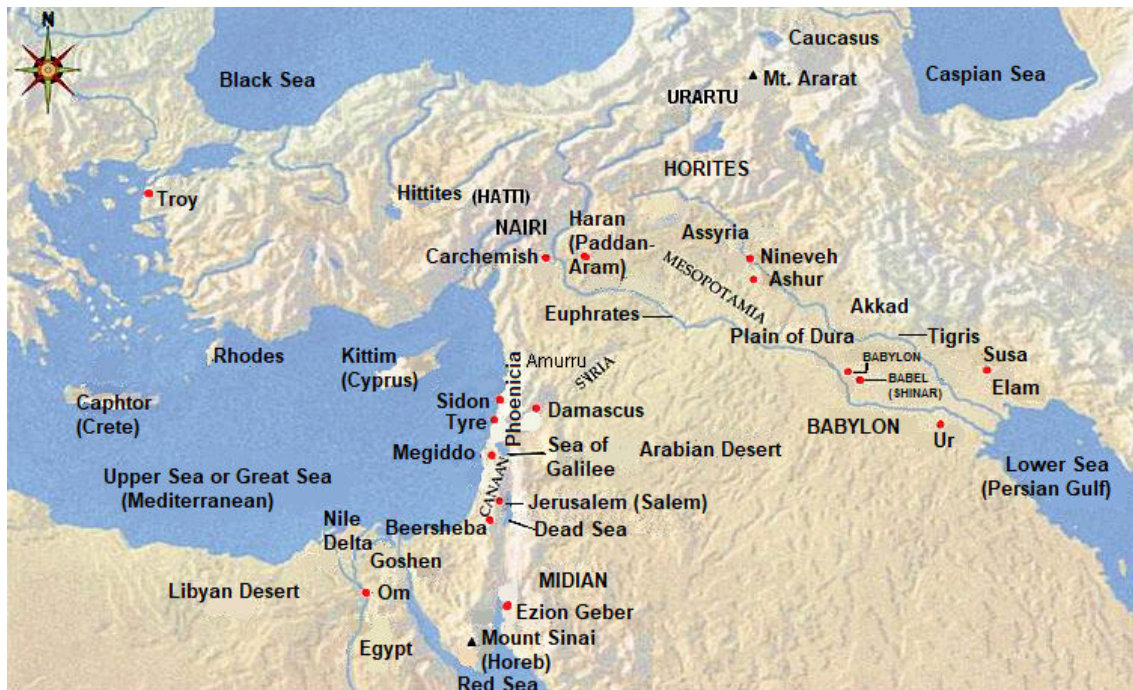
### Political stage at the time:

In the time of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC – 2 Kin. 14: 23-29), the oppression of Syria had diminished over Israel because of the victories God had given to Jehoash, the father of Jeroboam II (2 Kin. 13: 22-25), and he resolved to extend his borders (2 Kin. 14: 25-28) and to develop profitable trade, which created a powerful class of merchants in Samaria. But wealth was not evenly distributed among the people. It remained in the hands of rich merchants. Oppression against the poor was common (Am. 2: 6). Righteousness leaned towards those who could pay higher bribes. In addition to political anarchy, there was idolatry, which had once again prevailed in Israel after the death of Elias and Elisha. The people of Israel were in sin (2 Kin. 17: 7-23), for they followed the footsteps of Jeroboam I (931-910 BC): they worshiped other gods, instead of worshiping the Lord; they walked in the statutes of the heathen nations, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced (1 Kin. 12: 25-33); they built for themselves high places; they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles [NIV: sacred stones and Asherah poles]; they burnt incense in all the high places; they did wicked

things, provoking the Lord to anger and served the idols, especially the two golden calves of Jeroboam I; they made a sacred pole, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury.

As for Jeroboam I (1 Kin. 12: 25-33), the king of Israel (the ten tribes that separated), fearing that the people would return to worship in Jerusalem and return to Rehoboam, he made two golden calves and told the people that these were the gods who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. He also made houses (sanctuaries) on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites. They burnt incense there. At his pleasure Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the Feast of Tabernacles that was celebrated in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar to the calves that he had made in Bethel and Dan. The children of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam I had committed. Therefore, God would reject them and give them into the hands of the Assyrians. Later, Judah followed the example of Israel.

### **Kings of Assyria during Jonah's prophetic office:**



- **Adad-nirari III** (811-783 BC) was the father of the kings: Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V. He made military campaigns until 783 BC, and built the temple of Nabu (Nebo) in Nineveh. He was a vigorous and victorious general who benefited Israel by the campaigns he made, defeating Edom and Damascus. This city was ruled by Ben-Hadad III (796-770 BC; Mari' was its Aramaic title), son of Hazael (843-796 BC), who was caught by surprise by the Assyrian attack and took refuge behind the walls, but had to pay as tribute 23,000 talents of silver, 20 talents of gold, 3,000 of copper and 5,000 of iron, as well as other objects of ivory and wood. This happened in the time of Jehoash king of Israel (798-782 BC), and Amaziah king of Judah (796-781 BC). This Assyrian action against Damascus allowed Jehoash to



recover some villages in northern Israel that were lost to Hazael of Syria in the time of his father Jehoahaz (2 Kin. 13: 22-25).

According to the Assyrian inscriptions, the tribes of Media to the northeast, parts of the Iranian plateau and the northern areas of Assyria (Nairi, Hatti and the kingdom of Urartu) became vassals of Assyria in the reign of Adad-nirari III. Nairi, in Assyrian, means 'land of the rivers', which was the name given in the 13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC to the territory later known as Eastern Anatolia, now the southeast of Turkey. Hatti was to the northwest of Nairi and to the north of Syria; and the kingdom of Urartu was located to the northeast of Nairi. Other states to the west also paid tribute to the Assyrian empire: Tyre, Sidon, Israel ('the land of Omri', as recorded in the Assyrian documents), Edom and Philistia (called Palastu) and Amurru (Syria, near Lebanon). At this time there was peace in Assyria, for the king built a new palace in Calah. After his death, Assyria entered a long period of weakness. Adad-nirari III was succeeded by his son Shalmaneser IV.

- There is very little information on the reign of **Shalmaneser IV** (783-773 BC); only that for three years (781-778 BC) he conducted several campaigns against the kingdom of Urartu, a kingdom to the north of Assyria, a military aristocracy composed of many tribes that the Assyrian empire claimed as his. Their main god was called Khaldi or Haldi, so they called their nation Khaldia. Then there were two more campaigns against Urartu (776 BC and 774 BC). On several occasions, the Assyrian army was forced to retreat. This loss of prestige provoked a revolt in Damascus and great disturbances in northern of Syria. Though disturbed by the king of Urartu, he maintained the pressure against Damascus, and this helped Jeroboam II to extend the borders of Israel to Beq'a ('entrance of Hamath'). Jeroboam resolved to extend his borders, so he conquered Hamath and Damascus (2 Kin. 14: 25-28). The reign of Shalmaneser IV was severely limited by the influence of Shamshi-ilu (Šamši-ilu), who was the commander-in-chief of the army, and these internal dissensions weakened the kingdom, for the succession was uncertain. He was succeeded by his brother Ashur-dan III.



Hamath

- The reign of **Ashur-dan III** (773-755 BC), also a son of Adad-nirari III and successor of his brother Shalmaneser IV, was a difficult time for the Assyrian monarchy, which was still limited by the influence of Shamshi-ilu (Šamši-ilu) the commander-in-chief of the army. In 765 BC Assyria was struck by a plague, and the following year the king could not do military campaign, which was an annual custom. In 763 BC a rebellion broke out in the city of Haran, which was sacked, and another one in the Assyrian province of Gozan. This uprising in the north of the empire was marked by that 'sign of bad omen', an almost total eclipse of the sun (June 15<sup>th</sup>, 763 BC), the eclipse of Bur Sagale (Bur-Sagale was the governor of Gozan). Such revolt lasted until 759 BC, when there was another plague in the kingdom. With all these incidents, the West was free to regroup in order to resist further Assyrian attacks. Ashur-dan III was succeeded by another brother, Ashur-nirari V.

- **Ashur-nirari V** (755-745 BC) was a son of Adad-nirari III, and succeeded his brother, Ashur-dan III. He inherited a difficult situation from his predecessor, because of Shamshi-ilu (Šamši-ilu), the commander-in-chief of the army (tartanu or turtanu), and who still limited the actions of the king. He spent almost four years without military campaigns, and this indicated a seriously weakened reign. Finally, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years of his reign Ashur-nirari V campaigned against Namri or Namar (in Persian; Romanized as Namār; also known as Namārestāq, Namāristāq, and Namāristōq), a name given to a district of present-day Iran. In 746 BC there was another revolt in the empire and the following year Tiglath-Pileser III took the throne of Assyria during a civil war for the succession of the throne and killed the royal family. Although he has assumed himself to be a son of Adad-nirari III, this claim seems uncertain. The list of Assyrian kings places him as the son of Ashur-nirari V, one of the sons of Adad-nirari III. The list also describes Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V as brothers; all of them sons of Adad-nirari III. Little or almost nothing exists in the Assyrian records on Adad-nirari III, Shalmaneser IV and Ashur-dan III. But there is interesting information about an alabaster stele discovered in 1894 at Tell Abta, showing the name of Tiglath-Pileser III imprinted over that of Shalmaneser IV, the successor of Adad-nirari III. Combining this finding with the absence of information on Shalmaneser IV and Ashur-dan III, it strongly implies that Tiglath-Pileser III was a usurper to the throne and that he destroyed the records of his three immediate predecessors: Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V (source: Wikipedia.org).

**Summing up:** in the period of 783-745 BC (in the reigns of Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V) Assyrian sovereignty was severely limited by the influence of court dignitaries, especially Shamshi-ilu (Šamši-ilu), who was commander-in-chief (tartanu or turtanu); also by plagues, revolts in Syria and other places of the Assyrian empire, besides a solar eclipse almost total in 763 BC, in the reign of Ashur-dan III.

### **Later recovery of Assyria:**

Assyria (In Assyrian: Ashshur; in Hebrew: 'Ashshur – Strong #804) is the kingdom attributed to Asshur, the second son of Shem (Gen 10: 22; 1 Chr. 1: 17), the son of Noah.

Assyria only began to rise again in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) and that is why the bible only begins to speak of the Assyrian empire as a threat to

Israel in the reign of this king, who began to reign at the time of Menahem king of Israel (752-742 BC), and Uzziah king of Judah (781-740 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III (Tiglath-pil' eser – 2 Kin. 15: 29; 2 Kin. 16: 6-7) is also called Tiglath-Pilneser (a Hebrew variant, tilgath-piln' eser – 1 Chr. 5: 6; 2 Chr. 28: 20); in Aramaic, tgltpłsr (as appears in the stele of Zinjirli or Zincirli or the victory stele of Esarhaddon, after his second victory over Pharaoh Taharqa, 671 BC). Taharqa or Taharka or Taharqo, or Khurenefertem (Khunefertumre) reigned in the period of 690-664 BC. In the bible, he is called Tirhakah (2 Kin. 19: 9; Isa. 37: 9). In the Septuagint, Tiglath-Pileser is called Algathphel-lasar. The king's native name is: Pul (2 Kin. 15: 19; 1 Chr. 5: 26); Pulu, in the Babylonian chronicle. At the beginning of his reign, Tiglath-Pileser III concerned in conquering the cities-states of the north of Syria, which were under control of Urartu. While Urartu imposed control over Carchemish, Biti-Adini (Beth-Eden, 'the sons of Eden' – Isa. 37: 12; 2 Kin. 19: 12, 'the people of Eden who were in Telassar') and Cilicia, the weakened Aramaean states of southern Syria were under the leadership of Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah, who in this period was more powerful than Israel; however, he died shortly thereafter (2 Kin. 15: 7). After a three-years siege, Tiglath-Pileser succeeded in subduing Arpad and received tribute from Carchemish, Hamath, Tyre and Byblos (in Phoenicia) and other territories to the north of Israel. Among those who were listed appears Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria (around 744-743 BC). But it was only in the reign of Ahaz (732-716 BC) that he extended his dominion over Samaria, Galilee, and Judea. At the time, he conquered Philistia (Ashkelon and Gaza); and Ammon, Edom, Moab, and Ahaz of Judah paid tribute to him (2 Chr. 28: 19-21).

### **Introduction to the book of Jonah:**

There are several interpretations of the story of Jonah. According to rabbinic tradition, Jonah represents the nation of Israel; the fish represents Babylon; the fact that Jonah was swallowed represents the exile and etc. Another interpretation is that it is about a parable with moral report with didactic purpose, that is, when we disobey the orders of the Lord, we can lose ourselves and be 'swallowed by the enemy', for we leave the divine purpose for our lives. But the opinion of being a real story still prevails, where the experience of the prophet is already a prophecy; it leads us to exercise faith and believe in the miracles of God.

The book of Jonah intends to show us that the interest and mercy of God extend to the entire human race. He taught Jonah to have mercy on all human beings (experience with the plant, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book). Jonah was the only prophet sent to preach to the Gentiles.

## Chapter 1

- Jon. 1: 1-17 – Jonah’s calling, his escape and his punishment

• Jon. 1: 1-3: “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.’ But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.”

Jonah was ordered by God to go to Nineveh and protest against the wickedness of its people.

Nineveh, a large commercial city of Assyria, would be looted a hundred and fifty years later (612 BC) by the Medes, when its wickedness would be punished. It was bloodthirsty and cruel, a warlike city and had killed many nations through its prostitution and sorcery, so the Lord would turn against it and would expose it to ridicule, but the prophet Nahum would be His chosen to prophesy its defeat (more or less one hundred and twenty-two years after Jonah). The Assyrians were known by decapitating the vanquished peoples, making pyramids with their skulls; they also crucified or impaled the prisoners, plucked out their eyes and skinned them alive.

Jonah, in this case was being commissioned by God to convince its inhabitants to turn to Him and be saved from His wrath. However, he disobeyed Him and took a ship to the West, to Tarshish, for he feared to fulfill the mission entrusted to him, besides having no wish at all to see the foe (Assyria) being rescued by God. Jonah thought the Assyrians should be punished for their cruelty. So, he went to Joppa, where he would board a ship to Tarshish (probably corresponds to current Spain).

Joppa [Jafo – Josh. 19: 46] belonged to the tribe of Dan. Joppa is the modern Tel Aviv-Yafo. The Hebrew word is yāphô; and the Greek one is Ioppe; in Arabic is Yāfā (Jaffa), which means: ‘beauty’, ‘beautiful place.’

• Jon. 1: 4-9: “But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep [NIV: But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep]. The captain came and said to him, ‘What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish’ [NIV: The captain went to him and said, ‘How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish’]. The sailors said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, ‘Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?’ ‘I am a Hebrew’, he replied. ‘I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’”

By entrusting him with this mission, the Lord wanted to teach him the lesson of the divine mercy that loves the sinner, although he hates and abhors sin, always seeking to give man a chance of repentance and salvation. Jonah did not yet understand this, therefore, he fled from the challenge; however, it cost him dearly, because his rebellion was discovered by the companions of the ship. As Jesus said, there is nothing hidden,

except to be disclosed and to come to light. So, Jonas could not remain invisible or oblivious to what was happening, even because it was his fault. But one thing he did not deny: the name of his God. In spite of his error, he declared with truth who he was: A God-fearing Jew, servant of the Lord, the Creator of all things ('the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land').

- Jon. 1: 10-12: "Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, 'What is this that you have done!' For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them so. Then they said to him, 'What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?' For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous [NIV: The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, 'What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?']. He said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.'"

The sailors were not only afraid of shipwreck; they were afraid to die under the wrath of YHWH. Even though they did not serve Him, they knew the God of the Hebrews and knew that, though being merciful, He was powerful and just. To provoke His reaction that way, Jonah should have done something very serious, like fleeing from His presence; therefore they said to him, 'What is this that you have done!' or 'What have you done?', as if saying, 'Have you gone mad? Have you lost your mind? Why did you run away from Him? Look what happened!'

Then they asked the prophet himself what they should do. And Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, and the storm would quiet down.

- Jon. 1: 13-16: "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the Lord, 'Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you'. So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging [NIV: Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm]. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."

Here we can see that people who often do not know God as His children do, sometimes fear Him more than these ones. The sailors feared to throw Jonah into the sea and provoke His wrath even more; so they tried to do what was within their reach: to row. The NIV says: 'Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.' Then they used the right method, which was to pray to the Lord and ask to be spared from the guilt of anything that could happen to His prophet, and that was obviously, to drown. They recognized the sovereignty of God to do what He pleased and threw Jonah out of the boat. And the sea calmed down, which made them even more fearful, for they could never think that such a thing would happen. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

- Jon. 1: 17: "But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish and stayed inside it for three days, meditating on his attitudes and on the majesty of God. Remembering of Him, he shouted for help. Here it is interesting to notice what kind of discipline the Lord can use to convince someone of his error and put a child to meditate on certain things. He had to remove all distractions from Jonah and prevent him from sleeping or pretending that nothing was

happening. It was one thing to sleep on the boat floor during a storm, knowing someone was taking care of the problem; another thing was being alone ‘inside the problem’, knowing that there was no one else to solve it for him. It should be dark in there, so he needed to be alert; it was no use sleeping. There was only one alternative left for Jonah: to speak with God and acknowledge his weakness, as Elijah did inside the cave in Horeb. With no light and no sense of time, we can think, “when Jonah realized he needed to pray? How long did it take for him to open his mouth? What did he think and feel until he took this attitude?”



## Chapter 2

### • Jon. 2: 1-10 – Jonah’s prayer

1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,

2 saying, ‘I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol (*Strong #7585: grave, hell, pit, lower world, underworld*) I cried, and you heard my voice [NIV: From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry].

3 You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me’ [NIV: You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me].

4 Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?’

5 ‘The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head [NIV: The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; sea weed was wrapped around my head].

6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit (*in Hebrew: shachath – Strong #7845: corruption, destruction, grave, pit*), O Lord my God [NIV: To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit].

7 As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

8 Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty [NIV: Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them].

9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!’ [NIV: But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD’].

10 Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

In this chapter of the book of Jonah we can see a ‘shadow’ of what happened to Jesus after having died and spent three days in the tomb, for His work of redemption truly culminated with His resurrection. By dying on the cross, Jesus performed a great victory over the darkness. But the victory went further, when after His death He stayed in the tomb for three days, like Jonah in the belly of the fish, and rose up from that place and showed Himself alive again. Hence, Jesus said that the only sign He would give the Pharisees would be the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12: 38-41; Lk. 11: 29-30): “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!’”

What He meant is that the Ninevites did not see great signs from God, yet they repented with Jonah’s preaching, after he stayed three days and three nights in the fish’s belly. However, the teachers of the law, even though they heard Jesus’ preaching during His ministry, still did not believe in Him. Perhaps some would be converted after seeing

His resurrection or, at least, an account of it through the mouths of the disciples and apostles.

What Jonah felt inside the fish's belly was like death, that is, a place of darkness where he felt separated from God, for his sin of disobedience brought that punishment. Human being was always afraid of death. Jesus came to free us from fear of it (Heb. 2: 15; 1 Co 15: 17-20; 25-26). He paid for us the penalty of sin. The devil had the power of death (Heb. 2: 15) because all men had sinned and he imprisoned their souls; but Jesus came as a man, without sin (Rom. 8: 3), condemning it in His own flesh, buying us through His blood. By resurrecting and returning to earth, He brought the keys of death and hell with Him, therefore, taking of Satan his dominion over the souls of men (Rev. 1: 18: "and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades").

In that place, Jonah suffered anguish and oppression; he also cried out to God for help (Jon. 2: 1-2: "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol [NIV, 'from the depths of the grave'] I cried, and you heard my voice'"). The anguishes through which the hell did him pass, the doubts put into his mind about the capacity of God to save him (Jon. 2: 3-4: "You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?'"); the waves of terror and wickedness that passed over his soul, the bad thoughts that were 'wrapped' around his head (Jon. 2: 5: "The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head") and the doors closed over him by Satan made his soul faint, but he continued to cry out and God heard him (Jon. 2: 6-7: "at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple"). On the third day the deliverance came (Jon. 2: 6b: "yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God"), as if the doors that were closed over him were opened and the chains that bound him were broken. God Himself spoke to Satan (the great fish) in verse 10, ordering that Jonah was released ('spewed out upon the dry land').

If the Holy Spirit released Jonah and raised Jesus from the dead, He will also do in our lives because we have His power within us. Nothing can hold us anymore. The hand of God can reach us in the deepest and most hidden places and rescue us. If He triumphed over the darkness, we will also triumph over what oppresses us. We no longer need to fear death; the keys are now with Jesus, not with Satan. Death, which means separation from God, no longer frightens us because we are continually with Him. Jonah disobeyed God and only remembered Him when he was swallowed by the sea animal; Jesus obeyed the Father and was victorious in the 'interior of the great fish' (the tomb), giving us the same victory over evil.

Researchers find it more probable that, in the case of Jonah, the animal that swallowed him was a kind of shark. The word used in Jon. 1: 17 (Strong #1709) in Hebrew is 'dag' (fish, in the sense of squirming: moving by the vibratory action of the tail), from the root 'dagah' (Strong #1711) = a primitive root, which means: to move quickly; to generate, to spawn; to become numerous, to grow. The bible does not say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale but by a large fish [In Jon. 2: 1 the word 'fish' in Hebrew is dagah (Strong #1710), the feminine of dag (Strong # 1709), with the same meaning: fish (Jon. 1: 17)]. The species of shark in question is the 'Cains carchucharus', known by 'sea dog', that by its voracity, it swallows great animals, alive, without chewing. What may have caused some confusion was the Greek word used in Matt. 12:

40 (the sign of Jonah) for ‘huge fish’ (NIV) or ‘sea monster’ (NRSV) or else, ‘whale’ (KJV), that is, ‘ketos’ [Strong #g2785: a huge fish (as gaping for prey); whale], because all great fish were called ‘ketos’, unlike a small living fish, which was called ‘ichthus’ (ichthýs, in Greek: ἰχθύς – Strong #g2786). Another Greek word used for fish is opsarion (Strong #g3795), meaning fish (presumably salted and dried as a condiment). This last word is used only four times in the gospels: Jn. 6: 11; Jn. 21: 9; Jn. 21: 10; Jn. 21: 13.

Returning to Jonah, was not God making him feel something still new to him, which was his separation from the Lord due to the darkness of sin? Couldn’t it be that He wanted to make him experience the ‘death’ that this separation brought to better understand those who, blinded by their torts, trapped in the ‘sea weeds’ of the enemy, did not know the light of spiritual freedom?

The suffering of Jonah within the great fish could symbolize, indeed, the suffering of the whole nation of Israel, not necessarily the captivity in Babylon, but the spiritual captivity because of their idolatry, rebellion, and stubbornness.

Jonah seems to have been able to grasp this teaching by the psalm of thanksgiving that the Holy Spirit made him say. At least, there must have been some change, visible in the sight of God, for He heard Jonah and commanded the fish to spew him out upon the dry land. So he went to Nineveh; this time he obeyed His voice.

## Chapter 3

• Jon. 3: 1-4 (Jonah goes to Nineveh): “The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you’. So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across [NIV: it took three days to go through it]. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’”

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, “proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” This is interesting because a prophet must be willing to speak what the Lord commands and be sure that it is He who is going to speak. Jonah did not rehearse what he was going to say, even because he had never seen an Assyrian, a Ninevite, personally. In Israel he heard what the Assyrians did, but they had not yet come to destroy Israel. Jonas just had to trust in the Lord. So he went to Nineveh.

The bible says that ‘Nineveh was an exceedingly large city’, and it took three days to go through it. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ The three days to cross the city of Nineveh (Jon. 3: 3) probably refers to the time to cross the entire administrative district with all its neighborhoods. A day’s walk (Jon. 3: 4) perhaps referred to the distance from the southern suburbs to the north of the city.

The city of Nineveh in the time of Jonah was different from Nineveh in the time of Nahum., for it would still be embellished and fortified completely around 700 BC in the time of Sennacherib. Yet, it was a great city, as the bible says.

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, is quoted by the prophets as an arrogant city and very confident in itself, but also would be destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Isa. 10: 5-34; Nah. 1: 1 – 3: 19). It was a bloodthirsty city full of lies and theft (Nah. 3: 1) and of spiritual prostitution by the multitude of gods with whom it corrupted the other nations; ‘Mistress of sorcery’, who misled many peoples (Nah. 3: 4 – ‘Mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft – NIV); a mercantile city (Na 3: 16), greedy and insatiable, which devoured what lay ahead (Nah. 3:17); not to speak of the cruelty of the Assyrians: they had the custom of decapitating the vanquished peoples, making pyramids with their skulls; they also crucified or impaled the prisoners, plucked out their eyes and skinned them alive.

The Hebrew word for Nineveh (nīnēweh or Nīnewē – נִינְוָה), in Greek, nineue (Νινευη), in Latin, Nineve; in Arabic: Naīnuwa, an ‘exceedingly large city’, is a translation of the Assyrian, ninua, in Old Babylonian, ninuwa, which in turn is transliteration of the even more ancient Sumerian name, Nina, the name of the goddess Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love and war, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. Nina was the ancient Assyrian name of the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25), therefore, place of great abomination and idolatry, witchcraft and prostitution.

Nineveh, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, was a group of several villages along this river. Today is a large area of ruins by the new suburbs of the city of Mosul, in the state of Ninawa, Iraq. The ancient mounds Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk, Nimrud (name of the ancient Calah), Karamles (Karemlash or Karemlish) and Khorsabad (present name of the ancient Dur-Sharrukin) form the four corners of a parallelogram (an irregular quadrangle). They are located on the plain near the confluence of the Tigris and Khosr Rivers. Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk was the mound of the ancient citadel of Nineveh whose name means ‘mound of many sheep’, twenty meters high above the

plain, and has another mound beside it (One kilometer to the south, the secondary mound of the ruins of Nineveh) which was given the name of Nabī Yūnus (‘Prophet Jonah’ in Arabic), and which was not properly explored because there was a Muslim Arab shrine dedicated to that prophet on the spot. Nimrud is the modern name of the archaeological site located around the Assyrian city of Kalhu, located south of the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia. Archaeologists named the city Nimrud because of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 8-11). The city was called Calah in the bible. These were the four districts of old Nineveh, so Jonah must have taken three days to go through it. Dur-Sharrukin (the modern Khorsabad) means ‘Fortress of Sargon’ and was the capital of Assyria at the time of Sargon II, father of Sennacherib. Khorsabad today is a village in northern Iraq, fifteen kilometers northeast of Mosul. The great city was entirely built in the decade prior to 706 BC. After Sargon’s unexpected death in battle, the capital was displaced twenty kilometers south to Nineveh.



Location of Nineveh (archaeological sites) – Wikipedia

- Jon. 3: 5-10 – The repentance of the Ninevites

- Jon. 3: 5-9: “And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes [NIV: When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose

from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust]. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands [NIV: Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence]. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’”

Jonah preached about the future destruction of the city by the God of the Hebrews, if they did not repent. But the people of Nineveh gave heed to the preaching of Jonah, and repented of their sin, and the city was rescued by the Lord.

The sackcloth was a coarse loose cloth (Hebrew: saq – Strong #8242: A mesh (such as allowing a liquid to run through), that is, a thick cloth (used in mourning and for bagging); therefore a bag (for grain, etc.): bag (bed linen, clothes); in Greek, sakkos (Strong #g4526) – Matt. 11: 21; Lk 10: 13], usually made of goats’ hair or camel’s hair and black in color (Rev. 6: 12). The same Hebrew word sometimes means ‘sack’ (of keeping money or food – Gen. 42: 27), which obviously was made of the same material.

The sackcloth was a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Joel 1: 8), or mourning for national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Lam. 2: 10; Est. 4: 1), or of penance for sins (1 Kin. 21: 27; Neh. 9: 1; Jon. 3: 5; Matt. 11: 21), or special prayer, asking for deliverance (2 Kin. 19: 1; 2; Dan. 9: 3). The form of the sackcloth, as a symbol of humiliation before God, was often a sash or robe around the waist (1 Kin. 20: 31; 32; Isa. 3: 24; Isa. 20: 2; Ezek. 27: 31). It was usually worn on the skin (2 Kin. 6: 30; Job 16: 15), and sometimes was worn for an entire night (1 Kin. 21: 27; Jl. 1: 13). In some cases it replaced a cloak presumably over other clothes (Jon. 3: 6).

Sometimes the sackcloth was stretched out on the floor to lie on (2 Sam. 21: 10; Isa. 58: 5). Palestinian shepherds used sackcloth because it was cheap and durable. Sometimes the prophets used it as a symbol of the repentance they preached (Isa. 20: 2; Rev. 11: 3). According to Jonah 3: 8, even the animals were clothed in sackcloth as a sign of national supplication. The use of sackcloth as lamentation and penance was practiced not only in Israel but also in Damascus (1 Kin. 20: 31), in Moab (Isa. 15: 3), in Ammon (Jer. 49: 3), in Tyre (Ezek. 27: 31) and in Nineveh (Jon. 3: 5).

Source: J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

As for the word ‘ash’ (or ‘dust’) or ‘ashes’ (spread on the head as part of the weeping), in Hebrew it is: ‘epher (Strong #665) = ‘product of burning’; of an unused root meaning ‘to spread’; ashes, dust. Ash is a metaphor for what is worthless (Isa. 44: 20) and disgusting (Job 30: 19); misery (Ps. 102: 9; Jer. 6: 26); shame (2 Sam. 13: 19); humiliation before God (Gen. 18: 27; Job 42: 6); contrition (Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21) and purification (Num. 19: 9; 10; 17; Heb. 9: 13). When the bible talks about spreading ‘ashes’ on the head or the garments as a sign of mourning or repentance, it is not necessarily speaking of the ashes of resulting from the burning of animals (as it was in temple sacrifices), but it is referring to dust, the dust of the earth, which was often spread over the head of the repentant or those who were mourning (cf. Neh. 9: 1).

There is another Hebrew word used for ‘ash’, which is: deshen, meaning ‘fat’ or ‘ash’ – the residue of sacrificed animals.

When we come across some biblical texts, we can stop a little and ask a lot of questions, for our carnal reasoning becomes a hindrance to our faith, and the Lord tells us in His Word that whoever does not accept the kingdom God as a child cannot enter it. But we can be sure of one thing: the bible is always right, and in this case, if it says that the king of Nineveh repented and proclaimed a fasting and a collective outcry, it is

because it was so. As we saw at the beginning of the study, Assyria went through a few years of difficulties and decline in its might as an empire of that age; difficulties in all sectors of government, in all areas of the nation; from plague to revolts throughout the empire and civil war for succession to the throne. We can remember that, for at least three successive reigns, Assyria suffered a very great fall from prestige; therefore, it would not be surprising if any of those three kings could be in God's plans here (Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V). Assyria was polytheistic, and did not mock any other god, for fear of provoking his anger; even more when it comes to the God of Israel, known to all peoples of Ancient times. Therefore, it is quite probable that, weakened as they were, they had a heart opening (generated by God Himself) to receive the preaching of Jonah. The Lord can do the unlikely to show that He is in control and really knows the preparation of man's heart, though He respects his free will. He prepared the hearts, Jonah cast the seed of the word, and the people acknowledged their error; so the answer came in the following verse:

- Jon. 3: 10: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it [NIV: When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened]."

It is interesting to notice, in the Old Testament, how often Gentile peoples responded positively to the call of God, more than the people of Israel. The widow of Zarephath, in the time of Elijah, was one of these people. Naaman the Syrian in the time of Elisha was another example. Many men of the royal guard of David were not Israelites, but served him and respected God. Obed-Edom (probably a Philistine from Gath and who lived near Jerusalem – 2 Sam. 6: 10; 1 Chr. 13: 13-14; 1 Chr. 15: 25) kept the ark in his house. Ruth, a Moabitess, left her people to follow the God of Naomi; Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, was a Canaanite. Rahab, in the time of Joshua, was incorporated into the Israelite nation, for she responded positively to God, and entered into the Messiah's lineage (Matt. 1: 5).

Certainly, Jonah was not prepared for this reaction from the Ninevites. So, he felt irritated.



## Chapter 4

- Jon. 4: 1-5 (Jonah's anger at the Lord's compassion): "But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live'. And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city [NIV: There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city]."

Jonah became angry because of the repentance and subsequent deliverance from destruction, so he complained to God. He argued with anger and frustration, grounded in self-righteousness, finding it unfair on God's part to be so nice to such people. He did not expect a sincere conversion from them. In fact, Jonah behaved like someone who bets against, and wants to see 'fire coming from heaven over the wicked.' The flesh spoke louder than the spirit. It seems that he had forgotten what he had lived inside the great fish, experiencing the separation from God in such a way that it resembled death.

The following reaction was also surprising; he asked to die. He was not the only one in the bible who asked to die: Elijah (1 Kin. 19: 4) asked to die and Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (Jer. 20: 14-18) because they could not stand the suffering they were going through. Job also cursed the day of his birth (Job 3: 1-26) and came to ask God why he did not die while still in his mother's womb (Job 3: 11). Even more absurd was his wife's suggestion: 'Curse God and die' (Job 2: 9). Moses asked to die because he could no longer bear the responsibility and burden of his people's complaints (Num. 11: 14-15).

But in the case of Jonah it was really surprising why he wanted death: because things did not go the way he hoped. Or was he thinking about the time he spent in the fish's belly, and this made him angry? In fact, he was frustrated not to see God's judgment. How good the Lord is! He asks Jonah with patience: 'Is it right for you to be angry?'

And Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and built a shelter for himself, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

- Jon. 4: 6-11 (The Lord's lesson): God induces Jonah to have pity on a plant to teach him to have compassion for all human beings.

- Jon. 4: 6-8: "The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush [NIV: Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant]. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind [NIV: a scorching east wind], and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'"

First, the Lord provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort because of the sun and the heat. And Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed



the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, a scorching east wind came, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. Once again he asked to die.

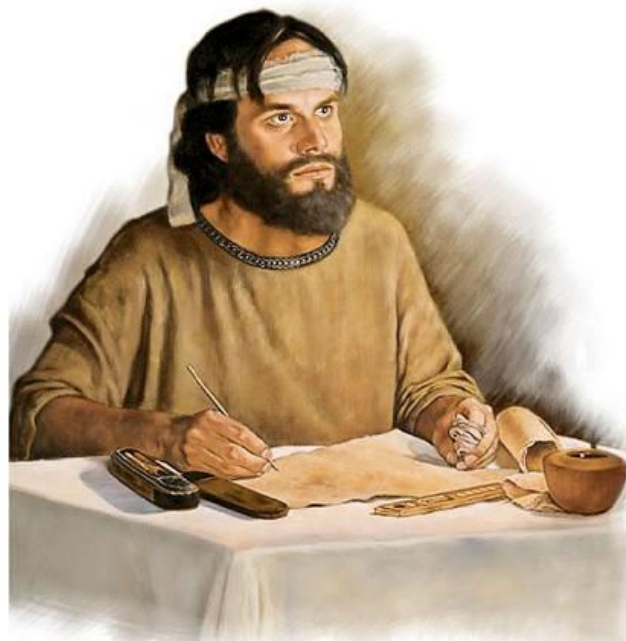
- Jon. 4: 9-11: "But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die'. Then the Lord said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'"

God once again asked Jonah if he was right to be furious about the plant that had withered, and Jonah said he was so angry that he wanted to die. So the Lord confronts him with a new question: if Jonah cared for a plant that had been born and died and which he had not planted, would the Lord have no compassion for a city as large as that one, with thousands of people, who did not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?

The bible does not say what happened next with Jonah, but certainly he stayed thinking. For us too, it is often difficult to attain the degree of compassion that God expects of us; then we behave like Jonah. And we withhold our affections, as the apostle Paul said (2 Cor. 6: 12), not understanding the thoughts and purposes of the Lord. Therefore, in our weakness and humanity, let us be a channel of blessing in the hands of the Holy Spirit, not losing the opportunity to speak of the gospel to everyone, since only God knows the preparation of each heart. Even if the person only reacts positively long afterwards, in any case, it is always a seed that is 'planted in that soil.' And the bible says that the soil itself bears fruit (Mk. 4: 28). Therefore, let us preach the Word, exercise love, and leave judgment to God.

## Micah

Micah (Mikhâ, abbreviated form for Mikhâyhîi, ‘who is like YHWH?’) prophesied around 742 to 687 BC, during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was born in Moresheth (Mic. 1: 1), referring to Moresheth-Gath in the lowlands of Judah (Sephelah), near Gath, in land of the Philistines. He was younger contemporary of Isaiah. He wrote to the inhabitants of Judah to warn them that the divine judgment was imminent for having rejected God and His law (condemnation against the princes and prophets – Mic. 3: 1-12). There would be the punishment of Israel and its restoration, the glory and peace would come over Jerusalem, there would be the suffering and the restoration of Zion, the corruption of society (Mic. 7: 1-6) and the final statement of confidence in God (Mic. 7: 7). His vigorous style and the consistent revelation of the divine judgment go along with compassion and hope of God. He prophesied against Jerusalem (Mic. 4: 10) and, like Amos and Isaiah, he arose against the exploitation of poor peasants and farmers on the part of the land owners (Mic. 2: 1-5). He emphasized the essential rightness and morality of the divine nature. Like Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, Micah thought that God would use a pagan nation to punish His own guilty people. He foretold clearly the depredations made by Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) in the northern kingdom, as well the final destruction of Samaria and Judah (later) because of idolatry and social corruption. He also waited for the Messiah who would be born in Bethlehem and would bring restoration to the nation (Mic. 2: 13; Mic. 5: 2-5). He stressed that the saving grace of God could not be obtained by merit (Mic. 6: 6-8) in the form of pretentious offerings of sacrifices and formalities, but by humility, mercy and justice as a daily experience in someone’s life.



## Chapter 1

- Mic. 1: 1-16 – Judgment against Samaria and Jerusalem

- Mic. 1: 1-9: “The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it [NIV: all who live in it]; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. Then the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place [NIV: The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope]. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? Therefore I will make Samaria a heap [NIV: a heap of rubble] in the open country, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour down her stones into the valley, and uncover her foundations. All her images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste; for as the wages of a prostitute she gathered them, and as the wages of a prostitute they shall again be used [NIV: All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used]. For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches [NIV: Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl]. For her wound is incurable. It has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem [NIV: For Samaria’s plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself].”

The prophet begins by saying that the Lord is aware of the transgression of His people and decided to act to correct the error. Like Nahum (Nah. 1: 4-6) and other prophets, he describes the manifestations of nature as a mirror of the wrath of God: ‘Then the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place [NIV: The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope]’, for everything bows down before His power and majesty. His wrath at this moment is in relation to the idolatry of Samaria and Israel (of the northern kingdom) and which had already contaminated Judah. He announces the destruction of Samaria because of this, especially of the images (idols); and the money that was conquered because of the idols will be transferred to another idolatrous people, the Assyrians (‘As the wages of a prostitute she gathered them, and as the wages of a prostitute they shall again be used’). He may be speaking here of Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) and Sargon II (722-705 BC), who destroyed Samaria (the father began the siege and the son conquered it in 722 BC).

- ‘For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches [NIV: Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl]’ – here it is probable that the prophet lamented with sackcloth and ashes (cf. Mic. 1: 10) because of his people, but it is interesting that when he writes: ‘I will go barefoot and naked’, his attitude has a resemblance to that of Isaiah (Isa. 20: 1-

4), in the time of Sargon II, and went around naked and barefoot for three years to show that Ethiopia would be taken into captivity. Micah may have had the same behavior for some time to show people that Samaria would soon be taken into captivity to Assyria (see v. 10).

- ‘For her wound is incurable. It has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem [NIV: For Samaria’s plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself]’ – he cries out, because the wound of the sin of Samaria is incurable and has come to Judah, to Jerusalem.

- Mic. 1: 10-15: “Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; in Beth-leaphrah [NIV: Beth Ophrah; ‘house of dust’] roll yourselves in the dust. Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir [means ‘pleasant’], in nakedness and shame; the inhabitants of Zaanen do not come forth [NIV: Those who live in Zaanen will not come out; Zaanen sounds the Hebrew for ‘come out’]; Beth-ezel is wailing and shall remove its support from you [NIV: Beth Ezel is in mourning; it no longer protects you]. For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, yet disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem [NIV: Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem; Maroth sounds like the Hebrew for ‘bitter’]. Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish; it was the beginning of sin to daughter Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel [NIV: You who live in Lachish, harness fast horses to the chariot. You are where the sin of Daughter Zion began, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you; Lachish sounds like the Hebrew word rekhes, meaning team]. Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib shall be a deception to the kings of Israel [NIV: Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Aczib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel; Aczib means ‘deception’]. I will again bring a conqueror upon you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam [NIV: I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam; Mareshah sounds like the Hebrew for ‘conqueror’].”

These cities refer to the fortified cities of Judea (2 Kin. 18: 13; 2 Chr. 32: 1; Isa. 36: 1) taken by Sennacherib, in addition to those described in Isa 10: 28-32: Migron (in the tribe of Benjamin), Micmash (in the tribe of Benjamin), Geba (city of Benjamin – Josh. 21: 17; 1 Kin. 15: 22), Ramah (in the tribe of Benjamin – Josh. 18: 25), Gibeah (1 Sam. 10: 26; 1 Sam. 11: 4; 1 Sam. 13: 2 – in the tribe of Benjamin), Anathoth (a city of priests in Benjamin), Gebim, Aiath, Bethel (Josh. 18: 13; 1 Chr. 7: 28 – it was a city of Benjamin, then conquered by Ephraim), Gallim (in the tribe of Benjamin), Madmenah (southern part of the tribe of Judah – Josh. 15: 31) and Nob (city of priests near Jerusalem – 1 Sam. 22: 19); forty-six cities in all.

Micah mentions a few more: Gath, Beth-leaphrah [NIV: Beth Ophrah], Shaphir, Zaanen, Beth-ezel [NIV: Beth-Ezel], Maroth, Lachish, Moresheth-gath, Aczib, Mareshah and Adullam. Almost all of them were situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah (Shfela or Shephelah), between the Mountains of Judea and the Coastal Plain, in Philistia.

- **Gath** – one of the five principal cities of Philistia (Josh. 13: 3), which would gloat about the calamity of the Jews. Gath was besieged and conquered by Sargon II. Its precise location has not yet been discovered.

- **Beth-leaphrah** [NIV: Beth Ophrah; ‘house of dust’ – Aphrah] – also known as Aphrah or Ophrah, in Benjamin – Josh. 18: 23. Perhaps that is why the prophet wrote in v. 8: ‘For this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches [NIV: like an owl]’, meaning that he lamented with sackcloth and ashes; as a sign of his sadness, he rolled in the dust.

- **Shaphir** (meaning ‘pleasant’) – Is in Judah on the plain of Philistia (Shfela or Shephelah). The exact location is unknown but may have been close to Ashdod. ‘Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame’ – this meant that its inhabitants should tear their clothes and mourn, which would make them ashamed.

- **Zaanan** – Perhaps it is identical with Zenan in the Shephelah of Judah, which appears in the list of Josh. 15: 37. Because it is a fortified city that was besieged, its inhabitants could not leave there, so the note of the NIV: “Zaanan sounds the Hebrew for ‘come out.’” ‘The inhabitants of Zaanan do not come forth [NIV: Those who live in Zaanan will not come out]’ – This may refer to the impossibility of leaving because of the siege of the city.

- **Beth-ezel** [NIV: Beth-Ezel] – The correct location is not known.

- **Maroth** – no one knows where it was. ‘Maroth’ means, ‘bitter’, ‘bitterness’, ‘bitter fountains.’ ‘For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, yet disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem’ – the inhabitants of the city would writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem, which suggests the coming from Sennacherib to the gate of the city, for the purpose of invading it.

- **Moresbeth-gath** (Jer. 26: 18; Mic. 1: 14) – near Gath in the land of the Philistines. Much probably it is the modern Tell el-Gudeideh, about thirty and two kilometers southwest of Jerusalem. Moresbeth-gath means ‘possession of Gath’, and it was Micah’s hometown. The gifts to which the prophet refers were those who people gave in the departure (‘parting gifts’); therefore, the city would soon be lost.

- **Aczib** – in Judah (Josh. 15: 44; Gen. 38: 5 – here is called Kesib, modern Ain Kezbeh), though there is another city with the same name in Asher (Josh. 19: 29: Aczib). This last city, the tribe of Asher never occupied (Judg. 1: 31, ‘Aczib’. It’s mentioned along with ‘Acco’ on the coast, the modern Acre or Akko). Aczib was taken by Sennacherib in 701 BC. It is the modern Az-Zeeb, founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, sixteen kilometers to the north of Acre. The city of Aczib, of which the prophet is speaking, is situated in the coastal plain of Judah, Shephelah, near Mareshah. Aczib means ‘deception.’

- **Mareshah** (meaning: ‘conqueror’, ‘front’, ‘head’) – it is in Judah (Josh. 15: 44). It was in the area of Shephelah, seven kilometers and a half from Lachish, near Keilah and Aczib (Josh. 15: 44). It was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chr. 11: 8). Later it became a Sidonian city and, later, was taken by Sennacherib. After the fall of Assyria and in the post-exile period, it was an important fortress of Idumea. It was destroyed by the Parthians in 40 BC. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century it was a Roman city (Eleutheropolis), going to Arab dominion and returning to Israel centuries later (Beit Guvrin, a rural area). Most of the archaeologically important areas of ancient Maresha are now part of the Beit Guvrin-Maresha National Park.

- **Adullam** – Canaanite city (Gen. 38: 1-2) in the territory of Judah (Josh. 12: 15); fortified by King Rehoboam (2 Chr. 11: 7); inhabited after the exile (Neh. 11: 30). The hilltop ruin is also known by the name of Khurbet esh-Sheikh Madkour, a sultan’s son, to whom a shrine was built in the Islamic Period, and is halfway between Jerusalem and Lachish. The place is usually associated with the cave in which David hid himself when



pursued by Saul (1 Sam. 22: 1). Adullam means ‘retreat (a place for privacy), refuge, shelter, enclosure, place of Antiquity’ (Gen. 38: 1; 12). Nowadays it is a natural reserve that is part of the National Parks of Israel.



Hill of Adullam covered with Pines



Ruins on the top of Adullam Hill

‘The glory of Israel shall come to Adullam [NIV: He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam]’ – It means that even in that place, which served as a refuge for the fugitives, like David and the patriarch Judah, for example, when he fled Jacob’s camp after the sale of Joseph to the Midianite merchants, so as not to have to face the remorse of seeing the pain of the father by the ‘death’ of his beloved son; even in that place the ‘glory of Israel’, referring to God Himself, will come to prevent the sinful people from

escaping the Assyrians. There are two more verses in the bible where the expression ‘the Glory of Israel’ is written, referring to God:

- He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind (1 Sam. 15: 29).
- She said [*The wife of Phinehas, son of Eli the priest*], ‘The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured’ (1 Sam. 4: 22).

• **Lachish** (Lākhîsh, in the Hebrew; Lachis, in the Septuagint) – was in Judah (Josh. 10: 31-32) at the current site of Tell el-Duweir twenty-four kilometers west of Hebron. Rehoboam rebuilt Lachish as one of its fifteen centers of defense to protect Judah from attacks by the Philistines or the Egyptians (2 Chr. 11: 5-12). This dependence on the military power of Lachish was one of the sins condemned by Micah (Mic. 1: 13), in a play on words with rekhes, ‘steeds.’ Therefore, Micah wrote: ‘it was the beginning of sin to daughter Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath.’ This means that, most likely, Lachish absorbed the sins of idolatry from the northern kingdom and was a stumbling block to Jerusalem, defiling the Holy City as well. Lachish had a thick wall of defense and towers.



Lachish – main gate of the archaeological site in Israel (Wikipedia)

Even so, it was conquered and destroyed by Sennacherib (2 Kin. 18: 13; 2 Chr. 32: 1; Isa. 36: 1). Lachish was situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah; therefore, it was of vital importance to the kingdom's economy. It was completely destroyed. What was left of the citadel stayed in the hands of an Assyrian governor to collect taxes from Philistia. History says that the Jewish city of Azekah, as well as Lachish, was also invaded, pillaged and then devastated. Besides Lachish, in the valuable agricultural land of Shephelah (the coastal plain of Philistia in the land of Judah), there were other cities, which were delivered into the hands of the Philistines. In



the time of Jehoiachin, Lachish and Azekah were rebuilt to withstand the Babylonian attack. When the Babylonians commanded by Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, they were the last cities that fell before the land of Judah was fully seized (Jer. 34: 7). Lachish fell with a heavy destruction by fire; was later reoccupied by Gedaliah (581 BC), the governor of Judea appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. 25: 22-25; Jer. 39: 14). It was recovered by Nehemiah (Neh. 11: 30), but never again it came to be an important place.



Shfela or Shephelah, literally, 'lowlands' (Wikipedia)

- Mic. 1: 16: “Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they have gone from you into exile [NIV: Shave your head in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourself as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile].”

Here the prophet speaks of **public mourning as was the custom** (cf. Jer. 16: 6), when one was clothed in sackcloth and pulled out the hair. There are other references in:

- Isa. 15: 2b-3 (“On every head is baldness, every beard is shorn; in the streets they bind on sackcloth; on the housetops and in the squares everyone wails and melts in tears”).

- Isa. 22: 12-13 (“In that day the Lord God of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and putting on sackcloth; but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’”).

The act of shaving the hair and beard was customary in great mourning; one wore sackcloth and put ashes on the head.

In the OT, **the hair**, both for men and women, used to be long to a certain length (Absalom had long hair: 2 Sam. 14: 25-26; 2 Sam. 18: 9). Generally the hair was not cut, just trimmed, and should be well treated, for to leave them without care was a sign of lamentation. Long hair was an honor and a sign of beauty for the woman (Song 4: 1b). In the NT it seems that the custom changes in relation to men (1 Cor. 11: 14), however, remained an honor for the woman (1 Cor. 11: 15). Lepers, by Jewish law,



should shave their beards, hair and eyebrows on the seventh day of their purification (Lev. 14: 9). When someone made a vow of Nazirite, the hair was shaved and burned at the end of the vow (Num. 6: 5; 9; 19), except Samson, who for being a Nazirite for life could not cut it off (Judg. 13: 5). The law forbade the hair to be cut at the temples (Temple = the flat part of either side of the head between the forehead and the ear – Lev. 19: 27; Jer. 25: 23; Jer. 49: 31-32), for this part of the head was regarded as the source of life for the Jews, and only the heathen shaved the sideburns. In Jer. 49: 32, where it is written ‘those who have shaven temples’ (NRSV) it may be read, in Hebrew, ‘cut off into corners, or, that have the corners of their hair pulled’, that is, to have a beard on the cheek narrowed or cut, which was a Canaanite custom, forbidden to the Israelites. Jer. 25: 23-24 concerns the Arabs, for it is written: “Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who have shaven temples; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples that live in the desert”, as well as in Jer. 49: 31-32, for the title of the biblical passage is: ‘A message about Kedar and Hazor’ (NIV), meaning its invasion by Nebuchadnezzar: “Rise up *[God was saying to the Babylonians]*, advance against a nation at ease, that lives secure, says the Lord, that has no gates or bars (*meaning nomadic life, outdoors, in tents*), that lives alone. Their camels shall become booty, their herds of cattle a spoil. I will scatter to every wind those who have shaven temples, and I will bring calamity against them from every side, says the Lord.”

A Jew could not cut his hair on his forehead too, for it was characteristic of certain idolatrous cults (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5; Deut. 14: 1). Regarding the priests, God speaks to Ezekiel (Ezek. 44: 20): “They shall not shave their heads or let their locks grow long; they shall only trim the hair of their heads.”

It was customary **to anoint the hair** of a guest as a sign of hospitality (Lk. 7: 46); or were anointed at feasts (Ps. 45: 7).

In the East, in general, and also among the Jews, **the beard** was of great importance, for it was a sign of civility, manhood, and respectability (Ps. 133: 2). There was no greater offense to man than to let anyone treat it with indignity. If one’s hand touched it with contempt, this was a great insult (1 Chr. 19: 4; 2 Sam. 10: 4-5; 2 Sam. 20: 9). On the other hand, kissing someone’s beard was a form of greeting and sympathy for the other person. To shave it or pull it out, or mar its edges, was a manifestation of mourning and pain (2 Sam. 19: 24; Ezra 9: 3; Isa. 15: 2; Jer. 41: 5; Jer. 48: 37). The Mosaic Law forbade to cut the beard in the manner of the Egyptians (Lev. 19: 27; Lev. 21: 5). Unlike the surrounding nations, the Egyptians shaved, except for the chin, where they allowed themselves to have a bundle of hair, which was kept well-cared. Sometimes, instead of their own hair, they wore a braided false beard with different shapes, depending on the category of the individual; just as they wore their wigs.

The **sackcloth** was a coarse loose cloth (Hebrew: saq – Strong #8242: A mesh (such as allowing a liquid to run through), that is, a thick cloth (used in mourning and for bagging); therefore a bag (for grain, etc.): bag (bed linen, clothes); in Greek, sakkos (Strong #g4526) – Matt. 11: 21; Lk 10: 13], usually made of goats’ hair or camel’s hair and black in color (Rev. 6: 12). The same Hebrew word sometimes means ‘sack’ (of keeping money or food – Gen. 42: 27), which obviously was made of the same material.

The sackcloth was a sign of mourning for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Joel 1: 8), or mourning for national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Lam. 2: 10; Est. 4: 1), or of penance for sins (1 Kin. 21: 27; Neh. 9: 1; Jon. 3: 5; Matt. 11: 21), or special prayer, asking for deliverance (2 Kin. 19: 1; 2; Dan. 9: 3). The form of the sackcloth, as a symbol of humiliation before God, was often a sash or robe around the waist (1 Kin. 20: 31; 32; Isa. 3: 24; Isa. 20: 2; Ezek. 27: 31). It was usually worn on the skin (2 Kin. 6:

30; Job 16: 15), and sometimes was worn for an entire night (1 Kin. 21: 27; Jl. 1: 13). In some cases it replaced a cloak presumably over other clothes (Jon. 3: 6).

Sometimes the sackcloth was stretched out on the floor to lie on (2 Sam. 21: 10; Isa. 58: 5). Palestinian shepherds used sackcloth because it was cheap and durable. Sometimes the prophets used it as a symbol of the repentance they preached (Isa. 20: 2; Rev. 11: 3). According to Jon. 3: 8, even the animals were clothed in sackcloth as a sign of national supplication. The use of sackcloth as lamentation and penance was practiced not only in Israel but also in Damascus (1 Kin. 20: 31), in Moab (Isa. 15: 3), in Ammon (Jer. 49: 3), in Tyre (Ezek. 27: 31) and in Nineveh (Jon. 3: 5).

As for the word **'ash'** (or **'dust'**) or **'ashes'** (spread on the head as part of the weeping), in Hebrew it is: **'epher** (Strong #665) = **'product of burning'**; of an unused root meaning **'to spread'**; ashes, dust. Ash is a metaphor for what is worthless (Isa. 44: 20) and disgusting (Job 30: 19); misery (Ps. 102: 9; Jer. 6: 26); shame (2 Sam. 13: 19); humiliation before God (Gen. 18: 27; Job 42: 6); contrition (Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21) and purification (Num. 19: 9; 10; 17; Heb. 9: 13). When the bible talks about spreading **'ashes'** on the head or the garments as a sign of mourning or repentance, it is not necessarily speaking of the ashes of resulting from the burning of animals (as it was in temple sacrifices), but it is referring to dust, the dust of the earth, which was often spread over the head of the repentant or those who were mourning (cf. Neh. 9: 1).

There is another Hebrew word used for **'ash'**, which is: **deshen**, meaning **'fat'** or **'ash'** – the residue of sacrificed animals.

Source: J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.

## Chapter 2

- Mic. 2: 1-5 (Human Plan and God's plans): "Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance. Therefore thus says the Lord: Now, I am devising against this family an evil from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time [NIV: Therefore, the LORD says: 'I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity']. On that day they shall take up a taunt song against you, and wail with bitter lamentation, and say, 'We are utterly ruined; the Lord alters the inheritance of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors he parcels out our fields' [NIV: In that day people will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: 'We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors']. Therefore you will have no one to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord [NIV: Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot]."

- 'I am devising against this family' – this family [NIV: these people] was referring to the people of the north. While they plotted evil things ['those who devise wickedness'], God was putting His plan into action, causing them to be dominated by a foreign people ('an evil from which you cannot remove your necks' or 'from which you cannot save yourselves'). It would not be possible to escape the misfortune planned by God.

'Among our captors he parcels out our fields' or 'He assigns our fields to traitors' – the lands would be given to the impious invaders.

- 'You will have no one to cast the line by lot' or 'to divide the land by lot' – this refers to the custom of casting lots to divide the inheritance or portions of land, as happened with Joshua, dividing the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel: Num. 34: 17; 29; Num. 36: 2; Josh. 14: 1-2.

Like Amos and Isaiah, Micah also arose against the exploitation of poor peasants and farmers on the part of the land owners (Mic. 2: 1-5). There was injustice against the small landowners. The rich used their influence with the judges, and by legal means distorted for their own benefit they expelled the simple peasants from their houses. This was what happened, for example, with Naboth, who refused to sell his vineyard to King Ahab, and was stoned because of false accusations (1 Kin. 21: 3; 10; 13). The poor peasants, then, would have to beg to survive, or be sold as slaves (sometimes they sold themselves). As it was done in Israel, the Lord would hand them over to the Assyrians, who would come and take their lands.

- Mic. 2: 6-11 (Against the false prophets):

"Do not preach"—thus they preach—"one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us" [NIV: 'Do not prophesy', their prophets say. 'Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us']. Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Is the Lord's patience exhausted? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good to one who walks uprightly? But you rise up against my people as an enemy; you strip the robe from the peaceful, from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war [NIV: Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle]. The

women of my people you drive out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away my glory forever [NIV: You take away my blessing from their children forever]. Arise and go; for this is no place to rest, because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction [NIV: Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy]. If someone were to go about uttering empty falsehoods, saying, ‘I will preach to you of wine and strong drink’, such a one would be the preacher for this people! [NIV: If a liar and deceiver comes and says, ‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer’, that would be just the prophet for this people!].”

There was much injustice and theft, the poor were defrauded, women and children suffered because the greed of the rich, and Micah showed it openly and warned that God was coming with judgment on them. But the rich did not like what they heard and told Micah to shut up. If the false prophets deceived the people by saying that disgrace would not overtake them, but instead that there would be plenty of wine and great joy, this prophet did not come from the Lord.

• Mic. 2: 12-13 (The Lord gathers the remnant of Israel):

“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the survivors of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture; it will resound with people. The one who breaks out will go up before them [NIV: The One who breaks open the way will go up before them]; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head.”

The prophet gives a message of hope and comfort to the repentant, for there will be a remnant left by the Lord, and this purified remnant He will gather like sheep in a single flock. The Lord promises that there will be many, and here is a messianic prophecy, because it is about Jesus when the prophet says: “The one who breaks out will go up before them; they will break through and pass the gate, going out by it (cf. Jn. 10: 9); Their king will pass on before them, the Lord at their head.” The Messiah would bring restoration to the nation.

## Chapter 3

- Mic. 3: 1-12 – Threats against the leaders, the priests and the false prophets

• Mic. 3: 1-4: “And I said: Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know justice?—you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron [NIV: who eat my people’s flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot]. Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have acted wickedly.”

Micah returns to the subject of social injustice, no longer talking about landowners, but touching the rulers of the nation of Israel, who know the righteousness of God but do not practice it. They exchange good for evil, extort the people to the last penny and oppress them. By this kind of attitude, the Lord will turn away His face from them, and will not answer them. When the day of calamity comes, they will cry out, but they will have no answer from God.

• Mic. 3: 5-7: “Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry ‘Peace’ when they have something to eat, but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths [NIV: but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them]. Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation [NIV: without divination]. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips [NIV: They will all cover their faces], for there is no answer from God.”

The Lord also gives a warning against the prophets who deceive the people with lies and tell them ‘peace’ while they listen to them, but they rise against those who do not let themselves be deceived by them. Because of this, the prophetic vision will cease (‘therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation [NIV: without divination]. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them’). God will bring shame and confusion upon them, for there will be no answer to their supplications.

• Mic. 3: 8-10: “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord [NIV: with the Spirit of the LORD], and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity [NIV: who despise justice and distort all that is right], who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! [NVI: wickedness].”

On the contrary, Micah says that he prophesies in the name of the Lord, and that the sin of the nation has become too obvious to be covered up in any way. Unlike the false prophets who were silenced, Micah received divine power from the Lord (1 Cor. 2: 13; 2 Pet. 1: 21), showing the contrast between His power and that of Israel’s inefficient leaders (v. 1). He then addresses the rulers and judges who use violence and wickedness to keep the city in the ‘stable’ way they want, and build Zion with illicit wealth and with innocent blood, both the temple and the royal palace.

- Mic. 3: 11-12: “Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money [NIV: and her prophets tell fortunes for money]; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us’ [NIV: Yet they look for the LORD’s support and say, ‘Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us’]. Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height [NIV: Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets].”

He addresses the magistrates, who judge for bribes; to the priests, who do not exercise their office as they ought and practice a false religion; to the prophets who prophesy for money, not what God commands, willingly, and still think that the Lord supports them.

Because of all these irregularities, likewise Samaria, Jerusalem will also be destroyed, including the temple of the Lord. He would use a pagan nation to punish His own guilty people. The agents of this destruction were the Babylonians.

## Chapter 4

- Mic. 4: 1-13 – The Mountain of the Lord

- Mic. 4: 1-4: “In days to come [NIV: In the last days] the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths’. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem [NIV: The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem]. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away [NIV: will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide]; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”



Just as this text is found in Isaiah (Isa. 2: 1-5) in reference to the future glory of the spiritual Israel, here Micah repeats the message. He makes mention of the future kingdom of the Messiah and the call of the Gentiles to be His people, for the temple of the Lord would be on the mountains, and there the people would go to learn His law. This text refers to the times of the gospel when Jesus would be in the temple at Jerusalem teaching all who would wish to know the truth of God. In the temple of the Lord the people would be taught to throw away the weapons of war and to learn peace. The future kingdom of the Messiah is called ‘The Last Days’ by the prophet, indicating an important spiritual change for mankind.

‘The mount of the House of the Lord’ is called Mount Zion. ‘Zion’ means ‘dry place’, ‘bathed with sun’, or ‘ridge.’ Mount Zion is the name of one of the hills of

Jerusalem and by the biblical definition is the City of David, and later became synonymous with the Land of Israel. Zion (in Hebrew צִיּוֹן – Tzion or Tsion or Tsiyyon; in Arabic, Şuhyūn) was the name specifically given to the Jebusite fortress that was located on the hill southeast of Jerusalem, called Mount Zion, which was conquered by David. After his death, the term ‘Zion’ came to refer to the hill where the Temple of Solomon was located (on Mount Moriah, 2 Chr. 3: 1, to the north of Mount Zion) and then to the temple itself and its grounds. After that, the word ‘Zion’ was used to symbolize Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

‘But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid’ – that means blessing, prosperity, and divine favor upon His people, a time of peace.

- Mic. 4: 5-8: “For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god [NIV: their gods], but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted [NIV: I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief]. The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore [NIV: from that day and forever]. And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come, the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem [NIV: As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem].”

Micah says that the peoples have their gods, but reminds the Lord’s people that He is their God, and encourages their faith, confirming that they will continue to walk under the protection of that God who had brought them out of Egypt, who taught them His law and that has delivered them from so many things up to here. In the days of the Messiah, He will gather His people from all nations to where they have been scattered and bring them to Zion. There will be healing there, and the remnant will become a mighty nation. For the Jews who did not receive Jesus as the Messiah, this promise is yet to be fulfilled, but to those who received Him and surrendered themselves into His hands, they became a mighty nation of faithful believers, who endured all things for His sake. The Early Church that was born in Jerusalem was strengthened by the Holy Spirit, who was abundantly poured upon them, giving them the spiritual and physical strength to spread the new doctrine throughout the ancient world. By the power of the Spirit, those people faithful to Christ no longer walked as lame among the doctrines of men, for they knew the truth through the mouth of the Son of God. For the converts, who understood the mission of Jesus and the new dispensation that He brought to His people, the temple of Zion came to be within them; their bodies and spirits became the living temple of the Lord on earth.

Then Micah says: “And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come, the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem [NIV: As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem],” and this confirms that the royalty that Jerusalem knew in the past through David was being restored in the person of a descendant of the house of David, Jesus. To Him belonged the dominion of the Holy City, of the Holy Land, and of all who wished to serve Him. He would be their King.

- Mic. 4: 9-10: “Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labor? Writhe and groan



[NIV: Writhe in agony], O daughter Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies.”

The prophet is already referring to the pains of Jerusalem under the threat of the Babylonian invasion, and says that his people will be taken into captivity in that strange land, but it must be so that they may be freed from idolatry and other sins that provoked God so much. After the period of purification, the Lord will look to them again and rescue them from the hands of their enemies.

- Mic. 4: 11-13: “Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, ‘Let her be profaned, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion’ [NIV: But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, ‘Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!']. But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples, and shall devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth [NIV: You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth].”

Micah continues his prophecy revealing the thoughts of the wicked upon Jerusalem. Their desire was really of desecration of the Holy City, and they delighted in seeing it personally, with their own eyes. They were already thinking about the distribution of the spoil. However, the thoughts of God and His ways are higher than the thoughts and ways of men, and He would catch them in ambush. What He was allowing would turn into a greater good for Jerusalem. As if it were a fact that was already occurring, the prophet speaks of the future and tells the city to react, to stand up and show its power (horn) and its force of government (iron), and show its ability to conquer again (nails) as an instrument of judgment in the hands of God (bronze), as it was in the days of Joshua, when the people entered the Promised Land and dispossessed the idolatrous and wicked peoples that were there, because the Lord was with them. This prophecy begins in the post-exile times, when Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt with the assistance of the Persians, especially Cyrus (Ezra 1: 6-11; Ezra 5: 13-15) and Darius I (Ezra 6: 4), and extends to the times of the gospel, when the strength of Jerusalem would be greater than the strength of the flesh; it would be God’s spiritual strength in the doctrine preached by Jesus (through the Holy Spirit), causing His apostles to take the gospel to distant lands, and would help the newborn church in its mission of evangelization.

‘You shall devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth [NIV: You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth]’ – the idolatrous people who used their money to enrich the temples of idols would convert to the true God and give Him their gain and their possessions, that is, they would offer to the kingdom of God, personified in the Lord’s Christian Church on earth.

## Chapter 5

- Mic. 5: 1: “Now you are walled around with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek [NIV: Marshal your troops now, city of troops (or ‘Strengthen your walls’), for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod].”

This verse seems to be related to the last verses of the previous chapter, to the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Jerusalem is summoned to fortify its walls and to mobilize its troops to defend itself against an enemy attack, for they will put siege against its inhabitants.

‘With a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek’ or ‘They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod’ – He says that the enemies will attack the ruler of Israel on the face with a rod, which means a great insult to an eastern ruler (in Am. 2: 3, the term ‘ruler’ is used for the king of Israel). The Lord would cause foreign troops to shame Jerusalem and its ruler would be struck on the face with more scorn (the rod is not only a material instrument of punishment but a metaphor for insults thrown at someone). Zedekiah suffered this; and much more, Jesus the Messiah, the true ruler of Israel, when He was humiliated by the Gentiles and by His own countrymen before being crucified (Isa. 50: 6; Matt. 26: 67; Matt. 27: 30; Mk. 15: 19).

- Mic. 5: 2-15: A promised ruler from Bethlehem

- Mic. 5: 2-4: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah [NIV: ‘small among the clans of Judah’ or ‘small among the rulers of Judah’], from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days [NIV: ‘from ancient times’ or ‘from days of eternity’]. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel [NIV: Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites]. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth [NIV: for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth].”

- Like Isaiah, Micah also waited for the Messiah, and says that He would be born in Bethlehem and would bring restoration to the nation. Bethlehem of Judah is a city in the hill country of Judah called Ephrathah (Gen. 35: 19; Gen. 48: 7). It is different from Bethlehem, another city in the tribe of Zebulun (Josh. 19: 15), so it is written in this verse of Micah as Bethlehem Ephrathah [NIV] or Bethlehem of Ephrathah [NRSV]. Bethlehem was a small and not very important city compared to other cities of Judah. The only thing that made her seen by the Jews was the fact that it was David’s hometown. And it is precisely there that Micah claims to be the birthplace of the Messiah, a descendant of David. After Zedekiah, there was no descendant of the house of David to sit on the throne of the nation; for after the exile, Judea was ruled by governors appointed by the Persian king; then by high priests appointed by Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings, to Antipater, an Idumean or Edomite, father of Herod the Great, placed by the Roman general Pompey as procurator of Palestine in 67 BC.

Then Micah goes on saying: ‘from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days [NIV: ‘from ancient times’ or

‘from days of eternity’].’ This confirms the supernatural nature of the Messiah, His divine character, for it speaks of His eternity.

- ‘Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth [NIV: Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son]’ – this confirms that for a long time, until the Messiah was given to Israel, the people would be delivered into the hands of foreign empires and nations, for they would not know their king. Israel would not be a nation with independent government.

- ‘Then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel [NIV: and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites]’ – this speaks in favor of the union between Israel and Judah (‘the rest of the ruler’s brothers’), which would only be possible in the Messiah’s times through His church, because this could not happen materially due to the separation of citizens in political parties and religious sects that arose in the Intertestamental Period and the beginning of the Christian era (the zealots, for example). In this period the Jewish people suffered with civil wars that were more evident in the time of the Macabees and the Hasmonean Period, when these leaders also fought among themselves. By the time of the Romans, Judea (or Palestine) was divided by many parties in constant disagreement, which allowed the later destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. Apart from extremist groups (the Zealots and the Sicarii) there were other political and religious parties that were also in constant opposition: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes, which arose during the time of the Ptolemaic Period, especially during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (250-198 BC).

- ‘And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth [NIV: for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth]’ – Jesus as a figure of the good shepherd would unite Jews and Gentiles under grace, the unmerited favor from God, in a single family: His Church (Jn. 10: 16). His name would be known throughout the Earth. His spiritual government over Israel would free His children from the bondage of sin and the humiliation of servitude to ungodly men, giving them greater security over life, for they would know the freedom of the Messiah, and receive a kingdom that would never be taken from them.

- Mic. 5: 5a: “And he shall be the one of peace [NVI: And he will be their peace; KJV: And this man shall be the peace].”

Micah continues to speak of the Messiah: ‘He will be their peace’, that is, He will be the peace his people are waiting for.

- Mic. 5: 5b-6 (Deliverance and destruction): “If the Assyrians (KJV: when the Assyrian) come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers [NIV: When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men]. They shall rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; they shall rescue us from the Assyrians if they come into our land or tread within our border [NIV: They will rule (‘or crush’) the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he invades our land and marches into our borders].”

When we read this text from Micah and compare it with Isaiah (Isa. 9: 1-7; Isa. 11: 1-10 and other texts where he speaks of the Messiah), it seems that the two prophets, because of the chaotic situation in which they lived, were awaiting the coming of the Messiah for a time very close to them, or perhaps, projecting the characteristics of the

Messiah on some ruler who would deliver the nation from those spiritual darkness and the oppression of foreigners. I am saying this because soon after the first sentence ('And he shall be the one of peace' or 'And he will be their peace' or else 'And this man shall be the peace'), the prophet again speaks of a situation much closer and real, which is the invasion of Assyria. Then he writes:

'If the Assyrians' (KJV: 'when the Assyrian'; NIV: 'When the Assyrian') – He probably referred to Sennacherib, who invaded Judah and threatened to invade Jerusalem.

It is difficult to identify the shepherds and rulers or leaders quoted by the prophet with any character who has lived in that age, especially with someone who would be able to deliver them from Assyria when it came to their land and trod upon their soil (or 'marched through their fortresses'), i.e., crossed their borders, and could rule ('or crush' the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod (Babylon) with the drawn sword (KJV: 'in the entrances thereof'). This would be something for God to do, for the Messiah the prophet was waiting for; but He would come much later, and with another purpose determined by the Father.

- Mic. 5: 7-9: "Then the remnant of Jacob, surrounded by many peoples, shall be like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which do not depend upon people or wait for any mortal [NIV: which do not wait for anyone or depend on man]. And among the nations the remnant of Jacob, surrounded by many peoples, shall be like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which, when it goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, with no one to deliver. Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off [NIV: and all your foes will be destroyed]."

When the people are free from Assyria and Babylon, as the prophet implies, he says that the holy remnant that the Lord leaves will be scattered among the nations and will be as a blessing to many peoples ('like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass'), and will reign among them as a mighty force ('like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep'). In other words, the Jewish dispersion.

However, this seems more like a prophecy about the spiritual Israel, the church of the NT; therefore, this prophecy has already been fulfilled in the person of Jesus, defeating the devil on the cross and making us ambassadors of His kingdom on earth, making His true doctrine to prevail over the sophistry of Satan, no matter where we are. This began with His apostles and disciples at the beginning of the Christian era, who went to many places (including Jewish communities in other nations, established in the period of exile) and carried the seed of the gospel. Today, the church of Christ, made of all who have accepted His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His divinity and authority over all things, and who takes on His call ('The great Commission' – Matt. 28: 18-20), this is the remnant that makes the difference wherever it is.

'Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off' – Micah still keeps the hope in the Lord's victory over His enemies.

- Mic. 5: 10-15: "In that day, says the Lord, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds; and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more soothsayers [NVI: I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells]; and I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; and I will uproot your sacred poles

[NIV: your Asherah poles] from among you and destroy your towns. And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey [NIV: that have not obeyed me].”

The Lord confirmed through Micah His intention to purify His people from violence and idolatry, which seemed the two major weaknesses in that nation. Hence, this is written in sequence to the birth of the Messiah and as being a characteristic of His reign. When we read the prophetic writings we can notice that not even after the return of Babylon the Jews were completely freed from their idolatrous tendency. Thus, with the birth of Jesus, a new dispensation began for Israel and became clear to those who converted and abandoned the old customs because of the particular revelation they received from Him, as happened to Saul of Tarsus (Gal. 1: 11-12 ) and with the other apostles of the Lord.

- ‘In that day’ refers to the first coming of Jesus and the times of the gospel.

- ‘I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots’ – It concerns their warlike nature, which has already caused many contentions, not only within Israelite society itself, but also between Israel and neighboring countries, almost making the Jews ‘to compete’ with the barbarian and wicked nations around them in matters of cruelty. This was not God’s plan for His people. Jesus came bringing another doctrine, teaching peace and holiness.

- ‘And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey [NIV: that have not obeyed me]’ – this phrase seems to have a very spiritual revelation if we think it is linked to the previous thought about the prophecy having been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus. We must remember that the cross was the moment where Jesus’ ministry had its apex, fulfilling the mission for which He came and putting an end to the enmity between God and men, mainly because of idolatry, and making it clear that only He would be able to do this reconnection. By saying, ‘It is finished’, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn, and something very strong has been done by God Himself in the spiritual realm, accomplishing His wrath against all manner of carnal deformation and sin provoked by Satan for thousands of years, especially the ‘plague’ of idolatry. Whoever was there at that moment was certainly struck by the truth, for the folly of idolatry became apparent, and the character and purpose of the Father became clear to those who had eyes to see. Thus, Jesus did the complete work and left the way open for the human being to exercise his free will. This wrath was suffered by the Son because of the sin of all of us, but it will be felt and lived in their own skin by those who insist on disobeying and, for pride, did not accept the propitiation that was made by the Son of God. Therefore, for some, this prophecy has already been fulfilled. For others, it will still be fulfilled.

## Chapter 6

- Mic. 6: 1-8 – The Lord’s case against Israel

- Mic. 6: 1-2: “Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord [NIV: the Lord’s accusation], and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.”

The prophet calls people to hear what the Lord has to say. God tells His people to defend themselves, and takes the hills and mountains as witnesses to this controversy.

- Mic. 6: 3-5: “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? [NIV: How have I burdened you?] Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord [NIV: Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD].”

God speaks what He has already done for Israel, and asks in what He has wronged or wearied His people. He reminds them of their deliverance from Egypt and the deliverance they gave them when they were about to enter the Promised Land, and He compelled Balaam to bless them (Num. 23 – 24) instead of cursing them as Balak the Moabite king, the son of Zippor, intended to do (Num. 22: 4-6).

‘What happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord [NIV: Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD]’ – The Lord refers to the episode concerning the worship of Baal of Peor (Num. 25: 1-18; Deut. 4: 3; Ps. 106: 28-31 cf. Hos. 9: 10).

- Mic. 6: 6-8: “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old (cf. Lev. 9: 3)? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness [NIV: to love mercy], and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah asks the people how it would be the right and pleasant way for them to present themselves before the Lord, that is, how to approach Him with true worship? He asked this because God was already tired of empty rituals, even of abominations that they might commit as some kings of Israel and Judah did (‘Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression’ – cf. Jer. 7: 31; Jer. 19: 5; Lev. 18: 21; Lev. 20: 2; Ahaz – 2 Kin. 16: 3; 2 Chr. 28: 3; Manasseh – 2 Kin. 21: 6; 2 Chr. 33: 6). He only asked three things of them: to do justice, and to love kindness [NIV: to love mercy], and to walk humbly with Him. Therefore, the prophet stressed that the saving grace of God could not be obtained by merit, in the form of pretentious offers of sacrifices and formalities, but by humility, mercy and justice as a daily experience in the life of the individual.

- Mic. 6: 9-16 (Israel’s guilt and punishment):



• Mic. 6: 9-12: “The voice of the Lord cries to the city (it is sound wisdom to fear your name): Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city! [NIV: Listen! The LORD is calling to the city—and to fear your name is wisdom—Heed the rod and the One who appointed it. Note: The meaning of the Hebrew for this line is uncertain]. Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? [NIV: Am I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures, you wicked house, and the short ephah, which is accursed?] Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights? [NIV: Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?] Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, with tongues of deceit in their mouths [NIV: Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully].”

The prophet was addressing the tribe of Judah and asked them to hear what he had to say from the Lord. Once again He condemned ill-gotten gains and denounced dishonest scales, unjust weights and unjust measures (ephah). In the law it was written that these things could not remain in their houses (Lev. 19: 35-36; Deut. 25: 13-16; Ezek. 45: 11-12). With the ephah, a unit of measure, they bought and sold the grain. And with the scales they weighed the products they bought, even gold and silver. But they used different weights and measures when they bought and when they sold in order to make a profit. When they were selling a product, the weight was lighter; so they sold a smaller amount for a certain price. If they were buying a product, the weight was heavier on this side of the scales, so they took more of the product to their homes.

An ephah was a unit of measure for dry and was equal to 17.62 liters (the bath or batous was the unit of measure for liquids, and it was equal to 20.82 liters), but if they diminished in size (even if a little), no one would notice; and so, would pay for something that would not consume because it had taken less quantity home. And that kind of attitude was very common among traders.

Ancient scales had a margin of error of 6% and it was not yet found two Hebrew weights of the same denomination inscribed on each of them that were of exactly the same weight. It was a little difficult to establish a weight exactly like the other because they were made of stone, which were sculpted to take certain shapes, usually with flat base, which made them easy to handle or recognize, and their value was carved on the stone. The weights were carried in a bag or purse (Mic. 6: 11), and the buyer could make the comparison with the currency among the merchants of a certain place (Gen. 23: 16). ‘Decreasing the ephah, and increasing the shekel’ – merchants used measures smaller than fair; and heavier weights to deceive, receiving more than due in business. They altered their scales so that their customers could lose their money when they bought something, weighting the product. God could not tolerate this kind of fraud.

‘Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, with tongues of deceit in their mouths [NIV: Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully]’ – the rich stole and were still able to do it with violence to get what they wanted. The lie was in every mouth to divert people from the right way and still gain advantages for oneself, like happened with the prophets who prophesied for money and said what was most convenient.

• Mic. 6: 13: “Therefore I have begun to strike you down, making you desolate because of your sins.”

Here the Lord says that because of all this the city will be punished.

• Mic. 6: 14: “You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be a gnawing hunger within you; you shall put away, but not save, and what you save, I will hand

over to the sword [NIV: You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword].”

They would experience hunger and deprivation, even if they sold or pawned their possessions in exchange for food. If they stored up something, still so they would be looted.

- Mic. 6: 15-16: “You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine. For you have kept the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab, and you have followed their counsels [NIV: you have followed their traditions]. Therefore I will make you a desolation, and your inhabitants an object of hissing; so you shall bear the scorn of my people [NIV: you will bear the scorn of the nations’ or ‘the scorn due my people’].”

All the work of their hands would be fruitless; nothing would be blessed because they walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like Omri and his son Ahab, full of violence and idolatry, promoting the public worship of Baal and his consort Asherah (1 Kin. 16: 21-34; 1 Kin. 18: 17-19; 1 Kin. 19: 2; 1 Kin. 21: 2-3; 9-13), worship that was associated with sexual rites. Because of this, the Lord would expose His people to shame.

## Chapter 7

- Mic. 7: 1-6 – The moral corruption of Israel

- Mic. 7: 1-4: “Woe is me! For I have become like one who, after the summer fruit has been gathered, after the vintage has been gleaned, finds no cluster to eat; there is no first-ripe fig for which I hunger. The faithful have disappeared from the land, and there is no one left who is upright; they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets. Their hands are skilled to do evil; the official and the judge ask for a bribe, and the powerful dictate what they desire; thus they pervert justice [NIV: Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire – they all conspire together]. The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of their sentinels, of their punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand [NIV: The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of their confusion].”

So far, the prophet says that he is very disappointed with his people, he is discouraged by what he sees and nothing rejoices him, for he only sees corruption. He finds himself so exhausted, lifeless like when the summer fruits are gathered, which soon disappear into the baskets of the harvesters and there is nothing left for the poor, or like what remains after the vintage has been gleaned: some grapes out of the clusters, and so dry that one can not suck; or as dried later figs, for the first-ripe figs are no longer in the tree. He no longer sees a godly man, no upright was left; he sees only violence, intrigue, and wickedness, which do not cease. The ruler orders and demands things from the people, the judge works for bribery, the rich and noble show their evil intentions and all together plot against the innocent. They look like thorns, dangerous to be touched and not attractive at all. But the day of God’s punishment is coming, and confusion will reign over them.

- Mic. 7: 5-6: “Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace [NIV: Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words]; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household (cf. Matt. 10: 36; Lk. 12: 53) [NIV: For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies are the members of his own household].”

Betrayal and distrust are within homes, as well as disrespect and indifference. Within his family a man does not feel safe.

- Mic. 7: 8-13 – The Lord has compassion on Israel

- Mic. 7: 7: “But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.”

Despite of all evil he witnesses, he affirms his trust in God, for he knows that he will be heard, and that only He can save him from all this. The Lord has compassion on Israel (Mic. 7: 8-13).

- Mic. 7: 8-9: “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I must bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he takes my side and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall see his vindication [NIV: Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD’s wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness].”

Micah speaks in the name of the nation now, after repentance came, and acknowledgment that it had sinned. The enemy to which he refers is Babylon. God will deliver them, after He has finished His judgment, and they will know His righteousness.

- Mic. 7: 10-12: “Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, ‘Where is the Lord your God?’ My eyes will see her downfall; now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets. **11** A day for the building of your walls! **In that day** the boundary shall be far extended [NIV: The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries]. **12 In that day** they will come to you from Assyria to Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain [NIV: In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain].”

Those who mock the misfortune of Judah will be ashamed, like Babylon, for example, for they will suffer destruction as well.

In that day’ (v. 11; 12) – It means, on the day of the rebuilding of the walls.

On the day that the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt, they will go farther than they were before, enlarging the city (cf. Neh. 3: 1-32). This prophecy of Micah was proven true in the archaeological finds made in the excavations of the city of Jerusalem in relation to the walls of Nehemiah: the northern and western parts of the wall needed only repairs. The east wall, however, must have been completely redone. But if we look at the map of the city of Jerusalem from the time of Nehemiah and compare it with the time of the monarchy, we can see that the western wall has been expanded (cf. Isa. 49: 20). The walls, with a base of about two and a half meters thick, were rudimentarily constructed with whole stones and gravel, explaining why they were the object of mockery. Perhaps they were six to nine meters high, almost three and a half kilometers long, on a circumference of three hundred and sixty-four square kilometers. Symbolically ‘the boundary shall be far extended’ may mean the removal of the tyrannical rules of Babylon upon them as it was with their fathers in Egypt (Ezek. 20: 25), since KJV writes: “In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed.” The prophecy may also refer to the restoration of the Jews in the first coming of the Messiah (cf. Am. 9: 11 – ‘David’s fallen tent’ or ‘the booth of David that is fallen’).

‘They will come to you’ – He is speaking to Jerusalem; the Jews will come to build it, from all parts of the earth to where they have been scattered, from north to south, from east to west.

- Mic. 7: 13: “But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their doing.”

The earth of which he speaks here is Babylon, which God will also punish because of its actions against the Lord’s people.

- Mic. 7: 14-20 – Appeal for mercy

- Mic. 7: 14-15: “Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land [NIV: in fertile pasturelands (or ‘in the middle of Carmel’)]; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things [NIV: As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders].”

Micah prayed that God, the Shepherd, would care for His flock. God told him that He will show the people of Israel marvelous things (‘I will show them my wonders’), as in the days when they came out of the land of Egypt.

- Mic. 7: 16-17: “The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their fortresses; they shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall stand in fear of you.”

The prophet is speaking to the people that the nations that humbled them would see the wonders of the Lord on their behalf, and they would be ashamed; they would speak no more against the God of Israel (‘they shall lay their hands on their mouths’) or against the Jews. They would close their ears to the blasphemies of unbelievers and to the curses against the Lord’s people (‘their ears shall be deaf’) so as not to provoke His wrath. On the contrary, they would come to Him to know Him better. The name of Israel would be feared among the peoples. This would be result of their repentance and obedience to Him, as Moses wrote in Deut. 28 about the blessings for obedience: “The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you” (Deut. 28: 9-10).

- Mic. 7: 18-20: “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency [NIV: mercy]. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old [NIV: You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago].”

Micah ends with exaltation to the Lord, praising Him for His mercy and for His ability to forgive. He knows that the Lord is now punishing them, but he is sure of His compassion, which will be poured out on them again and will erase their transgressions. He will show His faithfulness to Jacob, that is, to the truly Israelites; and to the Gentiles, the Israelites by faith (those who are of the seed of Abraham – cf. Rom. 4: 9; 11-13; Gal. 3: 14), who inherited their promises through Jesus the Messiah.

‘Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession?’ [NIV: Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?] – Micah is practically repeating what God said of Himself when He revealed His glory to Moses (Ex. 34: 6-9).

## Conclusion:

By speaking of Micah we are speaking of the zeal of the Lord for His people despite their sin, also punishing those who make fun of their suffering and of His zeal

for His own holiness, for when His chosen commit atrocities and iniquities, His holy name is ashamed and blasphemed. What He asks of us is the humility and the true worship. This way, the prophet must be an instrument of zeal of the Lord where there is sin, irreverence, abomination, lack of fear and lack of knowledge of the true God. The prophet must not let the world influence him or the things of the flesh and evil seduce him and divert him from the truth, for all this leaves a stain in our spirit and hurts the Holy Spirit who is in us. We should know that the love and mercy of the Lord will always be available to all those who sincerely repent of their error, and that His restoration is complete, removing of us all charges of the enemy. It is He who justifies us before those who humiliated us and lifts us before those who wished to see us fall. When we are at the center of His will, His protection and His righteousness are upon us. We must intercede like Habakkuk for those who are in error, but not to carry the burden for their sins, their rebellion and their idolatry. When the sinner rejects the correction through the mouth of the intercessor and the prophet, it's time to stop praying and let God's sovereign purpose take action to discipline, to convince of error, of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and thus vindicate His own holiness.

## Nahum

Nahum means ‘consolation’, ‘compassionate.’ Prophetic Period: 663-612 BC. Nahum reminds us that God holds the control of History and will not allow evil to prevail forever (Nah. 1: 1-3). He was born in Elkosh (probably in Judah). The capture of Thebes (No-Ammon, Nah. 3: 8-10) had already occurred in 661 BC under Ashurbanipal king of Assyria (669-627 BC), after three years of siege. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 BC, when was conquered by Babylon and Media, more or less, one hundred and fifty years after Jonah deliver God’s message to it. Nahum describes the trial to come by the zeal of God, which consists in to carry on His aims both to make His own kingdom prevail and to punish His adversaries. Nahum also describes the enemy that will put siege to Nineveh (Nah. 3: 1-19), the Medes, who came from the plains of Persia and turned their attention against the Assyrians in the plain of Mesopotamia. Nineveh, a large commercial city (Nah. 3: 16) of Assyria and its last capital, would be plundered. Its wickedness would be punished. It was bloodthirsty and cruel, full of lies and robbery (Nah. 3: 1), a warlike city and had killed many nations through its prostitution and sorcery (Nah. 3: 4). The Hebrew word for Nineveh (nīnʿweh or Nīnewē – נִינְוָה), in Greek, nineue (Νῑνευῆ), in Latin, Nineve; in Arabic: Naīnuwa, an ‘exceedingly large city’, is a translation of the Assyrian, ninua, in Old Babylonian, ninuwa, which in turn is transliteration of the even more ancient Sumerian name, Nina, the name of the goddess Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love and war, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. Nina was the ancient Assyrian name of the ‘Queen of Heaven’ (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25), therefore, place of great abomination and idolatry, witchcraft and prostitution.





## Chapter 1

- Nah. 1: 1-15 – The Lord’s anger against Nineveh

• Nah. 1: 1-2: “A prophecy concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite [NIV: Nahum of Elkosh]. A jealous and avenging God is the Lord, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies.”

Elkosh seems to have been a poor village in the tribe of Judah. In the first place, the prophet describes the zeal of God, which consists in carrying out His purposes both to elevate His own kingdom and to punish His adversaries. And this is described first to confirm the word of rebuke from the Lord and confirm that His decree will not be changed.

• Nah. 1: 3-6: “The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades [NIV: the blossoms of Lebanon fade]. The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces [NIV: the rocks are shattered before him].”

Like all other prophets and psalmists, Nahum shows the power, majesty, and righteousness of God, and poetically describes the manifestations of nature as a sign of reverence for Him, confirming His lordship over all creation. Like Isaiah, Nahum mentions Carmel, Lebanon, and Bashan to express God’s pleasure or displeasure in the face of situations experienced by mankind.

‘Bashan and Carmel wither’ – Bashan is the land east of the Jordan River, which before the entry of the people in Canaan belonged to the Amorites. When Moses overcame their kings (Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan – Josh. 12: 1-6; Num. 21: 21-35; Deut. 2: 26-37; Deut. 3: 1-13), the land was given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and a half tribe of Manasseh, for it was a land rich in pasture and very favorable to cattle. When Nahum says that Bashan withers, it means that before the wrath of God a greenish land, suitable for grazing, loses the exuberance and becomes a barren land, like a desert.

Mount Carmel (karmel, ‘planted’, ‘fruitful land’ or ‘vineyard’) is a mountain range of forty-eight kilometers long, North-West to South-East of the Mediterranean (south beach of Acre Bay) to the plain of Dothan (today the archaeological site of Tel Dothan, also known as Tel al-Hafireh). Dothan is 12 miles to the north of the city of Sebastia (in Latin, Sebaste), formerly called Samaria. Mount Carmel is the main mountain range (maximum height of five hundred and twenty-three meters), in the extreme Northwest. Although it is a region densely covered with vegetation, it was very sparsely inhabited. The luxuriant vegetation of Carmel is reflected in Am. 1: 2; Am. 9: 3; Mic. 7: 14; Nah. 1: 4; Song 7: 5. The word ‘karmel’ in Hebrew can be used as a common noun in this sense [2 Kin. 19: 23: ‘densest forest’ – NRSV; Strong #3759: a planted field (garden, orchard, vineyard or park); by implication, garden produce]. It can be used to indicate fresh grains of cereals (Lev. 23: 14: ‘new grain’ or ‘fresh ears’). Mount Carmel is formed of a hard limestone, abundant in caves, and reaches the altitude of five hundred and twenty-three meters. At the base of the mountain the tortuous Kishon River runs. It

was a very sparsely inhabited region. The glory of the Lord shone for His people in Carmel, for it was there that in the person of Elijah God manifested His power against the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, consuming with fire the sacrifice that the prophet had placed upon the altar. Nahum says that Mount Carmel also faints ('Bashan and Carmel wither'), that is, before God's wrath the great and luxuriant forest will disappear, it will lose its vegetation.

'The bloom of Lebanon fades' or 'the blossoms of Lebanon fade' – Lebanon is famous because of its dense forest. Ample rainfall from November to March and the mountains of limestone give rise to many wellsprings and streams. To the south of the mountains there are cultivation of gardens, olive groves, vineyards and orchards of fruit (mulberries, figs, apples, apricots, walnuts) and small fields of wheat. The forest vegetation is of myrtle, conifers and huge cedars; therefore, Lebanon is a symbol of fertility and of taking benefit and enjoyment of life and of a plantation, of taking advantage of the fruit. Nahum also says that the blossoms of Lebanon fade because of the indignation of the Lord.



Mount Carmel

‘The rocks are broken in pieces’ or ‘the rocks are shattered before him’ – this reminds us of Elijah in Horeb, when he hid in the cave and God passed before him. First, there was a great strong wind that split the hills and shattered the rocks. After the wind, an earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a gentle whisper (a still small voice – KJV) that came after all this; and in that quiet voice, He spoke with His son (1 Kin. 19: 11-12). The great manifestations of nature showed the power of God and His dominion over all things that were created by Him, but when the time to speak and comfort Elijah came, He spoke softly to calm him down from his fears.

In this passage of Nahum, God would not speak sweetly to the wicked, but would show them His indignation with so much sin.

- Nah. 1: 7: “The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him [NIV: The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him].”

In this verse, Nahum shows the counterpart of all that he wrote above, that is, for the humble and God-fearing, He shows His mercy and His strong arm, where those who are His can take refuge in times of trouble.

- Nah. 1: 8-10: “... even in a rushing flood. He will make a full end of his adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness [NIV: but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness]. Why do you plot against the Lord? He will make an end; no adversary will rise up twice [NIV: Whatever they plot against the LORD he will bring to an end; trouble will not come a second time]. Like thorns they are entangled, like drunkards they are drunk; they are consumed like dry straw [NIV: They will be entangled among thorns and drunk from their wine; they will be consumed like dry stubble].”

Here he prophesies the way the city will be destroyed: with a flood, because it was because of flood of its dam that the wall presented breaches, facilitating the entry of the enemy.

‘Will pursue his enemies into darkness’ or ‘he will pursue his foes into darkness’ – much probably it is about the fire of the palace, the main buildings of the city and other houses by the Medes and Babylonians, raising a dark smoke; however, may also mean the ‘darkness of death’ for the citizens of Nineveh.

Then God uses the prophet Nahum to confront His foes, for he shows that their thoughts are not hidden from His ears: “Why do you plot against the Lord? He will make an end; no adversary will rise up twice [NIV: Whatever they plot against the LORD he will bring to an end; trouble will not come a second time].” This means that everything the Assyrians planned against God’s people (therefore against Him) would be undone, and the destruction would be such that the Lord would not need to repeat the work by bringing in another invading army. However much united they might feel in their evil plans (‘Like thorns they are entangled’) and however much drunk as they were with their violence and thirst for blood and conquest (‘like drunkards they are drunk’), even so the Lord was stronger to put an end in all this evil.

- Nah. 1: 11: “From you one has gone out who plots evil against the Lord, one who counsels wickedness [NIV: From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the LORD and counsels wickedness; KJV: There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counselor].”

Many scholars say that ‘one has gone out who plots evil against the Lord, one who counsels wickedness’ or ‘a wicked counselor’ is Sennacherib or Rabshakeh his field commander, based on the premise that Nahum is contemporary with Isaiah. But if we take into account what is written in Nah. 3: 8 about the fall of Thebes or No Amon, in 661 BC in the reign of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) as a past event (a real one) then we may say that Nahum was probably speaking of another Assyrian king or Ashurbanipal himself, thinking of attacking Judah and Jerusalem on their return from Egypt after conquering Thebes. We know of the great thirst for conquest of the Assyrians. In the reign of Ashurbanipal Assyria acquired the greatest territorial extension, although in 663 BC it began to show signs of weakness, and had been attacked by the Medes in this time. About 652 BC Shamash-shum-ukin (brother of Ashurbanipal, and reigning in Babylon) revolted with the support of Elam, but died in his own palace, to which he had set fire. Therefore Ashurbanipal marched to plunder Susa in 639 BC, and henceforth became an Assyrian province. With the attention of Ashurbanipal turned to the east the western city-states gradually were liberating themselves from Assyria. Egypt, now free, turned its attention again to Palestine, but did not invade Judah until the time of Josiah (640-609 BC). What we know from the historical data in the Assyrian inscriptions is that during the reign of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) there were many conflicts with the Arabs, including those of Kedar.

Thus, ‘one has gone out who plots evil against the Lord, one who counsels wickedness’ or ‘a wicked counselor’ could be Ashurbanipal himself or one of his counselors or generals (or possibly a simple malicious citizen of Nineveh) who would even be able to suggest to the king an invasion of Judah after the conquest of Egypt, but they were probably frustrated by the event in Babylon, under the total control of God to carry out His plans and not those of men.

- Nah. 1: 12-13: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Though they are at full strength and many [NIV: Although they have allies and are numerous], they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you [NVI: O Judah], I will afflict you no more. And now I will break off his yoke from you and snap the bonds that bind you’ [NIV: Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away].”

Here the Lord brings a word of comfort and hope to His people, for He confirms the defeat of Assyria and the deliverance of Judah from its hands. He says that although the enemy army was numerous, it would be exterminated. In Isa. 10: 18-19 the prophet says that the Assyrian army was as numerous as a forest, but would be consumed by the Lord.

There was a short period of rest for Israel between the fall of Assyria (the taking of Nineveh was in 612 BC) and the Babylonian rule through Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC), for his father, Nabopolassar (626-605 BC), was involved in conquest of other nations at that time and concerned to establish a steady empire to be left to his heir.

- Nah. 1: 14-15: “The Lord has commanded concerning you: ‘Your name shall be perpetuated no longer [NIV: The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh: ‘You will have no descendants to bear your name]; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the cast image. I will make your grave, for you are worthless’ [NIV: for you are vile]. Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off.”

The decree of God is firm against Assyria, with the total destruction of its idols, since that nation corrupted many others, ‘exchanging’ gods among them and thereby

corrupting many lives, including Israel. Egypt was a nation that greatly encouraged this kind of spread of Assyrian idolatry; the goddess Nina or Ishtar was one of the goddesses involved in this idolatrous exchange. Assyria and Nineveh in particular were greatly enriched by their wars and conquests, for all the spoil was taken to the great city and given first to the priests. Before they went to war, the rulers invoked these gods to succeed in their purpose of destruction and extermination of other nations; and their greedy priests encouraged the campaigns of conquest, awaiting rich retribution of the spoils. Assyria was a nation whose principal occupation was war, and the priests were incessant supporters of it. Its kings also had a very cruel way of treating the prisoners, and this was recorded in many reliefs on the walls and tablets found in the palace of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The Assyrians were known by decapitating the vanquished peoples, making pyramids with their skulls; they also crucified or impaled the prisoners, plucked out their eyes and skinned them alive.

‘Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off’ – this expresses the peace that the Jews would enjoy with the downfall of the oppressor and the joy they would have in receiving the good news that Nineveh was destroyed and they would no longer be oppressed by the Assyrians. Nahum made use of a part of the phrase of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 52: 7) that speaks of the joy of the land of Judaea when the news of the return of the Babylonian exiles is given, for this means a reconciliation between God and His people. He will again be with them in the temple that will be rebuilt, and much more with the coming of the Messiah. Blessed is he who announces the good news, for he will bring peace to the hearts of those who hear of the liberation of the exiles.

## Chapter 2

### • Nah. 2: 1-13 – The siege and fall of Nineveh

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, is quoted by the prophets as an arrogant city and very confident in itself, but also would be destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Isa. 10: 5-34; Zeph. 2: 13-16; Nah. 1: 1 – 3: 19).

The first capital of Assyria was Assur (14<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), a city existing since the third millennium BC. Assur (Aššur, in Akkadian; Syriac, 'Āšūr; Persian: Āšūr; Hebrew: אַשּׁוּר Aššûr, Arabic: Āšūr, Kurdish: Asûr) is also known as Ashur and Qal'at Sherqat. Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 BC) changed the capital from Assur to Kalhu (Calah / Nimrud). With the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC) the capital passed to Dur-Sharrukin ('Fortress of Sargon'). However, he died in battle and his son and successor Sennacherib (705-682 BC) left the city, choosing to magnify Nineveh as his royal capital. However, the city of Assur remained the religious center of the empire, due to its temple of the national god Ashur.

The Hebrew word for Nineveh (nīnēweh or Nīnewē – נִינְוָה), in Greek, nineue (Νινευη), in Latin, Nineve; in Arabic: Naīnuwa, an 'exceedingly large city', is a translation of the Assyrian, ninua, in Old Babylonian, ninuwa, which in turn is transliteration of the even more ancient Sumerian name, Nina, the name of the goddess Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love and war, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. Nina was the ancient Assyrian name of the 'Queen of Heaven' (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25); therefore, a place of great abomination and idolatry, witchcraft and prostitution.

Nineveh, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, was a group of several villages along this river. Today is a large area of ruins by the new suburbs of the city of Mosul, in the state of Ninawa, Iraq. The ancient mounds Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk, Nimrud (name of the ancient Calah), Karamles (Karemlash or Karemlish) and Khorsabad (present name of the ancient Dur-Sharrukin) form the four corners of a parallelogram. They are located on the plain near the confluence of the Tigris and Khosr Rivers. Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk was the mound of the ancient citadel of Nineveh whose name means 'mound of many sheep', twenty meters high above the plain, and has another mound beside it (One kilometer to the south, the secondary mound of the ruins of Nineveh) which was given the name of Nabī Yūnus ('Prophet Jonah' in Arabic), and which was not properly explored because there was a Muslim Arab shrine dedicated to that prophet on the spot.

Nimrud is the modern name of the archaeological site located around the Assyrian city of Kalhu, located south of the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia. Archaeologists named the city Nimrud because of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 8-11). The city was called Calah in the bible. These were the four districts of old Nineveh, so Jonah must have taken three days to go through it. Dur-Sharrukin (the modern Khorsabad) means 'Fortress of Sargon' and was the capital of Assyria at the time of Sargon II, father of Sennacherib. Khorsabad today is a village in northern Iraq, fifteen kilometers northeast of Mosul. The great city was entirely built in the decade prior to 706 BC. After Sargon's unexpected death in battle, the capital was displaced twenty kilometers south to Nineveh.





Location of Nineveh (archaeological sites) – Wikipedia

• Nah. 2: 1-2: “A shatterer has come up against you [NIV: An attacker advances against you, Nineveh]. Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your loins; collect all your strength (For the Lord is restoring the majesty of Jacob, as well as the majesty of Israel, though ravagers have ravaged them and ruined their branches) [NIV: The LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines].”

‘A shatterer’ or ‘an attacker’ refers in particular to the king of Media, Cyaxares (Uvaxštra – in old Persian; transliterated as ‘Uvarkhshattra’ or ‘Hovakhshatra’, 625-584 BC, father of Astyages the grandfather of Cyrus II), aided by Nabopolassar (626-605 BC, father of Nebuchadnezzar II) king of Babylon, and by the Scythians (a group of nomadic tribes from northern of Siberia near the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), who acted with considerable destruction in the invaded areas, and was already devastating the regions of Assyria, Western Asia and Egypt. At the end of the eighth century BC they moved to the north of Persia and to the northern region of Assyria (Urartu). Their initial advance to the southwest was faced by Sargon II (727-705 BC) and Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC).

Nineveh was embellished in 700 BC by Sennacherib (705-681 BC), which made it a magnificent city. At that time the total area of Nineveh comprised seven square kilometers, an interior wall about twelve and a half kilometers long (circumference), and had fifteen great gates on its walls. The system of walls consisted of a wall of stone of about 6 meters high, surmounted by a mud brick wall with 10 meters high and 15



meters thick. The stone retaining wall had projecting stone towers spaced every 18 meters away from each other, and with great height. Like the city of Babylon, the walls of Nineveh were thick and allowed chariots to pass through them.

Five of the gates have been explored by archaeologists:

- Mashki Gate ('Gate of the Watering Places') perhaps was used to take the cattle to the Tigris River, which currently flows about 0.9 miles to the west. It was rebuilt with mud brick to the top of the vaulted passageway. The original Assyrian gate may have been plastered and ornamented.

- Nergal Gate

It received this name because of the god Nergal ('lord of the great city' – god of plague, war, flood and confusion), and perhaps was used for some ceremonial purpose, for it is the only known gate flanked by stone sculptures of winged bulls (lamassu) in both sides of the walls. The reconstruction made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a conjectural building of what could be before, as was excavated by Layard in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

- Adad Gate

It received this name because of the god Adad ('the thunderer' – the Amorite equivalent of Baal, the god of the storms). A reconstruction was begun in the 1960s by Iraqis but was not completed, leaving only a mixture of concrete and eroding mud brick, which nonetheless gives some idea of the original Assyrian structure.



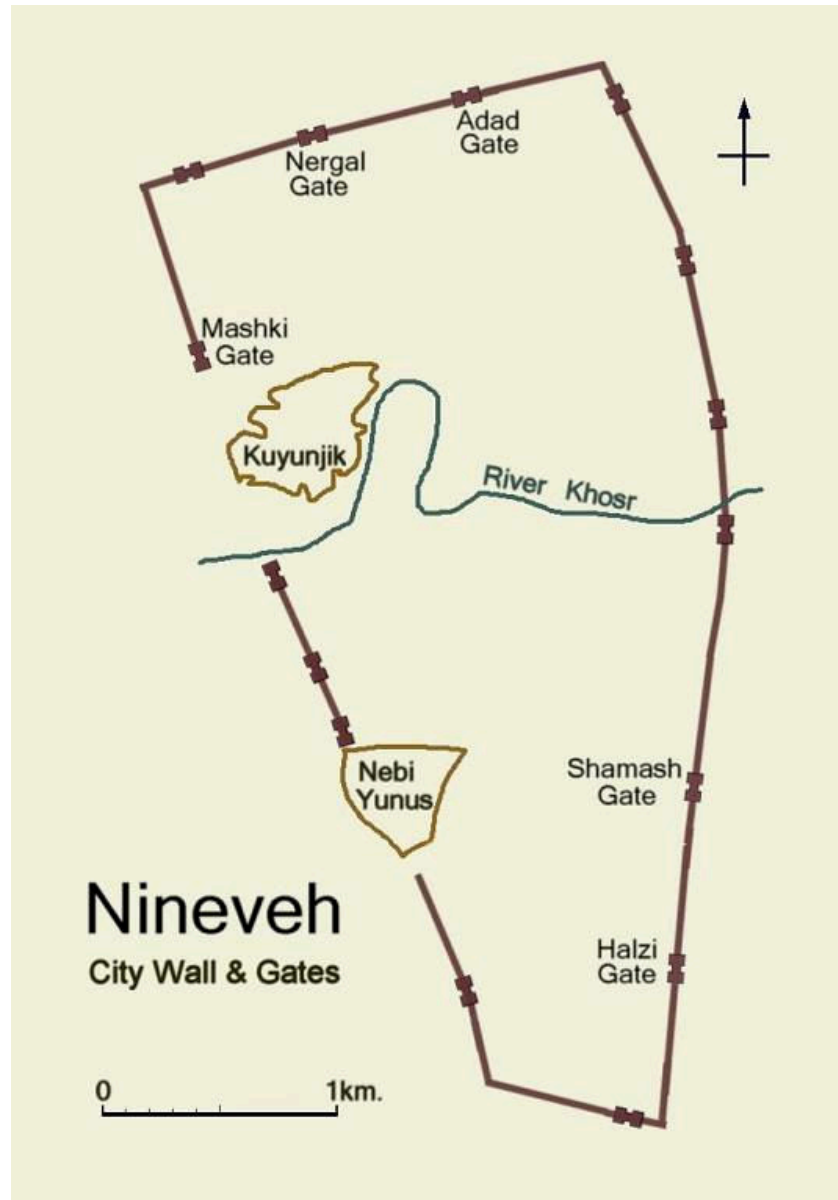
Exterior entrance of Adad Gate (after its restoration) – Wikipedia

- Shamash Gate

It received this name because of the sun god Shamash. It was excavated by Layard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the mud brick structure and the stone retaining wall were reconstructed in the 1960s. The mud brick reconstruction has deteriorated. The stone wall projects outward about twenty meters out of the main wall, and is seventy meters wide. Shamash Gate is the only one with such a significant projection. Its size and design suggest it was the most important gate in the times of Neo-Assyrian Empire.

- Halzi Gate – the meaning of this name is unknown. It was located near the south end of the eastern city wall. Archaeological excavations were undertaken here by the

University of California (1989-1990). There is an outward projection of the city wall, though not as pronounced as at the Shamash Gate. The entry passage has been narrowed with mud brick to about two meters as at the Adad Gate. Human remains from the final battle of Nineveh were found in the passageway.



Simplified plan of ancient Nineveh showing city wall and the location of gateways (Wikipedia)

The population of the city at the time was 175,000 people (The enclosed area had more than 100,000 inhabitants). In the account of Jonah (Jon. 1: 2; Jon. 3: 2; Jon. 4: 11) about the existence of 120,000 people agrees with the city of Nimrud, which was less than half the size of Nineveh, and housed 69,574 people in 879 BC, almost one century before the preaching of Jonah (785-750 BC). The three days' walk required to cross the city of Nineveh (Jon. 3: 3) probably refers to the entire administrative district with all its neighborhoods. A day's walk (Jon. 3: 4) perhaps referred to the distance from the southern suburbs to the north of the city.

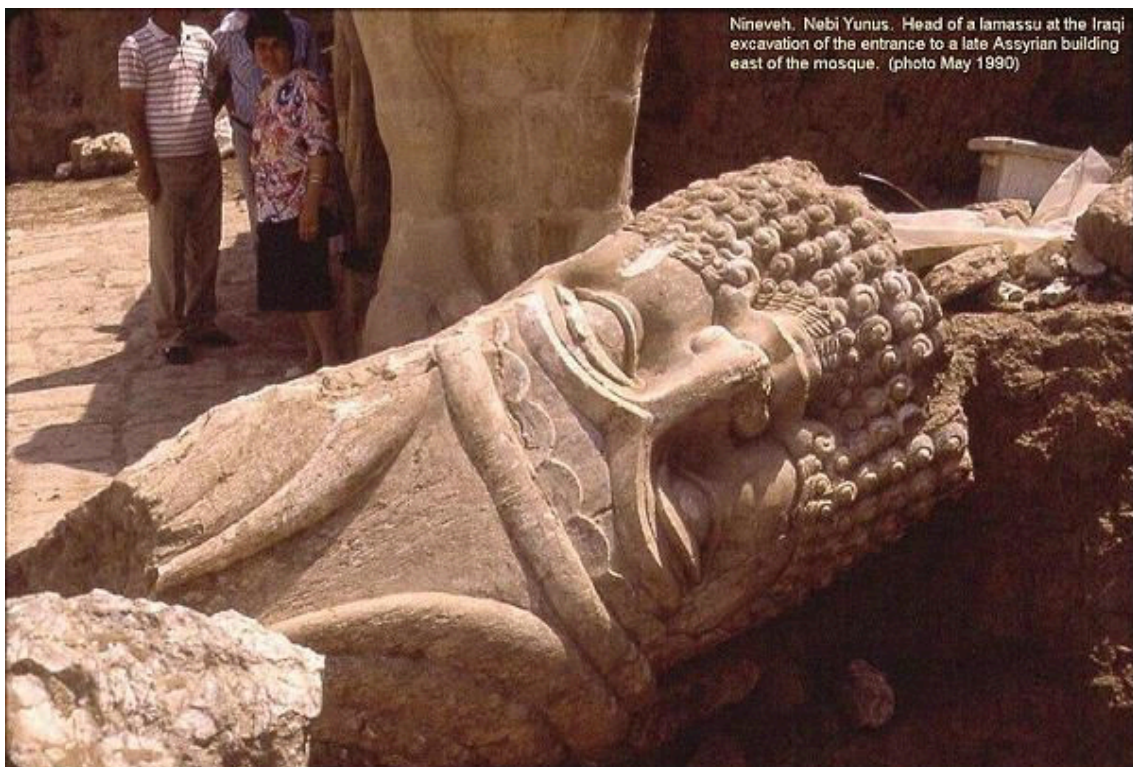
• Nah. 2: 3-5: “The shields of his warriors are red; his soldiers are clothed in crimson. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day when he musters them; the chargers prance [NIV: ‘The shields of his soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of pine are brandished’; or ‘The horsemen rush to and fro’ (Septuagint and Syriac version)]. The chariots race madly through the streets, they rush to and fro through the squares; their appearance is like torches, they dart like lightning. He calls his officers; they stumble as they come forward; they hasten to the wall, and the mantelet is set up. [NIV: He (*the Assyrian king*) summons his picked troops, yet they stumble on their way. They dash to the city wall; the protective shield is put in place].”

Naum describes the city of Nineveh (Nah. 2: 1) as a fortified city, always watched by soldiers in red uniforms (‘his soldiers are clothed in crimson’ or ‘the warriors are clad in scarlet’), in chariots of metal and armed with spears. The chariots raced swiftly, with rage through the streets and across the squares, and were as fast as lightning, especially on the day of their invasion. The description above makes us realize the unrest of its soldiers when they saw the enemy army approaching the walls.

• Nah. 2: 6-9: “The river gates are opened, the palace trembles. It is decreed that the city be exiled, its slave women led away, moaning like doves and beating their breasts. Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away. ‘Halt! Halt!’—but no one turns back. ‘Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! There is no end of treasure! An abundance of every precious thing!’ [NIV: Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures!].”

Like Babylon, the city of Nineveh had a great supply of water and great wealth (Nah. 2: 7-9). Sennacherib built a magnificent canal (aqueduct) carrying water from a dam on the Gomel River (forty-eight kilometers to the north), and controlled the inflow of water from the Khosr river (Khasr), which crossed the city, building another dam in Ajeila, a little further in the east (J. D. Douglas – *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995). Wikipedia.org writes: “An elaborate system of eighteen canals brought water from the hills to Nineveh, and several sections of a magnificently constructed aqueduct erected by Sennacherib were discovered at Jerwan, about 65 kilometers (40 mi) distant.”

His palace had a total size of five hundred and three meters, and had at least eighty rooms, many of which were filled by sculptures. Countless tablets with cuneiform writing were found there. The main entrances had on each side of the gates huge figures of stones weighing about 30 tons, including winged lions or winged bulls with a man’s head (‘lamassu’), which not only served as adornment on the walls and doors of the temples, but were found in pairs (of winged lions or bulls), also serving as guards posted at the entrance of the Mesopotamian temples. In some writings, these lions or bulls are portrayed to represent a female deity. A name less used is shedu (Sumerian: dalad; Akkadian, šēdu) which refers to the male counterpart of a lamassu. Large lamassu figures up to six meters high can be seen in Assyrian sculpture. Artistically, lamassus were portrayed as hybrids, with bodies of winged bulls or lions and human male heads as symbol of power. They were initially household protecting spirits of the common people of Assyria and Babylon, later becoming protectors of kings; so they were placed as sentinels at the entrance of the palaces.



The head of a 'lamassu' found by Iraqi archaeologists on the tell Nabī Yūnus ('Prophet Jonah) in the ruins of Nineveh – Wikipedia

These lions or bulls, carved in the quarries, were transported to the royal palaces of Nineveh and raised to a height of twenty meters by a ramp. The walls of the new palace of Sennacherib were decorated with reliefs describing his victories, including the siege of Lachish (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13; Isa. 10: 28-32 – describes the march of



Sennacherib to Jerusalem). Lachish was situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah (Shephelah); therefore, it was vitally important to the kingdom's economy. It was completely destroyed. The siege against Hezekiah in Jerusalem is recorded in a prism of clay (Prism of Taylor), found in 1830. The tribute received from Hezekiah was sent to Nineveh: 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold, plus the silver found in the House of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and the gold that was removed from the doors and the doorposts of the temple (2 Kin. 18: 14-16).

The Taylor prism that is in the British Museum was discovered by Colonel Robert Taylor (1790–1852), an archaeologist, in 1830 at Nineveh, but there two more prisms with cuneiform inscriptions in Akkadian from the Annals of Sennacherib: one in the Oriental Institute of Chicago and another in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. They are clay prisms inscribed with the same text, hexagonal in shape, made of red baked clay, measuring 38.0 cm high and 14.0 cm wide. They were created during the reign of Sennacherib in 689 BC (that of Chicago) or 691 BC (those of London and Jerusalem). They are Sennacherib's accounts of his campaign against the Kingdom of Israel and Kingdom of Judah, and some passages are in agreement with the biblical text of 2 Kings 18–19: the attack on Samaria and forty-six of fortified cities, including Lachish, the deportation the inhabitants and the tribute paid by Hezekiah. He also reports the siege of Jerusalem, describing Hezekiah 'like a caged bird' but he but does not speak of any capture of Jerusalem. The prism speaks something that is not in the bible: that Hezekiah still gave to Sennacherib as a present: antimony, jewels, ivory-inlaid furniture, his own daughters, harem, and musicians and became a tributary of him. The Assyrian King mentions 200,150 captive people. The towns he captured he gave to the kings of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza.





Lachish – main gate of the archaeological site in Israel (Wikipedia)



Fragment of a clay tablet from the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh with an Assyrian report of the Flood (crystalinks.com)

Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), the grandson of Sennacherib, made Nineveh his principal residence. In the excavations made by Layard and Rassam (1845-1854) the libraries of Ashurbanipal and of the temple of Nabu were found, with 25,000 tablets inscribed, one of them with the Babylonian account of the Flood in 1872. In the reign of Ashurbanipal, Assyria acquired the greatest territorial extension, although in 663 BC it began to show signs of weakness, and was attacked by the Medes at this time. Nineveh was attacked again in 625 BC by the Medes, allied with the Chaldeans.

Back to Nahum (Nah. 2: 6-9): “The river gates are opened, the palace trembles. It is decreed that the city be exiled, its slave women led away, moaning like doves and beating their breasts. Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away. ‘Halt! Halt!’—but no one turns back. ‘Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! There is no end of treasure! An abundance of every precious thing!’ [NIV: Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures!]”.

As I said previously, the city of Nineveh (in the same way as Babylon) had a great supply of water and a very great wealth. Sennacherib built a magnificent canal (aqueduct) carrying water from a dam on the Gomel River (forty-eight kilometers to the north), and controlled the entrance of water from the Khosr river (Khasr), which crossed the city, building another dam a little further in the east.

‘The river gates are opened, the palace trembles’ – When they attacked the city, the Medes, the Babylonians and the Scythians broke the floodgates so that the waters of the river overflowed, and then they entered the city to destroy the palace. Thus the city fell as a result of breaches of four and a half kilometers made in the walls by the waters of the flooded river (Nah. 2: 6-8). There was a serious war, fires in almost every city in the Assyrian empire, and the inhabitants of Nineveh who could not escape to the last Assyrian fortresses in the west were massacred or deported. Many skeletons not buried were found by archaeologists at that site during excavations in the nineteenth century. Nineveh was completely destroyed. Nahum gives a description of the time of war and its destruction (Nah. 2: 10; 13; Nah. 3: 2-3; 7; 12-13; 18-19).

‘Halt! Halt!’—but no one turns back’ – This was being spoken to those who tried to escape the destruction.

‘Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! There is no end of treasure! An abundance of every precious thing!’ – That was the order given by the commanders to their soldiers.

- Nah. 2: 10: “Devastation, desolation, and destruction! Hearts faint and knees tremble, all loins quake, all faces grow pale! [NIV: She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale].”

Nahum gives a summary of the war. All that remained of Nineveh was devastation, desolation, and destruction. All the survivors are desolate, distressed and afraid.

- Nah. 2: 11-12: “What became of the lions’ den, the cave of the young lions, where the lion goes, and the lion’s cubs, with no one to disturb them? [NIV: Where now is the lions’ den, the place where they fed their young, where the lion and lioness went, and the cubs, with nothing to fear?] The lion has torn enough for his whelps and strangled prey for his lionesses; he has filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh [NIV: The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey].”

As it was said in Nah. 1: 14-15, Assyria and Nineveh in particular were greatly enriched by their wars and conquests, for all the spoil was taken to the great city and given first to its greedy priests, who encouraged the campaigns of conquest. Assyria was a nation whose principal occupation was war. Its kings also had a very cruel way of



treating the prisoners, and this was recorded in many reliefs on the walls and tablets found in the palace of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The Assyrians were known by decapitating the vanquished peoples, making pyramids with their skulls; they also crucified or impaled the prisoners, plucked out their eyes and skinned them alive.

Therefore, Nahum says: “The lion has torn enough for his whelps and strangled prey for his lionesses; he has filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh [NIV: The lion killed enough for his cubs and strangled the prey for his mate, filling his lairs with the kill and his dens with the prey].” The eagerness for conquest of the kings led them to war, and it brought the spoils to them (‘the lions’), to the queens, concubines and ladies of the Assyrian court (‘the lionesses’), to the crown prince (‘the young lions’) and the other princes (lion’s cubs). They performed their atrocities and no one rebuked them; all went out unpunished (‘with no one to disturb them’ or ‘with nothing to fear’). The corruption of the clergy and the court, with its nobles, was like a real den of lions, where the poor and defenseless were shattered. The cruel inhabitants of Nineveh were not far behind; they followed the example of the leaders.

The prophet now asks, after the destruction: “What became of the lions’ den, the cave of the young lions, where the lion goes, and the lion’s cubs, with no one to disturb them?” Where is their trust now that the Lord has destroyed everything?

- Nah. 2: 13: “See, I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth [NIV: I will leave you no prey on the earth], and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.”

The prophet ends with a word of God’s assertion that all that has been said will be fulfilled to the letter: fire, death of princes, ambassadors and nobles of the court, and release of prisoners who were there (‘I will leave you no prey on the earth’), since Isaiah speaks of the return of the Jewish exiles who had remained in Assyria; or no other nation would be invaded by them and serve as their slaves. ‘And the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more’, that is, no longer the voices of the Assyrian messengers would be heard in every province, transmitting their king’s orders and demanding taxes from his subjects.

The descendant of Ashurbanipal was Sinsharishkun (Sin-shar-ishkun; Sîn-šarru-iškun – 628-612 BC), one of his sons, and at this time the city fell. The Assyrian Empire was over; and the Medes and the Babylonians divided their provinces among themselves. Sinsharishkun died in the fire, during the invasion by the Medes. But his family escaped. The last king of Assyria (Ashur-uballit II, 612-608 or 605 BC, who no one knows if he is the son or brother of Sinsharishkun) was practically a puppet king in the hands of the Babylonians. In 401 BC, Nineveh was already a ruin.

Zephaniah also makes a reference to this (Zeph. 2: 13-15), when he writes: “Herds shall lie down in it, every wild animal... What a desolation it has become, a lair for wild animals!” This prophecy was literally fulfilled, for today there are only sheep in that place.

## Chapter 3

- Nah. 3: 1-19 – Woe to Nineveh

- Nah. 3: 1-3: “Ah! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty—no end to the plunder! [NIV: Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!]. The crack of whip and rumble of wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies!”

As I said in the beginning of the study, Nineveh was a bloodthirsty city (for it lived on war and its spoils), full of lies and theft (Nah. 3: 1) and of spiritual prostitution by the multitude of gods with whom it corrupted the other nations; ‘Mistress of sorcery’, who misled many peoples (Nah. 3: 4 – ‘Mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft – NIV); a city that corrupted many nations, and thereby, many lives, ‘exchanging gods’ among them, including Israel; a mercantile city (Na 3: 16), greedy and insatiable, which devoured what saw ahead (Nah. 3: 17). Egypt was a nation that greatly encouraged this kind of spread of Assyrian idolatry; the goddess Nina or Ishtar was one of the goddesses involved in this idolatrous exchange.

Perhaps, because of this, Nahum says ‘no end to the plunder!’ or ‘never without victims!’ victims of its physical violence and its idolatry. The Assyrian gods were practically the same as those of Babylonian pantheon: Ishtar (or Inanna, goddess of fertility, love and war), Nebo (Nabu, god of science and erudition or writing), Anu (god of the sky), Adad (‘The thunderer’ – the Amorite equivalent of Baal, the god of the storms), Sin (Sîn – the moon god), Shamash (the later name of Utu, the sun god, the god of justice, morality, and truth), Enki (‘Lord of the deep waters’, the god of wisdom), Nergal (god of the underworld, therefore, lord of the plagues, of the fevers and of the infirmities; god of war, flood and confusion); Assur (or Ashur) was the national god (the Assyrian equivalent of Enlil, Babylonian god of wind, air, earth, and storms). There were others: Ninurta (god of war, law, scribes, farming, and hunting), Gula (or Nintinugga, Babylonian goddess of healing); Damkina [‘true wife’, also called Dam-gal or Damgalnuna, ‘great wife of the prince’; or Ninmah, ‘the great wife of earth and heaven’ or ‘Great Queen.’ She was wife of Enki]; Tammuz (or Dumuzid, equivalent of the Greek Adonis; he was the Mesopotamian god of the shepherds and associated with the growth of plants) and Nisroch (possibly, the god of agriculture).

The other verses tell the details of the battle: ‘The crack of whip and rumble of wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies!’

- Nah. 3: 4-7: “Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery, I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle. Then all who see you will shrink from you and say, ‘Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?’ Where shall I seek comforters for you? [NIV: All who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Nineveh is in ruins—who will mourn for her?’ Where can I find anyone to comfort you?”

The Lord explains the reason for His wrath and the severity of His judgment: the idolatry that corrupted the minds of the people and gradually killed the prisoners of deception.

- ‘I will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame’ – Everything would come to light so that all peoples would see what was practiced there and how God could punish whoever imitated them in their evil deeds.

- ‘I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle’ – their idols would be broken, and their corruption and immorality would cease, and this destruction would be an example to other nations.

- ‘All who see you will flee from you and say, ‘Nineveh is in ruins – who will mourn for her?’ Where can I find anyone to comfort you?’ – This shows the extent of the destruction. The ruin of Nineveh was so complete that even its location was forgotten for many centuries.

- Nah. 3: 8: “Are you better than Thebes [in Hebrew, No Amon] that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, water her wall? [NIV: Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall].”

**Thebes or No Amon** (the city of the god Amon – In Egyptian, n’iw(t)-’Imn) was a city of Upper Egypt, east of the Nile, mentioned along with other important cities of Egypt, as in the writings of Ezekiel (Ezek. 30: 14: Zoan, Thebes and Pathros – as was known the Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia). ‘No’ corresponds to the Egyptian term n’iw(t), ‘the city.’ Amon (in Egyptian, Amun) means ‘the hidden one’ or ‘invisible’, often associated with wind, but most of the time, his nature is unknown. He is often called Amun-Ra or Amun-Re, by his union with the cosmic god Ra-Aton (Re-Aton, the Sun god). During the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties (1570-1085 BC), Amon was the official god, the ‘king of the gods.’ In this period the treasures of Asia and Africa were poured into the strongboxes of Thebes. It fell into Assyrian power in 661 BC, under Ashurbanipal, after three years of siege, amid fire and slaughter; therefore, in predicting the fall of Nineveh, the comparison with the fall of Thebes could not be better. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, Thebes was rebuilt by the Arabs and was named Luxor (also known as Karnak).

Thebes, Tanis, Avaris, Memphis, On and Bubastis were cities of much idolatry.

Nahum goes on saying, “Are you better than Thebes [in Hebrew, No Amon] that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, water her wall? [NIV: Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall].”

The Pharaohs of the 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> dynasties (1070-657 BC) built fortresses on the seashore, that is, the first line of defense in Egypt, using the channels of irrigation and drainage to the eastern delta in the Nile estuaries, as well as defenses through of the road from Palestine; so Nahum wrote that the city had the sea as a rampart: the sea (referring to the Nile itself) and the Mediterranean Sea, where in the region east of the delta there were fortresses on the coast. At the time, the Nile emptied into the sea by seven channels. This protection was added to the great distance of Thebes upriver (Thebes was in Upper Egypt), which the invaders had to go through until they reached it.

Other prophets have pronounced judgment against Thebes and other Egyptian cities (Jer. 46: 25; Ezek. 30: 14-16).

- Nah. 3: 9-10: “Ethiopia was her strength, Egypt too, and that without limit; Put and the Libyans were her helpers [NIV: Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies]. Yet she became an exile, she went into captivity; even her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street; lots were cast for her nobles [in the original, ‘honorable men’], all her dignitaries were bound in fetters [NIV: Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the head of every street. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains].”

The destruction of Thebes (Nah. 3: 8-10) caused a reflection in Ethiopia, which also came to fall, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 20: 2-6. Later, it was absorbed by the Persian Empire: Est. 1: 1; Est. 8: 9.

The inhabitants of Thebes were also taken into exile by the Assyrians, and then imprisoned by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 43: 8-13; Jer. 46: 25).

‘Lots were cast for her nobles’ (cf. Joel 3: 3) – It concerns the custom of casting lots to divide the prisoners of war among the conquerors.

‘Even her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street’ – the prophet tells Nineveh what the Assyrians had done with the inhabitants of Thebes.

Ethiopia, Put and Libya – cf. Jer. 46: 9; Ezek. 30: 4-5 (These nations would fall before Nebuchadnezzar).

- Nah. 3: 11-13: “You also will be drunken, you will go into hiding; you will seek a refuge from the enemy. All your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe figs—if shaken they fall into the mouth of the eater. Look at your troops: they are women in your midst. The gates of your land are wide open to your foes; fire has devoured the bars of your gates.”

Nineveh will also be drunk by the cup of God’s wrath. It will try to run away from the enemy, but will not manage. Its fortresses are fragile like first-ripe figs, and its troops are feeling powerless and weak, and the limits of the empire (‘the gates of your land’) are at the mercy of the Medes, Babylonians, and Scythians. The prophet says that everything is burned.

- Nah. 3: 14: “Draw water for the siege, strengthen your forts; trample the clay, tread the mortar, take hold of the brick mold!”—That is, a warning to prepare for battle, for the invasion, fortifying the walls. However, nothing that they have done will be able to free them.

- Nah. 3: 15-16: “There the fire will devour you, the sword will cut you off. It will devour you like the locust. Multiply yourselves like the locust, multiply like the grasshopper! You increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens. The locust sheds its skin and flies away.”

The fire will bring destruction and the sword, death. Even if the merchants multiplied to continue giving profit to Nineveh, the enemies will take their riches and will ‘fly away’, taking everything.

- Nah. 3: 17-18: “Your guards are like grasshoppers, your scribes like swarms of locusts settling on the fences on a cold day—when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they have gone. Your shepherds [*or* ‘rulers’] are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them.”

The generals of the king of Assyria and the officers of the army fled, princes and counselors, ministers of state and magistrates ('shepherds' or 'rulers') are without direction, oblivious to their obligations, and the people are scattered, with no one to gather them.

- Nah. 3: 19: "There is no assuaging your hurt, your wound is mortal. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty? [NIV: Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?]."

The prophet ends by saying that destruction is so complete and definitive that it has no solution, no cure at all. Whoever knows of its fall will rejoice, for all peoples have suffered with their wickedness (cf. Zeph. 2: 13-15).

## Conclusion:

By speaking of Nahum we are speaking of the zeal of the Lord for His people despite their sin, also punishing those who make fun of their suffering and of His zeal for His own holiness, for when His chosen commit atrocities and iniquities, His holy name is ashamed and blasphemed. What He asks of us is the humility and the true worship. This way, the prophet must be an instrument of zeal of the Lord where there is sin, irreverence, abomination, lack of fear and lack of knowledge of the true God. The prophet must not let the world influence him or the things of the flesh and evil seduce him and divert him from the truth, for all this leaves a stain in our spirit and hurts the Holy Spirit who is in us. We should know that the love and mercy of the Lord will always be available to all those who sincerely repent of their error, and that His restoration is complete, removing of us all charges of the enemy. It is He who justifies us before those who humiliated us and lifts us before those who wished to see us fall. When we are at the center of His will, His protection and His righteousness are upon us. We must intercede like Habakkuk for those who are in error, but not to carry the burden for their sins, their rebellion and their idolatry. When the sinner rejects the correction through the mouth of the intercessor and the prophet, it's time to stop praying and let God's sovereign purpose take action to discipline, to convince of error, of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and thus vindicate His own holiness.

## Habakkuk

Habakkuk (In Hebrew: חֲבַקּוּק; transl. Havaqquq), a prophet of Judah, prophesied more or less between 610 and 597 BC during the reign of king Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). He speaks to God as an intercessor of the people, asking Him to put an end in the corruption of Judah (Hab. 1: 1-4). He cries out to God because of the iniquity he sees around him and asks how long it would continue without being punished. God replies that He is preparing the Chaldeans, and describes the ferocity of their armies and their contempt for all who dared to bar their way (Hab. 1: 5-11). The prophet expects that God solves his internal conflict regarding his thoughts: how a Holy God would also allow such atrocities by the Chaldeans? (Hab. 1: 12-17). Then he listens ('watch post' – Hab. 2: 1 – NRSV) and the response comes, confirming that the pride of the Chaldeans will destroy them, and the faithfulness of the righteous will be his salvation (Hab. 2: 1-5). His name is linked to the Hebrew root (h-b-q – חֲבַק – havak) that means 'embrace'; or the name of the Assyrian plant 'hambakuku.' The Greek form is Hambakoum. Actually, little information is found about the prophet. In the last chapter, his prayer is in the form of song, not only describing the judgment of God over His people and over His enemies, but also affirming their faith in Him until all His will is done.



## Chapter 1

- Hab. 1: 1-4 (The iniquity of Judah): “The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise [NIV: Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds]. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”

In this first part, the prophet asks God how long He will continue to see the sins of the nation of Judah. He exposes what he is seeing and that deeply grieves his heart: violence, injustice, wickedness, oppression, strife and contention around him, both in the midst of the people and in the political leadership of the nation. He complains that justice is not practiced, and the law is not applied correctly. All of them pervert justice for their own benefit; there is greed and extortion. Even priests and prophets are led astray from the commandments of the Lord and cause the people to wander. Most likely it was the mirror of that society during the last years of the kingdom of Judah in the reign of Jehoiakim, which the bible claims to have done evil in the eyes of the Lord (2 Chr. 36: 5). This picture described by the prophet is compatible with the attitude of this society and of this ruler, described by Jeremiah (Jer. 2: 8; 11; Jer. 4: 22; Jer. 5: 1; 7-9; 26-31; Jer. 13: 9-10; Jer. 22: 13; 17; Jer. 36: 1-2; 22-23 – the king throws the scroll into the fire).

‘How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?’ – Habakkuk asked God to put an end to the corruption of Judah and asked how long it would continue without being punished.

- Hab. 1: 5-11 – Judah will be punished by the Chaldeans

God tells him that He is preparing the Chaldeans and describes the ferocity of their armies and their contempt for all who dare on their way.

- Hab. 1: 5: “Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told.”

The Lord tells His prophet that He will do something quite astonishing among them that no nation will believe when He knows what is happening.

- Hab. 1: 6-11: “For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own. Dread and fearsome are they; their justice and dignity proceed from themselves [NIV: They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor]. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more menacing [NIV: fiercer] than wolves at dusk; their horses charge [NIV: Their cavalry gallops headlong]. Their horsemen come from far away; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. They all come for violence, with faces pressing forward; they gather captives like sand [NIV: they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand]. At kings they scoff, and of rulers they make sport. They laugh at every fortress, and heap up earth to take it [NIV: They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they building earthen ramps and capture them]. Then they sweep by like the



wind; they transgress and become guilty; their own might is their god! [NIV: Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty men, whose own strength is their god].”

Here the prophet gives a description of the Chaldeans: a cruel, fierce and impetuous nation, with an army so numerous that it occupies the breadth of the earth and advances like the wind of the desert; by force, they take possession of houses that are not theirs; the Chaldeans inspire dread and fear and they create their own righteousness. Their horses are swift as leopards, and their horsemen are fierce like wolves, spreading everywhere. They fly like eagles and bring violence along with them; they gather captives like sand on the beach. They mock the rulers and fortified cities of other nations, for they build siege works (earthen ramps) like no other people, and in this way, they get what they want. Their god is the power, the force, and therefore they accumulate guilt over themselves, because they do not believe in God.

The description of the Chaldean army given by Jeremiah is similar; are strong, mighty, fierce and furious, and riding on light horses like eagles:

“Look! He [*The Babylonian king*] comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles” (Jer. 4: 13a).

“It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. Their quiver is like an open tomb; all of them are mighty warriors” (Jer. 5: 15b-16).

“Thus says the Lord: See, a people is coming from the land of the north, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. They grasp the bow and the javelin, they are cruel and have no mercy, their sound is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses, equipped like a warrior for battle, against you, O daughter of Zion!” (Jer. 6: 22-23).

“At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his stallions, at the clatter of his chariots, at the rumbling of their wheels...” (Jer. 47: 3a).

• Hab. 1: 12-17 (The intercession of the prophet): “Are you not from of old, O Lord my God, my Holy One? **You shall not die.** O Lord, you have marked them for judgment; and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment [NIV: LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, **we will not die** [*Masoretic text*]. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish]. Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they? You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. The enemy brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net, he gathers them in his seine; so he rejoices and exults [NIV: The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad]. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his seine; for by them his portion is lavish, and his food is rich [NIV: Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food]. Is he then to keep on emptying his net, and destroying nations without mercy?”

The prophet is in conflict and asks: if God is holy, why allow such an atrocity, not only with His people, but with other peoples that the Chaldeans kill without mercy? He compares them to a fisherman who fishes other nations with his dragnet, so great is the number of people they take to their land as captives. These captive peoples are, in the eyes of the prophet, like sea fish or crawling things, without a ruler, without a defender, without someone speaking for them.

And then the enemy offer sacrifices to his gods in honor of his fishing net, because thanks to it, he enriches and lives in great comfort, enjoying what has fallen in it.

He says, 'We shall not die [*Masoretic text*]. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish' – he acknowledges that the Lord chose the Chaldeans to exercise discipline over His people, but this is still His people. He says 'We shall not die' as a way of asserting his faith that even under so much suffering, the Lord is still able to deliver them. He will not destroy them completely.

## Chapter 2

- Hab. 2: 1-5 – The Lord’s answer

The prophet hopes that God resolves his inner conflict. Then he watches (“I will stand at my watch post”) and the answer confirms that the pride of the Chaldeans will destroy them, and the faithfulness of the righteous will be their salvation.

- Hab. 2: 1: “I will stand at my watch post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.”

Perhaps the prophet stood on the rampart watching the horizon to see if the enemy was already coming, or maybe it was a place where he could talk more freely to God without others hearing. What we can say is that ‘watch post’ means that he was attentive to the voice of the Lord and would wait for His answer, for he was sure that his prayer was heard.

- Hab. 2: 2-5: “Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it [NIV: that a herald may run with it (or ‘so that whoever reads it may run’)]. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay [NIV: Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay (or ‘though he linger, wait for him; he will certainly come and will not delay’)]. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith [NIV: See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faith (or ‘faithfulness’)]. Moreover, wealth is treacherous; the arrogant do not endure. They open their throats wide as Sheol; like Death they never have enough. They gather all nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own [NIV: indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave (or ‘Sheol’) and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples].”

The Lord answers to the prophet that he should keep the vision and write it down, so that all could read easily; NIV puts it as a note the phrase that may be read as ‘so that whoever reads it may run’, which makes us think that the vision was indeed strong, and He wanted His people to understand the seriousness of the situation.

God confirms that the vision is to be fulfilled soon, in a time that is already determined by Him, but says that the present situation will come to an end and the prophetic word will be fulfilled. Even though it seems to linger, the end will come, and it will not be delayed. The proud Chaldeans shall find their ruin, for pride shall be the cause of their fall.

- ‘Their spirit is not right in them’ or ‘he is puffed up; his desires are not upright’ – God knew that even though they were His instrument of punishment against Judah, the Chaldeans were arrogant, and their heart was not bent on mercy or pity. They had bad desires in their hearts. But the righteous, by their faithfulness and their faith, would find salvation; the way out for their pain, for the Lord would fight for them and protect them. If evil was coming upon a sinful nation for correction, God had eyes to discern the righteous of heart that had been left in the midst of it. They would be protected; He knows those who belong to Him.

The arrogant, driven by covetousness and greed, and who is insatiable in his desires, will not remain, as wine deceives the fools with a false and temporary joy, but then passes, and reality shows itself as it is.

- ‘They gather all nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own [NIV: he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples]’ – he, the arrogant, is an allusion to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who had power over many peoples and nations and lived in the luxury and wealth of the palace, but had his end. God humbled him in his sickness (in the seven years of madness) until He made him acknowledge that God was Lord over men and His kingdom was given to whom He wanted. The beautiful city that corrupted nations with its power, witchcraft and allure was destroyed to the dust, and only ruins remain of it.

- Hab. 2: 6-20 – Woe to the Chaldeans

This is a song of mockery directed at the Chaldeans as a consequence of their inhumanity.

- Hab. 2: 6-8: “Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles, say about them, ‘Alas for you who heap up what is not your own! How long will you load yourselves with goods taken in pledge?’ [NIV: Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, ‘Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?'] Will not your own creditors suddenly rise, and those who make you tremble wake up? Then you will be booty for them [NIV: Then you will become their victim]. Because you have plundered many nations, all that survive of the peoples shall plunder you—because of human bloodshed, and violence to the earth, to cities and all who live in them.”

‘Shall not everyone taunt such people and, with mocking riddles’ or ‘Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn’ – ‘taunt him’, the arrogant, the wicked, personified here in Nebuchadnezzar, the figure of Satan, who instigates those who are his to commit the same evil things. God is indeed speaking a mocking riddle, not the prophet, for it follows v. 5 from the previous part of the chapter, where it was spoken about the fate of the proud, the arrogant, who does not fear Him.

The first woe – It’s against the one who piles up stolen goods and enriches by extortion. Despite the fear he inflicts on the little ones, one day the powerful will rise to scare him and will come to charge him, and he will become their spoil [NIV: their victim]. Because he has plundered many nations, the peoples will plunder him because of his violence that shed the blood of the inhabitants of many lands and cities. Spiritually speaking, creditors are the demons who find a legality to torment those who commit wickedness and do not turn to God. They find themselves rich and powerful, but they will be charged because of their evil deeds.

- Hab. 2: 9-11: “Alas for you who get evil gain for your houses, setting your nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm! [NIV: Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!]. You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. The very stones will cry out from the wall, and the plaster will respond from the woodwork.”

The second woe – It’s against the one who gets evil gain for his house, to keep that money in a safe place, as a protection against evil, for he may use it even to bribe his accusers. The man who does this, plotting the ruin of many peoples, ends up entangling

his own soul and shames his whole house, for there will always be someone who denounces him, even if they are the stones of the wall. This means that no one goes hidden from any evil deed he commits, no theft, and that the person's own conscience will accuse him sooner or later.

- Hab. 2: 12-14: "Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed, and found a city on iniquity! [NIV: Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!]. Is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor only to feed the flames, and nations weary themselves for nothing? But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

The third woe – It's against one who builds a city with blood and establishes it with crime, that is, that governs a city and establishes it on a spirit of violence and foments crime. It is from the Lord that the wicked ('peoples') labor in vain, for their useless and ill-intentioned work only serves for the fire, it will bear no fruit, and therefore it will be destroyed ('labor only to feed the flames, and nations weary themselves for nothing'). The greed and futility of the world lead to nothing, and all will be destroyed by the fire of the judgment of God. But the passage ends by saying that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, that is, all will know the difference between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him, the difference between the holy work of the children of God and the work of the children of the evil one. The earth, the nation of Israel and Judah and the Gentile nations, the holy remnants, will know the full and abundant glory of the presence of God. Isaiah said the same thing about the Messianic kingdom (Isa. 11: 9). Thus, even if the wicked man remained, the Messiah would come bringing His presence of righteousness and peace; and the violence, crime, and iniquity of the people would be banished from His presence.

- Hab. 2: 15-17: "Alas for you who make your neighbors drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness! [NIV: Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!]. You will be sated with contempt instead of glory. Drink, you yourself, and stagger! [In the Septuagint; in Masoretic text, 'be exposed']. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and shame will come upon your glory! For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you; the destruction of the animals will terrify you—because of human bloodshed and violence to the earth, to cities and all who live in them."

The fourth woe – It's against one who intoxicates himself with the wine and blood resulting from the madness of his violence. Woe to him who makes his neighbor drink to embarrass him, to expose his physical nakedness and his nakedness of soul. The cup (v. 15) is not only the cup of wine from the vine, but also the cup of innocent blood that was shed (v. 17), as the Chaldeans did in the devastation of Lebanon, with men and wild animals, killed by their fury. Shame will come upon those who have done this, and it will be their turn to drink from a bitter cup, the cup of God's wrath ('The cup in the Lord's right hand'). Their honor will turn into contempt and shame.

- Hab. 2: 18-20: "What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it—a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak! Alas for you who say to the wood, 'Wake up!' to silent stone, 'Rouse yourself!' Can it teach? See, it is gold and silver plated, and there is no breath in it at all. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!"

The fifth woe – It's against idolatry. The idol deceives even him who made it, so that he may trust in his own work, thinking that it can save him. The idol is a piece of dead metal, but the Lord is God, and before Him the whole earth keeps silence.

## Chapter 3

### Habakkuk's prayer

His prayer is in the form of a song, not only describing the revelation of God coming in His majesty, bringing His judgment upon His people and upon His enemies, as affirming their faith in Him until all His will is fulfilled.

Verse 2 of the prayer of Habakkuk (Hab. 3: 1-19) has been widely used by many servants of God as an inspiration to beseech Him for revival, but we can also see that it shows us the majesty and power of the Lord, judging our causes and responding to the enemy with the same violence he used against us. God will always save His anointed ones, even if He has made use of discipline with them because of their transgressions. Just as the prophet Habakkuk standing in awe and feeling helpless before what he could not change (Hab. 3: 2), seeing and predicting the destruction and desolation, we can also hold fast to our faith in the Lord, being sure that every trial will be overcome, and in the end of all things He will do justice and will bring us honor, because He Himself helped us to stand firm in His promise and in His word (Hab. 3: 17-19), and made us overcome the obstacles, putting us in a higher level of understanding ('he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights').

- Hab. 3: 1-2 "A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk. O Lord, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy [NIV: LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy]."

The prophet says that God's statement amazed him with awe of seeing what He is capable of. Then he asks the Lord to accomplish in his days the same thing He did in the past and to do His works known to all who live in that time, before the seventy years of captivity that will come. But he also asks Him that in His wrath He remembers His mercy; that His punishment doesn't annihilate His people completely.

- Hab. 3: 3-4: "God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden."

Here the prophet makes mention of the majesty of God in ancient times, where He appeared upon Sinai and where His people sojourned after leaving Egypt. Habakkuk saw the Lord coming from Teman (Hab. 3: 3). Teman (têmân) was the son of Eliphaz and the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36: 9-11; 1 Chr. 1: 36), and may have given his name to the district to the north of Edom (cf. Jer. 49: 20; Ezek. 25: 13; Am. 1: 12, Obad. 9). Its inhabitants were famous because of their wisdom (cf. Jer. 49: 7; Obad. 8 and following verses). Eliphaz the Temanite was one of the comforters of Job (Job 2: 11). A prince of Teman is named among the chiefs of Edom (Gen. 36: 15; 42; 1 Chr. 1: 53), and Husham was one of its first rulers (Gen. 36: 34). Although the exact location of Teman remains unknown, there is strong evidence in favor of the Jordanian city of Ma'an. There were many water springs in the area, and this made it attractive to the caravans between the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant.

Habakkuk also says that he sees the Holy One coming from Paran. Paran is a desert situated in the central-eastern region of the Sinai Peninsula, northeast of traditional Sinai and southwest of Kadesh, with the Arabah and Gulf of Aqaba on its eastern



border. Abraham sent Ishmael and Hagar there (Gen. 21: 21). The wilderness of Paran was part of the Israelite resting places on their pilgrimage in the desert (Num. 10: 12; Num. 12: 16), and from there Moses sent the spies to explore the conditions of the land of Canaan (Num. 13: 3; 26). It was crossed by Hadad the Edomite in his flight to Egypt (1 Kin. 11: 18). Mount Paran from the song of Moses (Deut 33: 2) and Habakkuk (Hab. 3: 3) was probably a prominent peak in the mountain range on the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Anyway, the prophet was saying that the Lord showed His glory there, and he would like to see it again. He exalts the majesty of God and says that He is worthy of praise. In his vision, he speaks of the brightness of God's glory in that place, and that rays came forth from the hand of the Lord, from His hand of power, which was hidden from men.

- Hab. 3: 5-6: "Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low [NIV: He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal]."

Habakkuk describes the wonders performed by God in guiding His people, delivering them from their enemies. The powers of nature were shaken and the course of nature changed.

'His ways are eternal' – this means that His ways are changeless and unknown to men. He traces the route of every child of His upon the earth.

- Hab. 3: 7: "I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled [NIV: I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish]."

Cushan was an archaic term for the Midianites, a nomadic people who later came to Syria (in Canaanite language, 'Aram', meaning 'high lands', the former name of Syria). Maybe because of this the bible says that Cushan-Rishathaim (king of 'Mesopotamia' – 'Aram' or 'Aram Naharayim') dominated the Israelites for eight years after the death of the last judge, Othniel (Judg. 3: 7-10). There may be a relationship between the two names. Midian was the name of the land located north-west of the Arabian Peninsula, near the Gulf of Aqaba, on the borders of Transjordan with Moab and Edom, and whose founder was Midian, a son of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25: 1-4; 1 Chr. 1: 32). Midian means 'strife.' Moses took refuge in Midian when he fled from Pharaoh (Ex. 2: 15). In the time of the judges, the Midianites oppressed Israel for seven years (Judg. 6: 1; Judg. 6: 11) and God raised Gideon to deliver them. The Midianites rode the camels of the Amalekites, which were nomads found in the Negev and Sinai. Amalek was a descendant of Esau (Gen. 36: 12) and fought against Israel when this one was in Rephidim (called by Moses 'Massah and Meribah' because of the strife of the people. Massah means 'testing' or 'provocation', and Meribah, means 'quarreling'), weary and thirsty after having fled from Egypt. Israel overcame Amalek and the Lord promised to blot out his memory from the earth (Ex. 17: 8-16; Deut. 25: 17-19).

When Habakkuk speaks, 'I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled [NIV: I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish]', he is talking probably about the victory that God gave to Gideon, causing the Midianites to kill themselves.

- Hab. 3: 8-10: “Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Or your anger against the rivers, or your rage against the sea, when you drove your horses, your chariots to victory? You brandished your naked bow, sated were the arrows at your command. You split the earth with rivers [NIV: You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers]. The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice, and lifted up his hands on high [NIV: the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high].”

In these verses it seems that Habakkuk is referring poetically to all the times God arose to save His people, like a warrior who removes the bow from his quiver to shoot the arrows. David wrote this differently in Psalm 18 (Psalm 18: 14): “And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightning, and routed them”.

It also shows how nature reacts to the presence, to the will or the wrath of God:

‘The deep gave forth its voice, and lifted up his hands on high’ or ‘the deep roared and lifted its waves on high’ may be a reference to the crossing of the Jordan River or the Red Sea, when the waters that were divided by the wind of God presented turbulent waves on both sides of the way of the Israelites (Josh. 3: 16; Ex. 14: 22), or may refer to the behavior of the sea when it becomes more agitated, and which in the bible was a way of show people the displeasure of God with certain things (Jonah, for example: Jon. 1: 4; 11-12; 15).

‘You split the earth with rivers’ ...

... ‘The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by’ or ‘the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by (NIV)’ – The Lord also made the earth tremble and opened the torrents of the heavens, bringing abundant rain to make the wrath of the enemy cease, as was in the case of the Kishon River (Judg. 5: 4-5; 20-22) in the time of Deborah.

We can also see this type of description in the book of Psalms:

- Ps 18: 7-9: “Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry... He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet.”

- Ps 68: 9: “Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished.”

- Ps 77: 16-20: “When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”

- Ps 114: 3-8: “The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.”

- Hab. 3: 11-14: “The sun and the moon stood still in their exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear [NIV: Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear]. In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations. You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof [NVI: You came out to deliver your

people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot]. You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding.”

‘The sun and the moon stood still in their exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear [NIV: Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear]’ – It concerns Joshua (Josh. 10: 12-15), when the Lord gave him victory over the five Amorite kings. Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of the Israelites: “O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon” (Josh. 10: 12b). And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on (or ‘the nation triumphed over’) its enemies (Josh. 10: 13a), and there was no such day as this because the Lord fought for them (Josh. 10: 14). The verses 12-14 of Habakkuk chapter 3 describe God’s supernatural action in the battle, as it was also written in Josh. 10: 10-11: “The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites – NIV.”

The interesting thing is that in v.14 Habakkuk writes: “You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind **to scatter us**, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding” (NRSV; NIV), but in KJV it’s written: “Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind **to scatter me**: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.” He uses the personal pronoun ‘me’ as if he were participating in that battle and identified himself with the Israelites; or as if the same thing were happening to him at the moment of that song, feeling so because of the future invasion of the Chaldeans.

- Hab. 3: 15: “You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters.” He recalls here the victory that God gave to His people in the Red Sea.

- Hab. 3: 16: “I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me. I wait quietly for the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us.”

The force of the vision and the revelation that God gave him caused fear, his bones fainted and he lost his strength (‘Rottenness enters into my bones’) and his legs began to tremble. He says that he will wait quietly for ‘the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us’, referring no more to the punishment of God against Judah, but to the judgment of God against the Babylonians, the people who attack them.

- Hb. 3: 17-19: “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. To the leader: with stringed instruments.”

Habakkuk ends the song asserting his trust in divine mercy, even though the land is desolate and fruitless and there are no animals in the pastures. This means that when

everything is gone, our God is not gone; there is still hope. The Lord is the salvation and the fortress where we can take shelter.

‘He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights’ – It means that God makes him overcome the mountains of difficulties with his head held high. The doe is an animal that has feet prepared to climb the mountains (‘the heights’) without slipping, for it jumps over the rocks.

## Conclusion:

By speaking of Habbakuk we are speaking of the zeal of the Lord for His people despite their sin, also punishing those who make fun of their suffering and of His zeal for His own holiness, for when His chosen commit atrocities and iniquities, His holy name is ashamed and blasphemed. What He asks of us is the humility and the true worship. This way, the prophet must be an instrument of zeal of the Lord where there is sin, irreverence, abomination, lack of fear and lack of knowledge of the true God. The prophet must not let the world influence him or the things of the flesh and evil seduce him and divert him from the truth, for all this leaves a stain in our spirit and hurts the Holy Spirit who is in us. We should know that the love and mercy of the Lord will always be available to all those who sincerely repent of their error, and that His restoration is complete, removing of us all charges of the enemy. It is He who justifies us before those who humiliated us and lifts us before those who wished to see us fall. When we are at the center of His will, His protection and His righteousness are upon us. We must intercede like Habbakuk for those who are in error, but not to carry the burden for their sins, their rebellion and their idolatry. When the sinner rejects the correction through the mouth of the intercessor and the prophet, it’s time to stop praying and let God’s sovereign purpose take action to discipline, to convince of error, of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and thus vindicate His own holiness.

We’ll give sequence to our study with the volume 3:

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