

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

THE SUDDEN FALL OF NINEVEH (Nahum)
HOPEFULLY NOT THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (Zephaniah)
THE SIEGE AND FALL OF JERUSALEM (Lamentations)
THE FALL OF BABYLON (Habakkuk)

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STUDY GUIDE COMMENTARY SERIES
OLD TESTAMENT VOL. 10B

BIBLE LESSONS INTERNATIONAL
MARSHALL, TEXAS
2015

INTRODUCTION TO NAHUM

I. THE NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. It is named after the prophet.
- B. His name (BDB 637) means “comfort” or “compassion” (cf. Isa. 57:18).

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book is part of the Minor Prophets because of its length.
- B. The Minor Prophets are called “the Twelve.” They probably were put together because they fit on one scroll.
- C. The Minor Prophets are in the second division of the Hebrew canon called “The Prophets.” See Special Topic: Canon (Hebrew).
- D. The Jews wanted the number of the books in their canon to match the number of consonants in their alphabet, therefore, they combined several books.

III. GENRE

- A. It is classical Hebrew propheticism (poetry). It is one of the most powerful poems in the OT. See Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry.
- B. Nahum was unique and artistic in his choice of words and idioms. He and Isaiah are considered the greatest poets of the Prophets. There is a literary relationship between them:
 - 1. Nahum 1:4 and Isaiah 33:19
 - 2. Nahum 1:15 and Isaiah 52:7
- C. Nahum 1:2-8 is a partial acrostic psalm. An opening psalm is unique among the Minor Prophets.

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. There is little known about the prophet. This is the only occurrence of his name in the OT.
- B. He is called an Elkoshite which was probably a place name. There have been several theories:
 - 1. Jerome and Eusebius place it in Galilee, the city of Elkosh.
 - 2. Others assert that Capernaum, “house of Nahum,” is the location but there is no corroborating evidence.
 - 3. Pseudo-Epiphanius places it in southern Judah, *The Lives of the Prophets*, XVII, the city of Elkosh close to Micah’s home.
 - 4. An Arab tradition of the 16th century A.D., placed it in Iraq (child of exiled parents). The city of Elkosh is 24 miles north of Nineveh, near modern Mosul.

V. DATE

- A. It must have been written before the fall of Nineveh, 612 B.C.
- B. It was written after the fall of Thebes (No-amon) by Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C. (cf. Nah. 3:8-10) because it was used as an example of a city defended by water that was captured.
- C. It was possibly written soon after Ashurbanipal's death in 627 B.C. He was the last strong king of Assyria and by 626 B.C. Neo-Babylon gained independence under Nabopolassar.

VI. BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF ASSYRIA AND PALESTINE

- A. Nahum addresses the fall of Assyria, whose capital was Nineveh. God used this cruel nation as an instrument of His judgment on Israel (cf. Isa. 10:5).
- B. The first recorded incident occurred in the reign of Jehu (842-815 B.C.). In 841 B.C. the Assyrian's king, Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.), forced Israel to pay tribute.
- C. This continued under Adad-nirari III (810-782 B.C.). Damascus was captured and King Joash was forced to pay tribute.
- D. The first major invasion and deportation of Israel occurred in the reign of Menahem (752-732 B.C.) by Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.) in 732 B.C. Apparently he replaced Pekah (740-732 B.C.) with Hoshea (732-722 B.C., cf. 2 Kgs. 15:29); 1 Chr. 5:6; 2 Chr. 30:6,10; Isa. 9:1. This domination of Palestine affected Judah because Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) also paid tribute.
- E. Hoshea tried to ally Israel with Egypt and was invaded by Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.). Samaria, Israel's capital, fell after a 3 year siege to Sargon II (721-705 B.C.). Israel was exiled to Medea (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:3-20; 18:20-21; Isa. 7:8; 8:4; 10:11; 36:20; Hos. 9:3; 10:6,14; 11:5). Sargon II invaded and forced tribute on Judah in 720 B.C. and 712 B.C.
- F. In Judah King Hezekiah (728-687 B.C.) had succeeded Ahaz. He initially paid tribute to Sargon II. He later refused tribute to Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 18). Judah was invaded by Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) in 701 B.C., but was forced to withdraw because of a plague caused by the angel of the LORD, which killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (cf. Is. 10:16; 36:1-37:38; 2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37; 2 Chr. 32:1-31).
- G. Later, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was forced to submit to Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C., cf. 2 Chr. 33:1-11).
- H. Esarhaddon's son, Ashurbanipal (638-633 B.C.), was the last strong king of Assyria. After his death, during a period of rapid decline:
 - 1. Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.) set up an independent Neo-Babylon.
 - 2. Psammetihus I (664-609 B.C.) restored Egypt to independence.
 - 3. Josiah (640-609 B.C.) restored Judah to independence.
 - 4. Cyaxaxes (625-585 B.C.) set up an independent Media.
- I. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 B.C., to Nabopolassar and Cyaxaxes. Ashur, the old capital, had already fallen in 614 B.C.

- J. Nineveh covered 1,850 acres and had 8 miles of reinforced walls.

VII. LITERARY UNITS

- A. Opening, Nah, 1:1
- B. A psalm of the severity and graciousness of YHWH, Nah. 1:2-8 (partial acrostic).
- C. The reality of God's character, judgment to Nineveh, deliverance to Judah, Nah. 1:9-2:2.
- D. A graphic poetic account of the siege and fall of Nineveh, the great city, Nah. 2:3-3:19.

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. The focus of the book is the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the cruel Assyrian Empire. It was made the capital by Sennacherib about 700 B.C. It was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River and was very well fortified.
- B. The city was completely destroyed by the Neo-Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C., as had Asshur in 614 B.C. They used the power of the river which flowed around the walls. They diverted the river water into reservoirs and then released it all at once. The force of the water knocked down a large section of the wall, Nah. 2:6.
YHWH used a foreign, pagan nation as His instrument of judgment. Nahum described this as a theophany (Nah. 1:3-8).
- C. God had used the cruel Assyrians to judge His people (Isa. 10:5) but now the Assyrians were judged.
- D. Nahum is similar to the judgment on the nations section of the Major Prophets.
 - 1. Isaiah 13-24
 - 2. Jeremiah 46-51
 - 3. Ezekiel 25-32

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

- A. Walter A. Maier, *The Book of Nahum*, Baker, 1980
- B. David J. Clark and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, UBS 1989
- C. David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, Tyndale OT Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, 1999

NAHUM 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
God Is Awesome		Title		
1:1	1:1	1:1	1:1	1:1
	God's Wrath On His Enemies	The Coming of the Avenging LORD	The LORD's Anger Against Nineveh	Psalm, the Wrath of Yahweh
1:2-8 (2-8)	1:2-3c (2-3c)	1:2-11 (2-11)	1:2-3c (2-3c)	1:2-8 (2-8)
	1:3d-5 (3d-5)		1:3d-10 (3d-10)	
	1:6 (6)			
	1:7-8 (7-8)			Prophetic Judgment on Judah and Assyria
1:9-13 (9-13)	1:9-11 (9-11)			1:9-10 (9-10)
				To Assyria
			1:11-13	1:11 (11)
				To Judah
	1:12a	1:12-13 (12-13)		1:12-13 (12-13)
	1:12b-13 (12b-13)			To the King of Nineveh
1:14 (14)	1:14 (14)	1:14 (14)	1:14	1:14 (14)
		The Sack of Nineveh (1:15-3:19)		To Judah
1:15 (15)	1:15 (15)	1:15 (15)	1:15	2:1 (MT) (1)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1

¹The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

1:1

NASB, NRSV,

REB “oracle”

NKJV “burden”

TEV “message”

NJB “charge”

LXX “issue”
Peshitta “wound”

The MT has “oracle” (BDB 672 III). The same root also means “Lord,” “burden,” or “tribute” (BDB 672 II). But in this context, “oracle” fits best (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:25; 2 Chr. 24:27; Isa. 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; Jer. 23:33,34,36,38; Ezek. 12:10; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1).

▣ **“book”** Probably better translated “scroll” (BDB 706, cf. Jer. 25:13; 30:2; 36:2; Dan. 12:4).

▣ **“vision”** This is the only OT Prophecy that has a double introduction. This term (BDB 302, #4) is a title (cf. 2 Chr. 32:32; Isa. 1:1; Obad. 1). It is related to the title of a prophet, “seer,” BDB 302; see Special Topic: Prophecy (OT).

This message was not the invention or fabrication of a person, but a revelatory message from YHWH (cf. Nah. 1:12a) in visual scenes of the fall of Nineveh.

▣ **“Nahum”** This name (BDB 637) means “comfort.” It is related to the name “Nehemiah” (BDB 637, i.e., YHWH comforts).

▣ **“the Elkoshite”** See Introduction, IV. B.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:2-8

²A jealous and avenging God is the LORD;

The LORD is avenging and wrathful.

The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries,

And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

³The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,

And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.

In whirlwind and storm is His way,

And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

⁴He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;

He dries up all the rivers.

Bashan and Carmel wither;

The blossoms of Lebanon wither.

⁵Mountains quake because of Him

And the hills dissolve;

Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence,

The world and all the inhabitants in it.

⁶Who can stand before His indignation?

Who can endure the burning of His anger?

His wrath is poured out like fire

And the rocks are broken up by Him.

⁷The LORD is good,

A stronghold in the day of trouble,

And He knows those who take refuge in Him.

⁸But with an overflowing flood

He will make a complete end of its site,

1:2 “A jealous and avenging God is the LORD”

1. “jealous” – BDB 888, KB 1110, ADJECTIVE denoting
 - a. zeal (i.e., Ezek. 39:25; Joel 2:18)
 - b. jealousy (BDB 888, only here and Jos. 24:9)
 - c. the sense of anger (i.e., Deut. 32:16-22)

Here it denotes a covenant of love and fidelity but that love when violated turns to zealous judgment.

2. “avenging” – BDB 667, KB 721, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE; it is used
 - a. three times in this verse
 - b. in an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB (emphatic form) in verse 3YHWH used Assyria to judge His faithless people (cf. Isa. 7:17; 8:7; 10:5), but they went too far and now they will be judged (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 32:21,35,41,43).
3. “God” – This is the general term for God in the ANE, *El*. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, A.
4. “LORD” – This is the covenant name for Deity, first revealed in Gen. 2:4; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

For a good brief discussion of “a jealous God” see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 338-339.

▣ **“wrath”** Literally “wrathful” (BDB 404). This is anthropomorphic language (cf. Deut. 4:24). See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“His adversaries. . . His enemies”** These could be any human beings who opposed His will. In some contexts it can refer to faithless Israel but here it refers to Assyria.

YHWH, in His covenant with Israel, promised to defeat her enemies (cf. Deut. 32:34-43). YHWH is a God of justice and holiness. When His own people violated His covenant they also experienced His judgement (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; 30:1,15,19).

1:3 “The LORD is slow to anger” This is a key phrase in the description of YHWH’s character, found first in Exod. 34:6-7, and it became a liturgical description of YHWH. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

What a contrast occurs between the description of Deity in Nah. 1:3 compared to 1:2.

▣ **“and great in power”** Notice that the expected phrase found in Exod. 34:6-7 (“abundant in lovingkindness”) is modified in this judgment against Assyria. YHWH’s power, not His mercy, is center stage (cf. Num. 14:17,18).

This very word for “power” (BDB 470) is used of the King of Assyria as he exiled Israel (cf. Isa. 10:12-14) but the real power in the universe is YHWH (cf. 2 Chr. 14:11-12; Ps. 147:5)!

I am so glad YHWH’s power is clothed in mercy and forgiveness (i.e., Isa. 50:2; 59:1; Jer. 32:17-21). See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

▣ **“the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 667, KB 720) for emphasis. YHWH’s gracious character should not be seen as “soft” on sin and rebellion. He is patient but there is a day of reckoning, Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18). The imagery that follows is from a violent storm (cf. Isa. 29:60).

▣ **“clouds”** See NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 465, and Special Topic: Coming On the Clouds.

1:4-5 “In whirlwind and storm is His way” Often in the Psalms YHWH is depicted as the immanent Creator who is present in natural weather events (cf. Ps. 18:7-15; 77:16-19; 97:1-5; 104:3-4; Mic. 1:3-4). Weather awed the ancient world!

Notice the parallelism of Nah. 1:4, where the first two lines have different VERBS for “dry” (BDB 386, KB 384 and BDB 351, KB 349) and the next two lines repeat the VERB (BDB 51, KB 63, *Pulal*) “feeble,” here translated “wither.”

1:4 One way the Bible shows God’s power is His control of water.

1. in creation dividing the waters
2. in crossing the Red Sea, Jordan River
3. in rain/drought

Nineveh will be made vulnerable by water. See Special Topic: Waters.

▣ **“Bashan and Carmel wither”** These were very fertile, well known sites in Palestine, but now are drought stricken (cf. Isa. 33:9).

1:5 YHWH’s visitation (for blessing or judgment) is accompanied by convulsions in nature (i.e., Ps. 98:7-9).

Notice the universal, worldwide language appropriate for the one Creator God (Nah. 1:5d). Both nature and humans tremble before their Creator!

1. earth – BDB 75
2. world – BDB 385

▣ **“and the hills dissolve”** This is imagery describing a theophany (cf. Ps. 46:6; 97:5; Mic. 1:4). Nature convulses at the presence of her creator!

▣

NASB “upheaved”

NKJV, NRSV,

JPSOA “heaves”

TEV “shakes”

NJB “collapses”

REB “is in tumult”

Targum “burns”

LXX “was removed”

Peshitta “trembles”

The MT has “lifts” (BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*), which the UBS Text Project gives a “B” rating (some doubt). It has three suggestions.

1. וַתִּשָּׂא – “lifted up” (UBS Text Project suggests “lifts up its voice”)
2. וַתִּשָּׂא – “was laid waste” (Peshitta, Vulgate, BDB 980 I, cf. Isa. 6:11; 17:12-13)
3. וַתִּשָּׂא – “it broke down”

1:6 Notice the repeated words for YHWH’s judgment.

1. indignation (BDB 276, cf. Isa. 10:5; Jer. 10:10)
2. burning of His anger (BDB 354 CONSTRUCT BDB 601 (, cf. Exod. 15:7; 32:12)
3. wrath is poured out like fire (VERB often used of YHWH’s anger, cf. Jer. 7:70; 42:18; 44:6; note Isa 51:17-20)
4. rocks broken up by Him

The rhetorical question emphasizes the transcendence of YHWH’s holiness (cf. Ps. 24:3; Mal. 3:2).

1:7 This verse is in contrast to Nah. 1:6 and 7. His positive qualities are extolled (cf. Nah. 1:3a).

1. He is good (cf. 1 Chr. 16:34; 2 Chr. 5:13; Ps. 25:7-8; 31:19; 69:16; 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,29; 135:1; 136:1; 145:7,8,9; Jer. 33:11)
2. He is protection (cf. Isa. 25:4; Jer. 16:19a-b)
3. He is a refuge, see Special Topic: Refuge (OT)

YHWH knows those who trust (cf. Isa. 26:3-4) in Him (LXX)! See Special Topic: Know.

1:8 This verse reflects the Neo-Babylonian use of the Tigris River to destroy a large portion of the city of Nineveh's walls. See Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 2.26-27; and Zenophon, *Anabasis* III. 4:7,12.

The flood imagery is used in a figurative way in Isa. 43:2;66:12; Dan. 9:26.

▣ **“He will make a complete end”** When YHWH judged His people, there was always hope of forgiveness and restoration, but for Israel's enemies, when YHWH judged them, it was to extinction (cf. Jer. 30:11; 46:28; Mal. 1:2-5).



NASB	“its site”
NKJV	“its place”
NRSV	“adversaries”
JPSOA	“her place”
LXX, NJB	“those who rise”
Peshitta	“place of his adversaries”

The UBS Text Project, vol. 5, p. 339, gives “her place” a “C” rating (considerable doubt). It suggests that “her” refers to Nineveh, which has not yet been named.

Some scholars suggest an emendation to parallel “enemies” (cf. Deut. 28:7; Mic. 7:6).

1. MT – המוקם, her place (i.e., Neneveh)
2. LXX, Targums, Peshitta – וימוקם, his adversaries

See NET Bible, p. 1634, #5.

▣ **“darkness”** This is imagery for death/*Sheol*. See Special Topic: *Sheol*.

Although in this context of an invasion by night, it could be literal.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:9-13

⁹Whatever you devise against the LORD,

He will make a complete end of it.

Distress will not rise up twice.

¹⁰Like tangled thorns,

And like those who are drunken with their drink,

They are consumed

As stubble completely withered.

¹¹From you has gone forth

One who plotted evil against the LORD,

A wicked counselor.

¹²Thus says the LORD,

“Though they are at full *strength* and likewise many,

Even so, they will be cut off and pass away.

Though I have afflicted you,

I will afflict you no longer.

¹³So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you,

And I will tear off your shackles.”

1:9 “you” This refers to Nineveh (Nah. 1:1) or her gods.

▣ **“devise”** Evil forces may plot and plan (BDB 362, KB 359, *Piel* IMPERFECT, cf. Nah. 1:11), but YHWH will defeat all comers. He is the One true God, the God of Israel.

▣ **“distress”** The MT (BDB 865 II) is given a “B” rating (some doubt) by the UBS Text Project, p. 339. The NRSV, NJB, JPSOA suggest an emendation from “distress” – הָרַצ, to “his adversaries” – וִירָצ (BDB 865 III), which seems a better fit with “will not rise up twice.”

1:10 Notice the powerful images of YHWH’s judgment.

1. drunkenness; see Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism
2. fire; see Special Topic: Fire

From historical records of the fall of Nineveh, the soldiers were mostly drunk at night (see James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 333, #614), and it was then that the Neo-Babylonian and Medians began their surprise attack.

1:11 “One who plotted evil against the LORD” This refers to the King of Assyria (cf. Nah. 1:9a).

This VERB (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) denotes a purposed plan against someone (cf. Gen. 50:20; 2 Sam. 14:13; Esther 8:3; Jer. 11:19; 18:11,18; Hos. 7:15).

▣ **“A wicked counselor”** This term “wicked” is literally *belial* (BDB 116), which means “worthless” or “good-for-nothing” (cf. Nah. 1:15e, where it refers to Assyria). It is used of

1. Ashurbanipal’s domination of Manasseh, cf. 2 Chr. 33:11-13
2. Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem, cf. 2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37; Isaiah 36-37
3. the current king at the time of Nineveh’s fall, Sin-Shar-Ishkun; see Special Topic: Kings of Assyria
4. *belial* later became a title for Satan in Judaism, cf. 2 Cor. 6:15; see Special Topic: Satan

1:12-13 These verses address captive Judah, as does Nah. 1:15.

1:12 The Assyrians had

1. powerful fortifications
2. large, well armed, well trained army
3. years of experience in war

Nineveh will fall and be totally destroyed (cf. Nah. 1:14).

YHWH used Assyria but no longer! He will forgive and restore His people (cf. Lam. 5:21).

1:13 “yoke bar...shackles” These were symbols of dominance of one nation over another (i.e., Lev. 26:13; Isa. 10:27; Jer. 30:8; Ezek. 34:27).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:14

¹⁴The LORD has issued a command concerning you:

**“Your name will no longer be perpetuated.
 I will cut off idol and image
 From the house of your gods.
 I will prepare your grave,
 For you are contemptible.”**

1:14 “you” This refers to the King of Assyria.

▣ **“I will cut off idol and image**

From the house of your gods” It is known from Assyrian records that they loved to destroy the Temple of the conquered people and to carry the venerated idols off to the city of Nineveh and place them in the temples of their gods. The Assyrian pantheon is made up of the main gods: Ashur, Ishtar, Nabu, Sin, Shamash, Abad, Bel, Ninurta, Nergal, and Nusku. YHWH is the only true God. See Special Topic: Monotheism.

▣ **“idol”** An idol was usually carved from stone or wood. Often they were overlaid with gold or silver.

▣ **“image”** The images were made by pouring heated metal into a mold.

▣ **“I will prepare your grave”** See the prophecy of Ezek. 32:22-23.

The VERB “prepare” (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is found in NASB, NRSV, TEV, JPSOA, but NJB emends יָשַׁע to מָשַׁח (BDB 1030, KB 1563, *Hiphil* PERFECT), which means “to make desolate.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:15

**¹⁵Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news,
 Who announces peace!
 Celebrate your feasts, O Judah;
 Pay your vows.
 For never again will the wicked one pass through you;
 He is cut off completely.**

1:15 (MT 2:1) God allowed Assyria to take Israel captive (fall of Samaria, 722 B.C.), but He protected Judah from them.

This may be an allusion to Isa. 52:7, which is quoted in Rom. 10:15. In this context it would be the messenger who brought news of the fall of Nineveh.

▣ **“on the mountains”** This could mean

1. the messenger crossed many mountains to bring the wonderful message
2. the messenger came to “the” mountain of Judah (i.e., Jerusalem, the Temple), which was, in Jewish theology, the highest place on earth

▣ **“peace”** See Special Topic: Peace (OT).

Because of the fall of Nineveh (cf. Nah. 1:15e-f) some normalcy can return to Jerusalem.

1. feasts restored (cf. Exodus 23; Leviticus 23)

2. vows paid (cf. Deut. 23:21-23); here, probably vows in connection to a defeated Assyria
Both #1 and #2 are IMPERATIVES. Restoration is not just declared forgiveness but the restoration of the cultus. Temple worship began again in all its fullness.

▣ **“the wicked one”** See note at Nah. 1:11. Assyria was one of the most vicious conquerors of the ANE. Their methods of exile and control were brutal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why are Nah. 1:3a and 1:7 such important statements?
2. Define “theophany.” What verses in this chapter describe a theophany?
3. Who devises plans against YHWH?
4. Explain Nah. 1:12d-e. How do these lines relate to Isa. 10:5?
5. Who is Nah. 1:15 (MT 2:1) speaking about?
6. What “good news” does the messenger bring?

NAHUM 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Overthrow of Nineveh	The Destruction of Nineveh	The Sack of Nineveh (1:15-3:19)	The Fall of Nineveh (2:1-3:14)	Fall of Nineveh, the Assault
2:1-2 (1-2)	2:1 (1)	2:1 (1)	2:1-13 (1)	
	2:2-4 (2-4)	2:2 (2)		2:2-11 (MT) (2-11)
2:3-7 (3-7)		2:3-9 (3-9)	(3) (4-5b) (5c-8)	
	2:5-7 (5-7)			
2:8-12 (8-12)	2:8-10 (8-10)		(9)	
		2:10-12 (10-12)	(10-12)	Sentence Passed On the Lion of Assyria
				2:12-14 (MT)
2:13	2:13	2:13	2:13	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-2

¹**The one who scatters has come up against you.**
Man the fortress, watch the road;
Strengthen your back, summon all *your* strength.
²**For the LORD will restore the splendor of Jacob**
Like the splendor of Israel,
Even though devastators have devastated them
And destroyed their vine branches.

2:1 “The one who scatters has come up against you” Nahum 2 is a detailed, poetic description of the fall of Nineveh. This refers to the invading Neo-Babylonian, Median, and Scythian army which scattered (BDB 807, in this sense only here) the Assyrians, as they had scattered other populations.

Nineveh’s fall is also predicted in Isa. 10:5-7 and Micah 5:4,5.

▣ **“Man the fortress”** This phrase addresses a personified Nineveh directly. Her assailants are a coalition of Media, Neo-Babylonians, and the Scythians. They collectively address Nineveh in sarcasm (cf. Nah. 3:14).

▣ **“watch the road”** This is the first in a series of three *Piel* IMPERATIVES.

1. watch – BDB 859, KB 1044
2. strengthen (lit. “make strong your loins,” cf. Jer. 1:17) – BDB 304, KB 302, cf. Nah. 3:14
3. summon all *your* strength – BDB 54, KB 65

It is possible that the INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE “guard” (BDB 665 I), which is in the NASB, “Man the fortress,” is to be understood as a fourth IMPERATIVE.

All of Nah. 2:1 is sarcasm, similar to Nah. 3:14 and Jeremiah’s taunt of Egypt’s army in Jer. 46:3-4. There is no hope; preparations will not help, for YHWH is their enemy (cf. Nah. 2:13)!

2:2 The first two lines refer to the divided kingdom (922 B.C.); the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Nineveh had exiled Israel but Judah was spared by a Divine act (cf. 2 Kings 19).

These two covenant nations will be reunited (“restore” is a PROPHETIC PERFECT, cf. Ezek. 37:21-23). Notice it was YHWH who allowed the exile and it is YHWH who will restore the descendants of Abraham to Canaan.

The JPSOA footnote, p. 1221, says, “Jacob refers to the northern kingdom (cf. Amos 6:8; 8:7); Israel refers to the southern kingdom, regarded as the remnant of Israel after the fall of the northern kingdom” (cf. Mic. 1:13-15).

The NRSV, TEV, NJB make Nah. 2:2 a parenthesis because Nah. 1:1,3-7 are a graphic description of the fall of Nineveh. It contextually fits best after Nah. 1:15 (Heb. 2:1).

▣ **“splendor”** The NOUN (BDB 144, see LXX) is used twice. The NJB (KB 200, “climbing plant”) emends “splendor,” נֶחֱם, and because “branches” (BDB 274, i.e., parallelism) are mentioned in 2:2d, changes it to “vines” (נֵפֶל, BDB 172, see JPSOA footnote).

The grapevine was often a symbol for the covenant people (i.e., Ps. 80:6-8; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 5:10; 12:10; Joel 1:7).

▣ **“Even though devastators have devastated them”** This is a *Qal* PERFECT and a *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE of the same VERB (BDB 132, KB 150). This constructio is typical of Hebrew Poetry. See Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry.

▣ **“destroyed their vine branches”** Here, the term “vine branches” (BDB 274) is figurative language for Israel.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:3-7

- ³The shields of his mighty men are *colored* red,
The warriors are dressed in scarlet,
The chariots are *enveloped* in flashing steel
When he is prepared *to march*,
And the cypress *spears* are brandished.
- ⁴The chariots race madly in the streets,
They rush wildly in the squares,
Their appearance is like torches,
They dash to and fro like lightning flashes.
- ⁵He remembers his nobles;
They stumble in their march,

They hurry to her wall,
 And the mantelet is set up.
⁶The gates of the rivers are opened
 And the palace is dissolved.
⁷It is fixed:
 She is stripped, she is carried away,
 And her handmaids are moaning like the sound of doves,
 Beating on their breasts.

2:3 “The shields. . .are colored red” The Hebrew term (BDB 10, KB 14, *Pual* PARTICIPLE) implies “dyed red” (cf. Ezek. 23:12-21). We know from Assyrian documents that the Assyrians and Babylonians both used red shields and cloaks. Some assert that this is to mimic the blood of their victims, while some say that they were covered with bronze (cf. Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* 6:4:1).

▣ **“red. . .scarlet”** These are two VERBS.

1. “red” is literally “dyed red” – BDB 10, KB 14, *Pual* PARTICIPLE; used of ram’s skins dyed red and used in the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:5 and five more times)
2. “scarlet” is literally “be clad in red” – BDB 1069, KB 1741, *Pual* PARTICIPLE, found only here

This color may have mimicked the blood of its victims.

▣ **“The warriors are dressed in scarlet”** Some have asserted that this is “purple,” but the ancient colors are difficult to identify. See Special Topic: ANE Sacred Colors. It is known from history that the commanders of the Babylonian army dressed in bright red.

▣ **“the chariots”** See Special Topic: Chariots.

▣ **“And the cypress *spears*”** The cypress spears (BDB 141) were very hard wood and were reddish in color.

▣

NASB	“flashing steel”
NKJV, JPSOA	“flaming torches
NRSV	“the metal. . .flashes”
TEV, REB	“splash like fire”
NJB	“the metal. . .sparkles”

The word “steel” (BDB 811, KB 929) is found only here. It appears to be a loan word from Aramaic or Arabic. Similar imagery is used of the chariots in Nah. 2:4d and 3:3.

▣

NASB, NKJV	“the cypress spears are brandished”
NRSV, LXX,	
TEV	“the chargers prance”
JPSOA	“the arrows of cypress wood are poisoned”

The MT has “and the cypress are made to quiver.” The JPSOA (footnote) suggests an emendation to “the horsemen charge,” giving Hab. 3:3 as a parallel.

1. the cypress – רבהושם (BDB 141)
2. the horsemen – רפהושם (BDB 832)

The UBS Text Project, p. 342, gives option #1 a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

2:4 This verse is a good example of the type of vivid, rhythmic poetry which characterizes this book (i.e., Nah. 2:8-12; 3:2-3).

Since “chariots” are mentioned in Nah. 2:3c, it is possible all the lines of poetry from 2:3c-4d are about them (see note at Nah. 2:3e). These verses describe either

1. the frantic, chaotic movements of Nineveh’s defenders
2. parading of the invaders before the wall of the citadel

▣ **“The chariots race madly in the streets**

They rush wildly in the squares”

These terms refer to the streets of the suburbs of the city in front of the citadel. We know from Assyrian records that the kings were very proud of these wide, shining streets just in front of the citadel and palace.

2:5 “He” This PRONOUN refers to the king of Nineveh, while the “she” (Nah. 2:7) refers to

1. the city personified (“her,” Nah. 2:5c)
2. the queen

▣ **“They hung to her wall”** Even the “nobles” (Nah. 2:5a) are called on to defend the city’s defenses. The PRONOUN could refer to military commanders.

▣ **“The mantelet is set up”** This term (BDB 697) occurs only here. It refers to some type of covering or shielding mechanism. It could refer to either

1. the defenders of the city (protection from arrows)
2. the invaders (NJB, 2:4-6; protection of siege machines)

The footnote of *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, p. 891, has “mantlet of the besiegers, or bulwark of the besieged,” a quote from George Adam Smith.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary, p. 798, suggests the root comes from an Akkadian term used of a “plug” and suggests it is related to the damming up of the Khosr River, which when released all at once (Nah. 2:6), destroyed part of the wall of Nineveh’s citadel.

2:6 “The gates of the rivers are opened

And the palace is dissolved”

This refers to the enemies’ manipulating the waters of the Khosr River, one of the tributaries which met the Tigris at the city of Nineveh. From archaeological evidence we learn that the Khosr was dammed up with a double dam for irrigation and defense, but it had control valves. Apparently the invading army (1) closed the irrigation gates and (2) stopped drinking water from entering the city. Then, when the reservoir was full, they opened the gates and knocked down a long section of the protecting wall.

See Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historia* 2.26-27; 27:1-3 and *The Babylonian Chronicles* (cf. ANET, 303-306).

2:7

NASB “and it is fixed”

NKJV, NRSV “it is decreed”

This VERB (BDB 662, KB 714, *Hophal* PERFECT), meaning “to stand,” is found only three times in the *Hophal* stem.

1. Gen. 28:12, “a ladder set up”
2. Jdgs. 9:6, “a pillar set up”

3. here in the sense of a decree set up (UBS Text Project, “C” rating, p. 343)

There have been many suggestions of its meaning in this context.

1. its mistress (JPSOA footnote)
2. the train of captives (from BDB 845, REB)
3. the beauty (NJB)
4. the statue (BDB 662, “pillar,” i.e. Ishtar, NJB footnote)
5. the Queen (Targums, Peshitta, “the Queen summons her horsemen and flees northward”)
6. a proper name for the Queen (Hussab)
7. LXX has “the substructure has been uncovered” (i.e., the wall)

▣ **“She is stripped”** The VERB (BDB 162, KB 191, *Pual* PERFECT). The question is who “is uncovered” (cf. Nah. 3:5).

1. symbol of the city (cf. Isa. 47:2-3 of Babylon)
2. goddess Ishtar (a main Assyrian goddess called, “The Queen of Nineveh”)
3. the Queen of Nineveh and her court

Assyrian records show they paraded conquered Queens naked through the streets of their capital.

The UBS Text Project, p. 344, suggests

1. she is stripped – הִחֲלַג (an “A” rating, NASB, NKJV)
2. she is deported – הִחֲלַג (same consonants but different vowels, NRSV, TEV, NJB, JPSOA, REB, NET)

▣ **“her handmaids”** If the Queen, then her entourage; if Ishtar, then her sacred prostitutes (i.e., fertility worship; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.



NASB “moaning”

JPSOA “escort her”

The MT has “moan” (BDB 624 II, KB 675), which is found only here. The Targums, LXX, and Vulgate think it is from the common root, “to remove forcibly” (BDB 624 I, KB 675), cf. Gen. 31:26; Deut. 4:27; 28:37; Isa. 20:4; Lam. 3:2

▣ **“like the sound of doves”** The sound of doves or pigeons is often a biblical image of grief (cf. Isa. 38:14; 59:11; Ezek. 7:16).

▣ **“Beating on their breasts”** This is literally “heart” (see Special Topic: Heart). The beating of one’s breast/chest was a common idiom for grief (cf. Isa. 32:12; Luke 18:13; 23:48). See Special Topic: Grieving Rites.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:8-12

⁸Though Nineveh was like a pool of water throughout her days,

Now they are fleeing;

“Stop, stop,”

But no one turns back.

⁹Plunder the silver!

Plunder the gold!

For there is no limit to the treasure—

Wealth from every kind of desirable object.

¹⁰She is emptied! Yes, she is desolate and waste!

Hearts are melting and knees knocking!

Also anguish is in the whole body

And all their faces are grown pale!

¹¹Where is the den of the lions

And the feeding place of the young lions,

Where the lion, lioness and lion's cub prowled,

With nothing to disturb *them*?

¹²The lion tore enough for his cubs,

Killed *enough* for his lionesses,

And filled his lairs with prey

And his dens with torn flesh.

2:8 “Though Nineveh was like a pool of water through her days” This phrase has been understood in several ways.

1. Nineveh was known for her decorative pools and water defenses (Peshitta).
2. Nineveh's strength and beauty are being drained away (NJB).
3. Nineveh, in the past, collected people groups as a reservoir collects water.
4. Nineveh's defenders and population are fleeing. See Josephus, *Antiq.* 9.11.3; LXX, NRSV, TEV

▣ **“they are fleeing”** This verse describes the panic among the military who tried to defend Nineveh.

1. they are fleeing – BDB 630, KB 681, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE (this was a new experience for them, cf. Nah. 2:8a; it could refer to fleeing by boat)
2. Stop, stop – BDB 763, KB 840, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, twice for emphasis; this is the cry of the military officers trying to stop the defenders of the city from fleeing
3. No one turns back – BDB 815, KB 937, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE; it was every man for himself; run!

2:9 Assyria had been a cruel and despotic nation for many years. She confiscated all her conquered people's idols and treasure. Her vaults were full.

What Assyria did to others is now done to them (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). Note the double use of “plunders” both of which are *Qal* IMPERATIVES (BDB 102, KB 117). This is YHWH's call to the invaders!

2:10 The fierce nation (i.e., the lion of the ANE) is now

1. emptied – BDB 101
2. desolate – BDB 101
3. wasted – BDB 118, KB 135 (the first three words have similar sounds and meaning, cf. Isa. 24:1,3)
4. hearts melting – BDB 587, KB 606, cf. Jos. 2:11; 5:1; Isa. 13:7; 19:1
5. knees knocking – BDB 807 (only here) and BDB 139; but similar imagery in Ps. 69:23; Ezek. 7:17; 21:7; Dan. 5:6
6. lions (i.e., “whole body”) in anguish – BDB 298), only four times in the OT: Isa. 21:3; Ezek. 30:4,9; and here, from root “to writhe in pain”
7. faces pale – BDB 802, only here and Joel 2:6

What a contrast between Nineveh now (Nah. 2:10) and Nineveh before (Nah. 2:11-12).



NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB,

NET

“pale”

NKJV, REB

“drained of color”

JPSOA, Peshitta

“turn ashen”

LXX, Vulgate,

Targums

“burnt earthenware”

NASB footnote

at Joel 2:6

“flushed”

This word (BDB 802) occurs only here and Joel 2:6. The problem is what root to connect it with.

1. black (from “cooking pot”)
2. red (KB 860)
3. grey (i.e., loss of beauty)
4. loss of all color

Number 4 fits the two usages best. See a good note in the NET Bible, p. 1643, #6.

2:11-12 This is a taunt directed to the arrogant, prideful Assyrians who characterized themselves in their art and literature as “lions.”

This may also relate to Nah. 2:7 if the first word “hussab” refers to the statute of Ishtar, the patron goddess of Nineveh, who was depicted in art as accompanied by a lion.

2:11 “the feeding places” The MT has the term “pasture” (BDB 945), but the NRSV, NJB, REB have the emendation “cave” (reversal of two consonants).

1. pasture – הערמי
2. cave – הרעמי

The UBS Text Project, p. 346, gives #1 an “A” rating. This is followed by the DSS and LXX. The question is, “Does this verse refer to where they are fed or where they sleep?”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:13

¹³“Behold, I am against you,” declares the LORD of hosts. “I will burn up her chariots in smoke, a sword will devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the land, and no longer will the voice of your messengers be heard.”

2:13 As Nah. 2:2 fits better after 1:15 (MT 2:1), so this verse may better be understood as an introductory statement to Nahum 3.

▣ **“the LORD of Hosts”** See Special Topic: LORD of Hosts. This phrase asserts “I am against you” (cf. Nah. 3:5).

1. I will burn up her chariots.
2. I will devour your young lions (i.e., warriors).
3. I will cut off your prey (i.e., captive peoples).
4. I will stop the voice of your messengers (i.e., governmental pronouncements or threats, 2 Kgs. 18:13-37; Isa. 36:1-22).

▣ **“her chariots”** There have been several suggested emendations.

1. הַבָּכָר – its chariots, JPSOA, NRSV, NJB, NKJV, TEV
2. הַכְּבֵדָה – your crowd, Peshitta
3. גִּבְוַת – your pride (i.e., of lions), REB
4. your abundance, LXX

▣ **“messengers”** The MT has “messenger (מַלְאֲכִים, BDB 521), but it is spelled in an unusual way, so the LXX and Peshitta understood it as “deeds” (BDB 521, מַלְאָכִים).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. To whom is Nah. 2:1 addressed?
2. In Nah. 2:2 Israel and Judah are addressed, but which term, “Jacob” or “Israel” applies to Judah?
3. To whom is Nah. 2:3-5 addressed?
4. Why has Nah. 2:7 caused so much trouble to translators? Who is it referring to?
5. Explain the imagery of Nah. 2:8.
6. Why is Assyria described as a den of lions?

NAHUM 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Nineveh's Complete Ruin	The Woe of Nineveh	The Sack of Nineveh (1:15-3:19)	The Fall of Nineveh (2:1-3:19)	Sentence Passed on Nineveh the Harlot
3:1-7 (1-7)	3:1-4 (1-4)	3:1-7 (1-7)	3:1-4 (1-4)	3:1-1 (1-4)
	3:5-7 (5-7)		3:5-7 (5-7)	3:5-7 (5-7)
				The Lesson of Thebes
3:8-15c (8-15c)	3:8-11 (8-10)	3:8-9 (8-9)	3:8-10	3:8-10 (8-10)
		3:10-13 (10-13)		
			3:11-15c	3:11 (11)
				Nineveh's Preparations Useless
	3:12-13 (12-13)			3:12-15b (12-15b)
				The Locusts Fly Away
	3:14-15c (14-15c)	3:14-15c (14-15c)		3:15c-17a (15c-17a)
3:15d-19 (15d-19)	3:15d-17 (15d-17)	3:15d-17 (15d-17)		A Funeral Lament
				3:17b-19 (17b-19)
	3:18-19 (18-19)	3:18-19 (18-19)	3:18-19	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-7

¹Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies *and* pillage;

Her prey never departs.

²The noise of the whip,

The noise of the rattling of the wheel,

Gallop horses

And bounding chariots!

³Horsemen charging,

Swords flashing, spears gleaming,

Many slain, a mass of corpses,

And countless dead bodies—
 They stumble over the dead bodies!
⁴All because of the many harlotries of the harlot,
 The charming one, the mistress of sorceries,
 Who sells nations by her harlotries
 And families by her sorceries.
⁵“Behold, I am against you,” declares the LORD of hosts;
 “And I will lift up your skirts over your face,
 And show to the nations your nakedness
 And to the kingdoms your disgrace.
⁶I will throw filth on you
 And make you vile,
 And set you up as a spectacle.
⁷And it will come about that all who see you
 Will shrink from you and say,
 ‘Nineveh is devastated!
 Who will grieve for her?’
 Where will I seek comforters for you?”

3:1 “Woe to the bloody city” Assyria was known for its cruelty. From Assyrian documents we know that they impaled alive, skinned to death, dragged to death, put hooks in the mouths of exiles, and physically blinded her captives. Quite often she cut off the hands and heads of military men who opposed her.

In Ezekiel Jerusalem is called “the bloody city” (cf. Ezek. 22:2; 24:6). The imagery denotes a society out of control where the powerful dominate the powerless.

“Woe” is the Hebrew INTERJECTION “Ah” (BDB 222), which often introduces laments (i.e., Isa. 1:4,24; 5:8,11,18,20,21,22; Jer. 22:13,18; 23:1; 48:1; 50:27, but only here in Nahum).

▣ **“completely full of lies *and* pillage”** See Nahum 2:9.

▣ **“*Her* prey never departs”** Assyria was always looking for more people to conquer. She was never satisfied! In the end this over-extension is what brought the empire down in such a short period of time.

3:2-3 It is uncertain if these verses exclusively refer to the defenders of Nineveh, the invaders, or both in different lines of poetry (cf. Nah. 2:3-7).

The poetic lines are short with a rhythmic beat which graphically and vividly portray the siege of Nineveh.

3:2 “chariots” See Special Topic: Chariots.

3:3 “countless dead bodies” The footnote of the NASB Study Bible, p. 1312, is helpful. “The Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, boasted of erecting a pyramid of chopped-off heads in front of an enemy’s city. Other Assyrian kings stacked corpses like cord wood by the gates of defeated cities.” What they did to others has now come home to them (i.e., Nah. 3:10c).

3:4 “All because of the many harlotries of the harlot” Some scholars say that this refers to political alliances (figurative language), but in context, it may refer to the worship of the love goddess, Ishtar, cf. Nah. 2:7 (i.e., literal usage)

▣ **“the charming one, the mistress of sorceries”** Jonah had preached the truth to Nineveh and she repented, but now she had turned back to her superstition and idols. From the Assyrian documents it is obvious how superstitious these people really were.

3:5-7 Nahum lists the judgment (“I am against you”) God will send against proud, cruel, idolatrous Assyria.

1. lift up your skirts over your face, Nah. 3:5
2. throw filth on you and make you
 - a. vile, Ezek. 24:13
 - b. a spectacle, Jer. 13:22,26; Lam. 1:9
3. all who see you will shrink from you with no compassion

3:5 “I am against you” This is a repeat of Nah. 2:13. This phrase has ominous connotations. The One, true God has become your enemy! See Special Topic: Monotheism.

1. Judah – Jer. 21:13
2. Babylon – Jer. 50:31
3. Tyre – Ezek. 26:3
4. Assyria – here

▣ **“LORD of hosts”** See Special Topic: LORD of Hosts.

▣ **“I will lift up your skirts over your face”** This is a sign of shame for prostitutes and those caught in adultery (cf. Nah. 2:7; Jer. 13:26; Ezek. 16:37; Hos. 2:3,10). See Special Topic: Shame.

3:6 “I will throw filth on you” This term “filth” (BDB 1055) is connected to idolatry in several passages, cf. Jer. 4:1; 7:30; 13:27; 16:18; Ezek. 5:11; 7:20; 11:18,21; 20:7,8,30; 37:23.

3:7d-e These are rhetorical questions expecting “no” answers. The second question may reflect an Assyrian “curse” formula.

▣ **“grieve”** This is literally “shake the head” (BDB 626, KB 678, *Qal* IMPERFECT). Here, it is a physical gesture of lament (cf. Ps. 64:8; Isa. 51:19; Jer. 15:5; 16:5; 18:16; 22:10; 48:17).

▣ **“comfort”** This VERBAL (BDB 636, KB 688, *Piel* PARTICIPLE) apparently comes from an Arabic root for the panting of a horse. This panting and shaking of the head can be both positive (as here, cf. Job 2:11; Isa. 51:19; Jer. 15:5) or negative (cf. Lam. 1:2,9,16,17,21).

▣ **“for you”** The LXX has “for her.” This fits the parallelism better but it requires an emendation.

1. MT – לך, “for you”
2. LXX – לה, “for her”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:8-15c

⁸Are you better than No-amon,
Which was situated by the waters of the Nile,

With water surrounding her,
 Whose rampart *was* the sea,
 Whose wall *consisted* of the sea?
⁹Ethiopia was *her* might,
 And Egypt too, without limits.
 Put and Lubim were among her helpers.
¹⁰Yet she became an exile,
 She went into captivity;
 Also her small children were dashed to pieces
 At the head of every street;
 They cast lots for her honorable men,
 And all her great men were bound with fetters.
¹¹You too will become drunk,
 You will be hidden.
 You too will search for a refuge from the enemy.
¹²All your fortifications are fig trees with ripe fruit—
 When shaken, they fall into the eater's mouth.
¹³Behold, your people are women in your midst!
 The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies;
 Fire consumes your gate bars.
¹⁴Draw for yourself water for the siege!
 Strengthen your fortifications!
 Go into the clay and tread the mortar!
 Take hold of the brick mold!
¹⁵There fire will consume you,
 The sword will cut you down;
 It will consume you as the locust *does*.

3:8 “Are you better than No-amon” This refers to the capital of southern Egypt, Thebes (cf. Jer. 46:25). This city was also well fortified and utilized natural river defenses. However, it fell to Ashurbanipal in 633 B.C. and was totally razed. Nineveh, who also trusted in her powerful army and natural water defenses, would be destroyed like Thebes.

This event has been very helpful in dating the book. Most commentators date Nahum between the fall of Thebes, 633 B.C., and the fall of Nineveh, 612 B.C. A good possible date would be around 627 B.C., when Ashurbanipal, the last effective king, died and the empire began to fall apart.

▣ **“the sea. . .the sea”** The word “sea” (BDB 410) can refer to rivers.

1. Nile – Isa. 18:1-2; 19:5; 27:1; Ezek. 32:2
2. Euphrates – Isa. 21:1; Jer. 51:36

3:9 Thebes (No-amon) had powerful and numerous allies but they could not stop the fall.

1. Ethiopia (Cush)
2. all of Egypt

3. Put (founder of Libya)
4. Lubim (i.e., Libya)

3:10 “Also her small children were dashed to pieces at the head of every street” Babies were often killed because:

1. they could not travel easily into captivity
2. it cut off the future generations from these captured people
3. it demoralized the people causing less resistance (cf. 2 Kgs. 8:12; Ps. 137:9; Isa. 13:16,18; Hos. 10:14; 13:16)

▣ **“They cast lots for her honorable men”** This refers to a method of

1. gambling for slaves
2. deciding which victorious leader got which defeated nobles as their slaves

For a similar occasion of casting lots for prisoners, see Joel 2:3; Obad. 11.

What Assyria did to Thebes will now happen to Nineveh.

1. exiled
2. children killed
3. sold into slavery
4. led away in chains

3:11 These are actions of fear at the fall of Nineveh.

1. drunkenness
2. attempt to hide
3. attempt to flee

Several scholars suggest that #2 should be “you will hire yourself out,” which involves the repointing of ψ to ψ .

The term “refuge” is used twice in Nahum.

1. God’s people found refuge in Him, Nah. 1:7
2. Nineveh’s people found no refuge

3:12 Powerful imagery of defeat!

The NET Bible, p. 1646, #11, 16, mentions that Sennacherib had planted fig trees along all the main roads of Nineveh. This may be eyewitness sarcasm!

3:13 “your people are women in your midst” This is ANE imagery of the fear and weakness of Nineveh’s defenders. For similar imagery see Isa. 13:7-8; 19:16; Jer. 51:30.

The term “people” (BDB 766 I) can refer to soldiers (cf. Num. 20:20; 21:23).

▣ **“The gates of your land are opened wide to your enemies”** The VERB here is intensified by the use of an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT TENSE VERB of the same root (BDB 834, KB 986).

In Nah. 2:6 the wall of Nineveh’s citadel was opened by the force of the dammed river water. Now the same imagery is used for the whole empire of Assyria. Here, probably the initial homeland.

3:14 This is a series of five sarcastic IMPERATIVES about the futility of Nineveh’s defenses and defenders (cf. Nah. 2:1).

1. draw for yourself water for the siege – BDB 980, KB 1367, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. strengthen your fortifications – BDB 304, KB 302, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
3. go into the clay (i.e., to strengthen defensive fortifications) – BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
4. tread the mortar (related to #3) – BDB 942, KB 1245, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

5. take hold of the brick mold (related to #3 and #4) – BDB 304, KB 302, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE

3:15 “There fire will consume you” Archaeology has confirmed that Nineveh was destroyed by fire. See Special Topic: Fire. Also, ancient tradition asserts that the last king burned himself and all of his family in the royal palace. Therefore, he committed suicide just before the fall of the city.

This city was so destroyed that it was never rebuilt. Xenophon, in about 400 B.C., visited the site and could not even tell a city had been there!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:15d-19

- ^{15d}**Multiply yourself like the creeping locust,
Multiply yourself like the swarming locust.**
- ¹⁶**You have increased your traders more than the stars of heaven—
The creeping locust strips and flies away.**
- ¹⁷**Your guardsmen are like the swarming locust.
Your marshals are like hordes of grasshoppers
Settling in the stone walls on a cold day.
The sun rises and they flee,
And the place where they are is not known.**
- ¹⁸**Your shepherds are sleeping, O king of Assyria;
Your nobles are lying down.
Your people are scattered on the mountains
And there is no one to regather *them*.**
- ¹⁹**There is no relief for your breakdown,
Your wound is incurable.
All who hear about you
Will clap *their* hands over you,
For on whom has not your evil passed continually?**

3:15d-19 “Multiply yourself like the creeping locust” This seems to emphasize the fact that military power will not prevail, while Nah. 3:16 emphasizes that governmental administration will not help. Nahum 3:18 states that all of the leaders are dead.

Both Nah. 3:15c and 15d are *Hithpael* IMPERATIVES (BDB 457, KB 455). The imagery of locusts is reminiscent of Joel.

Notice the different people involved in Assyria’s downfall.

1. traders, Nah. 3:16 – BDB 940
2. princes, Nah. 3:16 – BDB 634 (only here)
3. marshals (or scribes), Nah. 3:17 – BDB 381 (military connotation, cf. Jer. 51:27)
4. shepherds, Nah. 3:18 – BDB 944 I
5. majestic ones (NASB, “Nobles”), Nah. 3:18 – BDB 12, cf. Nah. 2:5; Jer. 14:3; 25:34-36; 30:21
6. your people, Nah. 3:18 – BDB 766 I

All aspects of society collapsed.

3:17c “like hordes of grasshoppers settling in the stone walls on a cold day” Grasshoppers are immobile in cold weather and this was a striking metaphor for Nahum’s purposes.

3:18 “sleeping” “Sleeping” is an ANE idiom for death (i.e., Deut. 31:16; 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kgs. 2:16; Jer. 51:39,57; Dan. 12:2).

▣ **“scattered”** The MT VERB (BDB 807 II, KB 921, *Niphal* PERFECT) is found only here. Many scholars suggest a change to another Hebrew root, BDB 658 or 659, “scatter.”

3:19 “There is no relief for your breakdown” The term “relief” (BDB 462) occurs only here. BDB suggests that it be changed to “healing” (BDB 155).

1. רַחֵם, “relief”
2. לַחֵם, “healing” (LXX, JPSOA, cf. Pr. 17:22)

▣ **“clap *their* hands over you”** This was a gesture of joy over cruel Nineveh’s fall.

1. literal – 2 Kgs. 11:12; Ps. 47:1; Ezek. 25:6
2. figurative – Ps. 98:9; Isa. 55:12
3. negative connotation – Job 27:23; Lam. 2:15

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. This chapter lists several reasons why YHWH judged Nineveh. List them.
2. Who does the graphic poetry of Nah. 3:2-3 describe?
3. What is the cultural imagery of marching someone exposed through the streets?
4. Why is the destruction of Thebes mentioned by the author?
5. Why do scholars think Nah. 3:14 and 3:15c-d are sarcastic?
6. Why are locusts used as imagery?

INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH

I. THE NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. It is named after the prophet.
- B. His name.
 - 1. the “iah” suffix is an abbreviation of YHWH, which was common in Hebrew names
 - 2. the root word is disputed
 - a. “YHWH has hidden,” from רתם, BDB 711, NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 1309
 - b. “YHWH has treasured,” from הִינִפֵּץ, BDB 861
 - c. “YHWH watches” or “watchman of YHWH,” הַפֶּצֵּץ, BDB 859
- C. There are several people in the OT who bear this name.
 - 1. a priest – 2 Kgs. 25:18-21; Jer. 21:1; 29:25,29; 37:3; 52:24
 - 2. a musician of the line of Heman – LXX of 1 Chr. 6:21
 - 3. this royal prophet – Zeph. 1:1
 - 4. a Judean family in post-exilic Jerusalem – Zech. 6:10,14

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book is part of the “latter prophets” (*Ecclesiasticus* 49:10).
- B. It is part of “the Twelve,” a grouping of minor prophets (*Baba Bathra* 14b):
 - 1. like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, they would all together fit on one scroll, *Young Commentary*, p. 1088
 - 2. represent the twelve tribes or the symbolic number of organization (see Special Topic: The Number Twelve)
- C. The order of “the Twelve” or Minor Prophets has been linked by many scholars to a chronological sequence. It is obvious that Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah form a historical unit.

III. GENRE

- A. This was classical Hebrew prophecy (poetry) which focused on the themes of sin, judgement and restoration (see Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry).
- B. Zephaniah 3:14-20 may be an ancient hymn/psalm.

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. The book had an unusually long genealogy: “. . .son of Cush, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah,” Zeph. 1:1.
 - 1. This implies that he was of the royal line of Judah. If the Hezekiah listed is the King of Judah (715-687 B.C.), then this seems to be the purpose of the lengthy genealogy.

2. Possibly the length is to prove his Jewishness because his father's name was *Cushi* (i.e., Ethiopian, BDB 469).
- B. Many believe he was cousin to Josiah (640-609 B.C.; see Special Topic: Kings of the Divided Kingdom) and was possibly trained by the same teachers as the godly King.
- C. Three others in the OT have the same name: 1 Chr. 6:36-38; Jer. 21:1; 2 Kgs. 25:18-21; 29:25; 37:3; 52:24-27; Zech. 6:10,14.

V. DATE

- A. Zephaniah spoke during the life of the godly King Josiah (640-609 B.C.).
- B. Because of the internal tensions in Judah mentioned in the book, Zeph. 1:4-6, 8-9, 12; 3:1-3, it seems that the recipients were Judeans before Josiah's reform was instituted (621 B.C., cf. 2 Kgs. 22:8-13; 23:1-25).

VI. HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. Some see God's instrument of invasion
 1. as the Scythian hordes (NIV, Clyde Francisco says 626 B.C.) which had earlier attacked Assyria
 2. Heroditus (I:103-106) says that the Scythians invaded through Palestine as far as Egypt before they were turned back by Pharaoh Psammetichus I (663-609 B.C.) by a pay off.
- B. Although the Scythian invasion was possible, probably it is Neo-Babylon that invaded Judah. Most scholars see the invaders as Babylon.

VII. LITERARY UNITS (taken from *Introduction to the Old Testament* by R. K. Harrison, p. 939-940)

- A. The Day of the LORD, Zeph. 1:1-2:3
 1. threat of desolation against *Ba'al* worshipers, Zeph. 1:2-6
 2. the implications of the Day of the LORD, Zeph. 1:7-13
 3. the ensuing judgment, Zeph. 1:14-18
 4. means of avoiding judgment, Zeph. 2:1-3
- B. Judgments Against Foreign Nations, Zeph. 2:4-15
 1. Philistia, Zeph. 2:4-7
 2. Moab and Ammon, Zeph. 2:8-11
 3. Egypt, Zeph. 2:12
 4. Assyria, Zeph. 2:13-15
- C. Woe and Blessing, Zeph. 3:1-20
 1. threat of punishment for Jerusalem, Zeph. 3:1-7
 2. assurance of blessing for the faithful remnant, Zeph. 3:8-20

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. This prophet warns of the approaching invasion of Judah. The reason for this act of judgement was the rampant idolatry in Jerusalem which was begun by Manasseh (cf. Ezekiel 8). Zephaniah used the concept of “the Day of the LORD.” Often the prophets used a crisis in their day to foreshadow future, end-time events. See Special Topic: That Day and Special Topic: The Day of the Lord (NT).
- B. There is a call to repentance in Zeph. 2:3. Judah’s only hope was in the Messiah’s love (Zeph. 3:17) and presence (Zeph. 3:15 & 17)! See Special Topic: Repentance (OT).
- C. It is obvious that God used Assyria to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5-11) and this Fertile Crescent Empire now stands judged but, so too, Judah (cf. Hab. 1:2-4)!

ZEPHANIAH 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Day of Wrath Upon Judah		Superscription		
1:1	1:1 The Great Day of the LORD	1:1 The Threat of Universal Destruction	1:1 The Day of the LORD's Judgment	1:1 Prelude: Judgment on All Creation
1:2-6 (2-6)	1:2-3 (2-3)	1:2-6 (2-6)	1:2-3	1:2-3 (2-3) Against the Worshipers of Alien Gods
	1:4-6 (4-6)	Court Officials and Royal Family Will Be Punished	1:4-6	1:4-6 (4-6)
1:7-13 (7-13)	1:7 (7)	1:7-9 (7-9)	1:7-9	1:7 (7) Against the Courtiers
	1:8-9 (8-9)			1:8-9 (8-9)
		Merchants and Traders Will Be Cut Off		Against the Merchants of Jerusalem
	1:10-11 (10-11)	1:10-13 (10-13)	1:10-11	1:10-11 (10-11) Against Unbelievers
	1:12-13 (12-13)		1:12-13	1:12-13 (12-13)
		The Day of the LORD Is At Hand		The Day of the LORD
1:14-18 (14-18)	1:14-16 (14-16)	1:14-16 (14-16)	1:14-16	1:14-18 (14-18)
	1:17 (17)	1:17-18 (17-18)	1:17	
	1:18 (18)		1:18	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1

¹The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah:

1:1 “The word of the LORD which came” This is the same prophetic formula as Jer. 1:2,4; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1. This is not simply a man’s understanding of history but it is a Divine communication from the covenant God, cf. Zeph. 1:3e, 10.

Jeremiah 18:18 lists the different ways YHWH revealed Himself in a message.

1. the law from the priests
2. counsel from the sage or wise man
3. the “word” (BDB 182) from the prophet

He also reveals Himself through nature, cf. Job 37-41; Ps. 8:1,3; and esp. Ps. 19:1-6, but the word of YHWH is wonderfully specific (cf. Ps. 19:7-14)! He has not left His faithful followers in a fallen, capricious world without clear instruction. Thank God for the Bible! See Special Topic: Bible (its uniqueness and inspiration).

For “Lord” see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D., YHWH.

▣ **“Zephaniah”** The etymology of this word is somewhat in dispute. Some take it from the root which means “to hide” (BDB 861), therefore, “YHWH hides,” or “YHWH shelters” (BDB 861). Others take it from the root “to watch” and, therefore, the “watchman of YHWH” (BDB 859).

▣ **“the son of Cushi”** Zephaniah 1:1 is the longest genealogical introduction in the prophets. There has been much discussion about the length.

1. Some say it is because of the word “Cushi” (BDB 469, a name, cf. Jer. 36:14), which means “dark” or “swarthy” (often used of people from Ethiopia, cf. 2 Sam. 18:21; 2 Kgs. 19:9; Isa. 18:1), and it was needed to prove his Jewishness.
2. Others have assumed that because the fourth person mentioned is Hezekiah, which is a rare name in the OT, that this refers to King Hezekiah, therefore, asserting the royal ancestry of Zephaniah.

▣ **“Hezekiah”** This seems to relate to one of the godly kings of Judah (716-687 B.C.). If this is true, then Zephaniah had the same teachers as his cousin, King Josiah, another godly king of Judah who reigned from 640-609 B.C.

▣ **“Josiah”** This young king came to the throne at the age of eight years. He reigned for a long period of time. He instituted a major spiritual reform in 621 B.C. Many believe that Zephaniah was written before this reform was instituted. This godly king was killed in a strange accident as he tried to stop Pharaoh Necho II from helping the retreating Assyrian army against Babylon (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:28-30). Therefore, his reforms did not take hold and succeed.

There is an interesting comment by David Baker in the *Tyndale OT Commentary Series*, p. 86.

“Another important aspect of the prophecy arises when one notices the serious moral and spiritual decline following the vigorous reforms of Hezekiah (see p. 81), which would in turn follow those being undertaken by Zephaniah’s contemporary Josiah (see 2 Ki. 23:31-24:4). Dependence on the faith and piety of a preceding generation is not enough. A personal commitment to the covenant was needed by each successive king and each generation of Israel, as it still is for each generation in the church. Neither the twentieth-century church nor the Israel of the monarchy can be second-generation children of God. The commitment must be made individually and personally by everyone.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:2-6

²“I will completely remove all *things*

From the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.

³“I will remove man and beast;

I will remove the birds of the sky
And the fish of the sea,
And the ruins along with the wicked;
And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD
⁴**“So I will stretch out My hand against Judah**
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place,
And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.
⁵**And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven,**
And those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom,
⁶**And those who have turned back from following the LORD**
And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him.”

1:2 “I will completely remove” This is made up of two inflected words spelled the same.

1. VERB, “gather,” “remove” – BDB 62, KB 74, *Qal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE
2. VERB, “come to an end” – BDB 692, KB 746, *Hiphil* JUSSIVE form but functioning as an IMPERFECT VERB (three times, Zeph. 1:2,3)

The INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and the thrice repeated VERB, all spelled הָסֵא, make a very emphatic statement by YHWH (cf. Jer. 8:13)! This is prophetic hyperbole. See D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*.

1:2-3 “I will completely remove all things” These verses are a strong hyperbolic passage on the universal judgment. The extent of species destroyed here is even wider than for the flood destruction of Genesis 6 and 7. This passage is the imagery of a second worldwide judgment, like the flood. It is hyperbolic for an ANE period but, in reality, for an eschatological event. See G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*.

▣ **“earth. . .man”** The term “earth” is the term *adamah*,” while the term “man” is the term *adam*. Both BDB 9 relate this text to the catechismic judgment of Genesis 6-9 (??).

1:3c “fish of the sea” Even the flood did not affect aquatic life forms, yet this judgment will! In Romans 8:18,19 we see that mankind’s sin has affected all nature.

1:3d This line of poetry is translated several ways. The “stumbling blocks of the wicked” refers to idolatry (NKJV footnote). The following verses affirm this (i.e., Zeph. 1:4-6; Ezekiel 8). The NET Bible, p. 1656, #4, suggests the idols are of the animals or fish mentioned in Zeph. 1:3a-c.

There are apparently three types of wicked Judeans.

1. idolaters, Zeph. 1:4-5
2. apathetic (i.e., practical atheist), Zeph. 1:6 (cf. Isa. 1:4)
3. wicked merchants, Zeph. 1:11

All will be judged and destroyed in Zeph. 1:14-18. However, there is a faithful remnant mentioned in Zeph. 2:3,7,9. See Special Topic: The Remnant, Three Senses.

1:4 “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah. . .Jerusalem” This is an anthropomorphic phrase (see Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language) to speak of God’s power to act in history (cf. Exod. 7:5; 15:12; Isa. 5:25; 23:11; Jer. 6:12; 15:6; 51:25; Ezek. 6:14; 14:13; 16:27; 25:7,13,16; Zeph. 2:13). It is so surprising that the universal judgment of God is going to fall upon His own covenant people. The book of Zephaniah shows that God is no respecter of persons. The idolatry which took the northern

ten tribes into captivity was repeated by Judah and God also disciplined them (cf. Ezekiel 23). God is a moral, just God. His people must reflect His character.

▣ **“the remnant of Baal”** The Septuagint has “names of Baal.” This refers to the Phoenician fertility god and his consort, *Anath*. In the Bible, *Ba'al*’s consort is *Ashtaroth*. This cultic fertility worship had invaded even the people of God, cf. 2 Chr. 33:3,7; Mic. 5:13-14; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East and NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 422-428.

▣ **“the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests”** The term “idolatrous priests” (BDB 1027 CONSTRUCT BDB 485) is also found in 2 Kgs. 23:5; Hos. 10:5. As these cultic priests performed their tasks, they were joined by some Levitical priests. Both will be destroyed.

These Hebrew consonants *kmr* (BDB 485) form the term “priests” and have several connotations.

1. to be warm (or blackened), BDB I, Lam. 5:10
2. to be black (from Syriac), BDB II, possibly “black robed priests”
3. to lay prostrate, BDB III, bows to the ground before idols
4. a snare or net, Ps. 141:10; Hab. 1:15, play on the root for idolatry’s terrible consequences

1:5-6 Notice how Zeph. 1:5-6 describes the faithless, idolatrous followers.

1. those who bow down to the host of heaven
2. those who swear to YHWH by *Milcom*
3. those who have turned back from following YHWH
4. those who have not sought YHWH
5. those who have not inquired of YHWH

These people are not God’s people. Only faithful followers are God’s people. God wants a people to reflect His character to a fallen, lost, unbelieving world. When the messenger (i.e., Israel) gives the wrong message, He must act to restore His ultimate purpose, the salvation and fellowship of all people made in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26,27; 3:8; see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan).

1:5 “who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven” This refers to astral worship. When Manasseh was forced to pay tribute to Assyria, he was also forced to worship the Assyrian astral deities (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:3-5). We learn from Jer. 19:13; 32:29 that Jerusalem was actively involved in this housetop worship. The host of heaven is condemned in Deut. 4:19; Job 31:26-27. Idolatry was the reason for the fall and exile of the northern ten tribes (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:16), but Judah did not listen and even became more perverse (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:3,5; 23:4,5,11,12; Jer. 7:18; 8:2; 44:17,30; Ezekiel 23).

▣ **“Milcom”** This fertility god of the ANE was known by several closely related titles (all forms of the Hebrew root for “King,” *mlk*, BDB 572).

1. Milcom, Molcom – BDB 575, Ammonite form (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:5; 2 Kgs. 23:13; also note LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate)
2. Molech – BDB 574, KB 592, see Special Topic: *Molech*
3. Moloch, Molekh, Molok, Melek, Melech – other spellings of #2
4. MT has “Malcom” or “their King” (cf. Jer. 49:1)
5. even possibly a Babylonian god—Malku, Akkadian root

In Jer. 19:3-6 the fertility god of Canaan, *Ba'al*, is linked with *Molech*.

Notice how Judah has combined the worship of (cf. Ezekiel 8, violating Exod. 20:3; Deut. 5:7; see Special Topic: Monotheism):

1. YHWH
2. Mesopotamian astral worship
3. fertility worship

- a. Ammon – Milcom
- b. Phoenician – Molech
- c. Canaan – Ba'al

They formed faithless Judah's new pantheon of hope and prosperity (i.e., alliances and trade)!

1:6 There are two aspects to biblical fellowship with YHWH. One is negative (repentance) and one is positive (faith). This text expresses the same thought with

1. turn back – they stopped following YHWH's guidance, cf. Isa. 1:4. They are moving away from Him (BDB 690, KB 744, *Niphal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE). A good example is Isa. 59:13.
2. not seeking – they stopped trusting YHWH (see Zeph. 2:3)

The VERB "seek" (BDB 134, KB 152, *Piel* PERFECT) could denote three things.

1. seek fellowship with YHWH (cf. Deut. 4:29; 1 Chr. 16:10; 2 Chr. 11:16; Isa. 51:1; Jer. 50:4; Hos. 3:5; Zech. 8:21-22)
2. seek information (cf. Pro. 28:5; Zeph. 1:6). The exodus contexts (Exod. 33:13) fit Moses as judge (i.e., oracle of YHWH). Often in the Psalms (with different phrasing) worshipers ask for God to teach them His ways, truth, will (cf. Ps. 16:11; 25:4; 119:66; 142:8).
3. seek the Lord's help (i.e., 2 Chr. 20:1-13)

These same pillars of biblical faith can be seen in the NT.

1. Jesus' words – Mark 1:15
2. Peter's words – Acts 3:16,19
3. Paul's words – Acts 20:21; 26:20

See Special Topics:

1. Special Topic: Repentance (OT)
2. Special Topic: Repentance (NT)
3. Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT
4. Special Topic: Faith, Believe, or Trust (NT)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:7-13

⁷Be silent before the Lord GOD!

For the day of the LORD is near,

For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,

He has consecrated His guests.

⁸"Then it will come about on the day of the LORD's sacrifice

That I will punish the princes, the king's sons

And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.

⁹And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold,

Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.

¹⁰On that day," declares the LORD

"There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,

A wail from the Second Quarter,

And a loud crash from the hills.

¹¹Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar,

For all the people of Canaan will be silenced;

All who weigh out silver will be cut off.

¹²It will come about at that time

That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,

And I will punish the men
 Who are stagnant in spirit,
 Who say in their hearts,
 ‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’
¹³Moreover, their wealth will become plunder
 And their houses desolate;
 Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*,
 And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.”

1:7 “Be silent before the Lord GOD” The context does not state exactly why the people are to be silent (BDB 245, used as an IMPERATIVE).

1. Some scholars suppose that silence accompanied sacrifice (Zeph. 1:7c; *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 291).
2. silent at YHWH’s deliverance of His people – Zech. 2:13
3. silent during worship – Hab. 2:20
4. silent during mourning – Lam. 2:10; 3:28
5. silent so as to receive instruction from YHWH – Isa. 41:1
6. silent to YHWH’s not responding – Ps. 28:1; 134:2; 141:2; Lam. 2:19
7. stopping the speech of the wicked – Ps. 31:17-18
8. silencing the wicked in *Sheol* – 1 Sam. 2:9
9. in this context the term may be purposefully ambiguous because
 - a. this context stresses “the day of the LORD,” which the covenant people thought would be good for them but not so, they are unfaithful idolaters and they will be judged
 - b. silence was appropriate for both
 - (1) worship and revelation
 - (2) judgment and death

Notice “Lord” (BDB 10) in the first line is “*Adon*”, but “Lord” in the second and this line is YHWH (BDB 217). They are parallel. Later in Judaism the title YHWH became so holy that the Jews substituted “*Adon*” when they read the Scriptures. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

▣ **“the day of the LORD is near”** This imagery dominates Zephaniah 1. See Special Topic: That Day and Special Topic: The Day of the Lord (NT).

The essence of this imagery is that God is both

1. transcendent – we live our lives in faith not sight; biblical faith is a worldview, a faith relationship, and a godly lifestyle
2. immanent – one day we will recognize that He was always with us (i.e., Psalm 139:7-12). On that day every human, created in the image and likeness of YHWH, will give an account to Him for their stewardship of the gift of life.

In time He comes for blessing (cf. Zeph. 3:9-20) and judgment (cf. Zeph. 1:2-6,7-13,14-18; see Special Topic: That Day). At the end of time a culmination event will occur (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15). See the following Special Topics.

1. Special Topic: Judge, Judgment, Justice in Isaiah
2. Special Topic: Judgment in the NT
3. Special Topic: The Judgment Seat of Christ

The time element “near” (cf. Zeph. 1:14b; cf. Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. v. 15) has always been problematic because “the day” has two aspects.

1. temporal (any time, repeated)

2. eschatological (end-time, once)

This tension is carried over into the New Testament. See Special Topic: Soon Return. Faithful followers must live every day as if it were the last day, but plan and organize as if it is far in the future.

▣ **“For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice”** God help us! The sacrifice is His own people (their blood “poured out” on the ground, Zeph. 1:17), and the consecrated guests mentioned next are either the Assyrians or the Scythians, or more probably, the Babylonians. God used cruel Assyria (Isa. 10:50) and godless Babylon (Isaiah 13; Hab. 1:5-11) to judge His own people because they became involved in idolatry and faithlessness. His judgment was actually an act of love to restore His covenant people.

1:8 This poetry is depicting the Judeans’ (i.e., of every level of society, cf. Zeph. 3:3-4) worship of foreign gods (i.e., “foreign garments”).

1. *Ba’al*, Zeph. 1:4c
2. host of heaven, Zeph. 1:5a
3. *Milcom/Molech*, Zeph. 1:5b

Ezekiel 8 shockingly invisions this pagan idolatry.

▣ **“the princes, the king’s son”** Zephaniah was part of the royal extended family. He knew the court intrigue well! He was an insider!

▣ **“All who clothe themselves with foreign garments”** This refers to

1. *Ba’al* worship (cf. 2 Kgs. 10:22)
2. fashionable clothing of foreign nations (i.e., showing their influence, NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 258)

1:9 “all who leap on the *temple* threshold” Notice that the word “temple” is in italics, which means that it is not in the Hebrew text. However, the term “threshold” (BDB 837) is always used in the OT to refer to the Temple (cf. Ezek. 9:3; 10:4,18; 47:1). The threshold, in ancient societies, was a place of demonic spirits (cf. 1 Sam. 5:5, describes Philistine worship which has affected the Targum translation of this text). Our modern, western custom of carrying one’s bride over the threshold is a cultural example of this belief. The VERBAL “leap” (BDB 194, KB 222, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is used in 1 Kgs. 18:26 for a ritual dance of the *Ba’al* worshipers. This may be an allusion to the practice of *Ba’alism* even in the Temple of God, cf. Ezekiel 8.

▣ **“their lord”** The intended referent is very ambitious. This could refer to

1. master of servants
2. priests of Temple (YHWH or *Ba’al*, Zeph. 1:4d)
3. invaders (sent by YHWH, Zeph. 1:13)
4. legal robbers (i.e., judges, the wealthy people/servants who exploit the poor)
5. merchants, Zeph. 1:11
6. NIV has “their gods”; NJB translates it “house” (BDB 108), as “temple,” which supports the NIV understanding; REB has “their Lord’s house,” which capitalizes *Adon* (BDB 10; cf. Zeph. 1:7; NET Bible footnote has “king” or “pagan god”)

1:10 “the Fish Gate” Many believe that this was on the north wall (closest to the Sea of Galilee) and would have been the first gate to be approached by an invader from the north (i.e., Jer. 1:13-15; 4:6; 6:1,22).

▣ **“the Second Quarter”** This is believed to be a new extension of the city northwest of the Temple, cf. 2 Kgs. 22:14; 2 Chr. 34:22; Neh. 11:9. The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1236, says “probably refers to the Upper City of Jerusalem, the western hill, where the upper social strata of Jerusalem dwelled.”

1:11 “wail” This is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE used often of YHWH’s coming judgment.

1. Babylon comes – Isa. 13:6; 14:31
2. Babylon judged – Ezek. 30:2
3. Moab judged – Jer. 48:20

▣ **“the Mortar** This (BDB 509) was a part of Jerusalem. The term was used in Jdgs. 15:19 for a low place, therefore, many believe it to be the “Trypoeon Valley,” which separated the city of Jerusalem. It may have referred to the market place (NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 746).

▣ **“the people of Canaan. . .all who weigh out silver”** These are in a Hebrew parallel relationship. It refers to the idolatrous merchants. The terms “Canaanite” and “merchant” (BDB 489) are synonymous (cf. Pro. 31:24; Isa. 23:8; Zech. 14:21; Hos. 12:7, NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 669).

▣ **“will be silenced. . .will be cut off”** The two VERBS of Zeph. 1:11 are PROPHETIC PERFECTS. Future action is viewed as so certain that it is spoken of as already accomplished.

1:12 “I will search Jerusalem with lamps” This was not to find people who loved God, but to find those who loved idolatry, cf. Ezek. 9:4-11. It is God Himself who searches (similar imagery in Amos 9:3). See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“Who are stagnant in spirit”** This is a metaphor from the wine industry. It is used in a good sense in Isa. 25:6; it is used in a bad sense in Jer. 48:11, where it refers to Moab. It refers to leaving wine too long on its lees so that it becomes stagnant and thick (i.e., the apathy of the people of God; some scholars slightly emend the phrase to read, “those who are at ease” (NIV, NRSV, cf. Isa. 32:9,11; Amos 6:1; Zech. 1:15; see *Tyndale OT Commentary*, p. 98, #1).

For “wine” see Special Topic: Wine and Strong Drink.

▣ **“The LORD will not do good or evil”** This is a shocking statement from God’s people. It is used in Isa. 41:23 to describe lifeless idols. This is “practical” atheism on the part of the apathetic inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 8:12; 9:9).

1:13 “Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them,

And plant vineyards but not drink their wine” The covenant curses of YHWH are coming into play on His people because of their rebellion (cf. Lev. 26:32,33; Deut. 28:30; Amos 5:11; Mic. 6:15).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:14-18

¹⁴**Near is the great day of the LORD**

Near and coming very quickly;

Listen, the day of the LORD

In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

¹⁵**A day of wrath is that day,**

A day of trouble and distress,

A day of destruction and desolation,

A day of darkness and gloom,

A day of clouds and thick darkness,

¹⁶**A day of trumpet and battle cry**

Against the fortified cities

And the high corner towers.

¹⁷I will bring distress on men

So that they will walk like the blind,

Because they have sinned against the LORD

And their blood will be poured out like dust

And their flesh like dung.

¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold

Will be able to deliver them

On the day of the LORDs wrath;

And all the earth will be devoured

In the fire of His jealousy,

For He will make a complete end,

Indeed a terrifying one,

Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

1:14-18 This is apocalyptic language (see Special Topic: Apocalyptic Literature) that describes the end-time judgment on all the created order. A day of universal judgment is only possible if

1. YHWH is the one true creator God (see Special Topic: Monotheism)
2. YHWH is an ethical God
3. YHWH's words are true (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28)

For the phrase “near end coming very quickly,” see note at Zeph. 1:7b.

1:14d Who is the warrior who cries out (NOUN, “listen,” BDB 876, cf. Zeph. 1:14c; Isa. 13:4, plus *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE of “cries aloud,” BDB 863, KB 1055, Zeph. 1:14d)?

1. the victims of YHWH's wrath
2. the Judean soldier viewing the invaders' victory
3. the war cry of the divine Warrior Himself (cf. Isa. 42:13; 59:17)

Number 3 would reflect “Holy War” terminology. However, for faithless, idolatrous Judah, He is the attacker, not the defender!

If #2 is the correct option, then the “battle cry” (BDB 929) of Zeph. 1:16 is a strong contrast. If #3 is the correct option, then Zeph. 1:16 is a parallel.

1:15 Similar imagery is in Joel's and Amos' description of “the day of the LORD” (cf. Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18,20).

1:16 “trumpet” This term (BDB 1051) is one of several horns used by Israel (see Special Topic: Horns Used By Israel).

▣ **“Against the fortified cities**

And the high corner towers” This same imagery of judgment day is used in Isa. 2:12-22.

1:17b This is part of the curses of Deut. 28:29 (cf. Isa. 59:10).

1:17c The reason for the judgment (Zeph. 1:15) is “sin” (Gen. 6:5,11-12,13). See Special Topic: The Fall (Genesis 3 in the NT). For the pagan it was unbelief, but for Judah it was covenant disobedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28-30).

There are “in time” consequences to sin as well as “beyond time” consequences! Faith and obedience are both crucial (cf. James 2:14-26).

- 1:17d,e** Modern western people are uncomfortable with
1. the violence of ANE warfare (cf. Jer. 8:2; 9:22)
 2. biblical prophetic hyperbole

I would like to make two comments.

1. God will judge sin and unbelief. It will be horrid and shocking but look at biblical history!
2. The best books I have read on biblical hyperbole are
 - a. D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*, ISBN 0-8308-2653-X
 - b. G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, ISBN 0-8028-4221-6

1:18a-b This may refer to

1. the ANE practice of buying off an invader (cf. 2 Kgs. 15:20; 18:13-15), but YHWH cannot be bought off!
2. the lifeless idols and helpless gods that Judah was worshipping (i.e., Zeph. 1:4-5; Ezek. 7:19).

I think in context #2 is best.

▣ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God (cf. Gal. 6:7; Heb. 10:31). See Special Topic: Fire.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is the opening genealogy so long?
2. How is Zeph. 1:2-3 related to Genesis 1-2 and 6-9?
3. What two kinds of sinners are mentioned in Zeph. 1:4-6?
4. What does the phrase in Zeph. 1:12, “The LORD will not do good or evil” mean?
5. What does “near” and “coming very quickly” mean in apocalyptic literature?
6. Why is Zeph. 1:17c so significant?
7. Is God’s judgment temporal or eschatological?

ZEPHANIAH 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Judgments on Judah’s Enemies	A Call to Repentance	The Humble of the Land Who Seek the LORD in Righteousness	A Plea for Repentance	Conclusion: A Call to Conversion

2:1-3 (1-3)	2:1-3 (1-3) Judgment on Nations	2:1-3 (1-3) Against the Nations	2:1-3 The Doom of the Nations Around Israel	2:1-3 (1-3) The Enemy to the West: The Philistines
2:4-7 (4-7)	2:4-5 (4-5) 2:6-7 (6-7)	2:4-7 (4-7)	2:4-7	2:4-7 (4-7) The Enemies to the East: Moab and Ammon
2:8-11 (8-9)	2:8-9 (8-9) 2:10-11 (10-11)	2:8-11 (8-11)	2:8-9 2:10-11	2:8-11 (8-11) The Enemy to the South: Ethiopia
2:12-15 (12-15)	2:12 (12) 2:13-15 (13-15)	2:12 (12) 2:13-15 (13-15)	2:12 2:13-15	2:12 (12) The Enemy to the North: Assyria 2:13-15 (13-15)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter has a word to the remnant of Judah (Zeph. 2:1-3). The prophet issues a divine call for repentance to the faithful few in Judah.
- B. This chapter has the hope of the universal worship of YHWH (Zeph. 2:11; 3:9).
- C. All nations who oppose YHWH will be judged, even powerful, arrogant Assyria (cf. Nahum).
- D. Concerning Zephaniah's use of Hebrew poetic forms and imagery note D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, p. 193.

“Zephaniah is describing God's judgment on Assyria in the destruction of its capital, Nineveh. But for a poet it is not enough simply to state the fact. Zephaniah develops the point with a series of metaphors: lack of water replaces an abundance of water, animals replace people, the screech of owls replaces voices, rubble replaces finery, mockery replaces admiration. Metaphors are essential to the poetic development of basic concepts.”

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-3

¹Gather yourselves together, yes, gather,

O nation without shame,

²Before the decree takes effect—

The day passes like the chaff—

Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you,

Before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you.

³Seek the LORD

All you humble of the earth

Who have carried out His ordinances;

Seek righteousness, seek humility.

Perhaps you will be hidden

In the day of the LORD's anger.

2:1 “Gather. . .gather” These are repeated IMPERATIVES which occur only here.

1. BDB 905 II, KB 1154, *Hithpoel*
2. same root, *Qal*

The root is used of gathering dried chaff or stubble (cf. Exod. 5:7,12; Num. 15:32,33; 1 Kgs. 17:10). Another word for “chaff” (BDB 558) is used in Zeph. 2:2. Even the faithful remnant (see Special Topic: The Remnant, Three Senses) are about to be destroyed by the fire of YHWH's wrath (Zeph. 2:2c,d). They must “seek” Him (three *Piel* IMPERATIVES, Zeph. 2:3). Finding Him will result in

1. their humility (Zeph. 2:2b; 3:2, cf. 1 Kgs. 21:29)
2. their covenant obedience (Zeph. 2:2c)

Even then there is only hope (i.e., “perhaps,” BDB 19 II, cf. Exod. 32:20; Amos 5:15, similar to Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:27 or Jonah 3:9) that YHWH will “hide” (BDB 711, KB 771, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) them, which is a word play on the prophet's name.

Godly individuals are impacted by national judgment. Sin, even forgiven sin, has terrible consequences in time.

▣ **“nation”** This term (*goy*, BDB 156) is used several times for the covenant people (i.e., Gen. 18:22; 22:18; 26:4-35:11; Exod. 19:6; Deut. 28:1), but in this context (judgment on surrounding nations of the ANE) it is a derogatory word about Judah's faithlessness. She is acting like the idolatrous, ignorant pagan nations (*goim*).



NASB, NRSV,

JPSOA, TEV,

NJB

“without shame”

NKJV, NET

“undesirable”

REB

“unruly”

LXX

“uneducated”

Peshitta

“without discipline”

The MT has the VERB BDB 493, KB 490, *Niphal* PERFECT, which means “longing for,” “deeply desiring” (i.e., Gen. 31:30; Ps. 84:2, JB). Here, it is negated. Judah did not long for YHWH (cf. Zeph. 1:6).

The translation “unashamed” comes from an Aramaic root for “shame,” or literally, “become pale from embarrassment.”

2:2 “Before the decree takes effect” The “decree” (BDB 349) refers to the covenant blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28. See Special Topic: Terms for God's Revelation, I.

The VERB is literally “born” (BDB 408, KB 411, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). This is powerful imagery of God's word once given or released cannot be recalled (i.e., Isa. 55:11, note the *Qal* IMPERATIVE “seek” in Isa. 55:9).

I like the comment by David Baker in the *Tyndale OT Commentary* series, p. 103.

“The people are to respond quickly, because several things are imminent and soon to come, as shown by the threefold repetition of *before*, another allusion of the closeness of the Day of Yahweh (1:7,14). Here the day is described as relating to his *anger* (cf. La. 2:22), his *fierce anger* (3:8; cf. Ex. 32:12; Is. 13:9,13; Ho. 11:9; Na. 1:6) which *comes upon* the nation as a result of sin.”

▣ **“the chaff”** This is the disposable part of grain. It became an idiom of judgment (i.e., chaff blown by the wind, i.e., Ps. 1:4; Hos. 13:3). Here it denotes the rapid passing of time when repentance must be made before judgment is unleashed.

There is a word play between “gather” (Zeph. 2:1, BDB 905 II, “gather dry chaff”) and this word (BDB 558).

▣ **“the burning anger of the LORD”** This is anthropomorphic language (see Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language), yet there is the reality of YHWH’s passion, zeal, and commitment to His covenant. Anger is what occurs when love is rejected, especially in the presence of great light (i.e., Scripture, cf. Nah. 1:2-3,6-7)!

2:3 “Seek” This is a crucial term to denote faithful followers.

1. They are not idolaters, Zeph. 1:4-5 (cf. Deut. 4:25-31).
2. They do not turn back, Zeph. 1:6a.
3. They do not cheat the poor, Zeph. 1:11 (usually “humility” is related to the poor, Exod. 22:21-41; Deut. 18:10; Mic. 6:8, but here for the faithful followers).

Here the VERB “seek” (BDB 134, KB 152), from Zeph. 1:6, is repeated three times in a *Piel* IMPERATIVE form. See full notes at Zeph. 1:6b.

Notice how this “seeking” is characterized here.

1. all you humble
 - a. of Judah (one use of *erets*, see Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth)
 - b. of all the earth (see Zeph. 2:11, another use of *erets*)
2. disobedience to the covenant (see Special Topic: Covenant and Special Topic: Keep)
3. live in righteousness (see Special Topic: Righteousness)

▣ **“ordinances”** See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:4-7

⁴For Gaza will be abandoned

And Ashkelon a desolation;

Ashdod will be driven out at noon

And Ekron will be uprooted.

⁵Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast,

The nation of the Cherethites!

The word of the LORD is against you,

O Canaan, land of the Philistines;

And I will destroy you

So that there will be no inhabitant.

⁶So the seacoast will be pastures,

With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks.

⁷And the coast will be
 For the remnant of the house of Judah,
 They will pasture on it.
 In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening;
 For the LORD their God will care for them
 And restore their fortune.

2:4-5 These verses reflect God’s judgment on the surrounding nations. Many (NJB) have asserted that they formed the four points of the compass.

1. Philistia to the west (Zeph. 2:4-7)
2. Moab and Ammon to the east (Zeph. 2:8-11)
3. Cush to the south (Zeph. 2:12)
4. Assyria to the north (Zeph. 2:13-15, i.e., they invaded from the north)

2:4 “Gaza. . . Ashkelon. . . Ashdod. . . Ekron” These are four of the five major Philistine cities (cf. Jos. 13:3). Amos 1:6-8 also omits the city of Gad. This is why many believe that Zephaniah quoted from Amos. But Zech. 9:5-7 also omits “Gad.” It was destroyed by Sargon II, King of Assyria in 711 B.C.

▣ **“Gaza will be abandoned”** There is a sound play between

1. Gaza – גִּזְזָה
2. abandoned/deserted (BDB 736 I, KB 806, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) – הִבְזִיזָה

The Philistine city states will be destroyed and deserted, like Nineveh in Zeph. 2:13-14.

Also note the word/sound play between

1. Ekron – עֲרֹקַע
2. be uprooted (BDB 785, KB 784, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) – רִקַּע

Word/sound plays (not rhymes) are so common in Hebrew poetry. See Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry.

▣ **“will be driven out at noon”** The imagery of “noon” has several connotations.

1. God’s judgment will blind sinners even at noon (the brightest time of day), cf. Deut. 28:29; Job 5:14; Ps. 37:6; Isa. 59:10 (i.e., YHWH’s presence is brighter)
2. demonic attack – Ps. 91:6; Jer. 15:8
3. an unusual time for attacking because (idiom of intense fighting of a surprise attack, cf. Jer. 6:4; Zeph. 2:4)
 - a. bright light
 - b. heat of the day
 - c. time for lunch and rest

▣ **“Ekron will be uprooted”** “Ekron” (BDB 785) means “deeply rooted.” Therefore, this is a Hebrew way of saying that the deeply rooted will be uprooted (BDB 785, KB 874, *Niphal* IMPERFECT).

2:5 “Woe” The Hebrew INTERJECTION (BDB 222) is sometimes positive, “alas” and sometimes negative, “woe.”

1. some positive examples – Isa. 55:1; Jer. 47:6; Zech. 2:6-7
2. negative examples
 - a. Assyria – Isa. 10:5; Nah. 3:1
 - b. Syria – Isa. 17:12
 - c. Ethiopia – Isa. 18:1

- d. Israel – Isa. 1:4; 28:1; Amos 5:16-17
- e. Babylon – Hab. 2:6,9,12,15,19
- f. Judah
 - (1) Jehoiakim – Jer. 22:18-19
 - (2) Zedekiah – Jer. 34:4-5; Ezek. 24:6,9

▣ **“The nation of the Cherethites”** They (BDB 504, KB 501) may refer to the VERB “cutter offs” (BDB 503, KB 506). Some assert that they are Cretans, as are the Philistines (cf. Deut. 2:23; Amos 9:7). They lived in the Negev (cf. 1 Sam. 30:14) and later were connected to the Philistines. Many of them were part of David’s original army (cf. 2 Sam. 8:18). This is another play on the Hebrew phrase, “the cutter offs will be cut off.”

▣ **“The word of the LORD is against you”** The Judge of the universe has made a verdict of judgment (cf. Amos 3:1)!

▣ **“O Canaan”** This was YHWH’s promised land to His covenant people (cf. Gen. 15:18-21), but their disobedience caused it to be a land of judgment, not blessing. As YHWH took the Canaanites out of the land (cf. Gen. 15:16), so too, now the Israelites (i.e., Assyrian exile of the northern tribes, Babylonian exile of the southern tribes).

2:6

NASB “caves”
NKJV “shelters”
NRSV “meadows”
TEV “shepherd’s huts”
JPSOA “abode for shepherds”

The differences in these English translations is because of the uncertainty of the Hebrew root.

1. חרַב – BDB 500 I, used in Zeph. 2:9 for “salt-pits,” here “wells” or dug out shelters
2. רָבַע – BDB 499, pasture, cf. Ps. 37:20; 65:13; Isa. 30:23 (NRSV); different word for “pasture” used in Zeph. 2:6a and 7e (BDB 944 I, KB 1258)

2:7 “the remnant of the house of Judah” This refers to a few faithful, repentant Judeans (cf. Zeph. 2:3,9; 3:13). See Special Topic: The Remnant, Three Senses.

The difficult issue of only a few being right with God continues in the NT (cf. Matt. 7:13-14; 22:1-14; Luke 13:22-35; see note online at Matt. 7:13-14).

Notice the play on the remnant “pasturing” on the coast and YHWH taking care of them (i.e., Psalm 23; John 10).

There may be one more word play between “restore” (BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* PERFECT) and the remnant being “repentant” (BDB 996, KB 1427). See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT.

▣

NASB “will care for them”
NKJV “will intervene for them”
NRSV “will be mindful of them”
TEV “will be with them”
NJB “has punished them”
JPSOA “will take note of them”

REB “will turn to them”
LXX “has looked upon them”
Peshitta “will visit them”

The MT has the VERB (BDB 823, KB 955, *Qal* IMPERFECT) meaning “to visit” (Peshitta). This visiting (i.e., personal presence) can be for

1. blessing – other English translations (i.e., Gen. 21:1; 50:24-25; Exod. 13:19; Ps. 65:9; 106:4; Jer. 15:15; 27:22; 29:10)
2. judgment – NJB, cf. Ps. 59:5; Jer. 6:15; 50:31 (often translated “punish”)

▣ **“fortune”** This NOUN can be

1. fortune – BDB 986 (*Ketiv*), Zeph. 3:20; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14 (NASB, NRSV, TEV, NJB, REB)
2. captivity – BDB 986 (*Qere*), Deut. 30:2; Ps. 126:1; Ezek. 16:53; 29:14 (NKJV, LXX, Peshitta)

Note how Jer. 48:46-47; 49:38-39 have both ideas.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:8-11

⁸“I have heard the taunting of Moab

And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,

With which they have taunted My people

And become arrogant against their territory.

⁹Therefore, as I live,” declares the LORD of hosts,

The God of Israel,

“Surely Moab will be like Sodom

And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah—

A place possessed by nettles and salt pits,

And a perpetual desolation.

The remnant of My people will plunder them

And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.”

¹⁰This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts. ¹¹The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.

2:8 Notice the VERBS that characterize the children of Lot (Moab, Ammon, Gen. 19:30-38).

1. the taunts – BDB 357, NOUN
2. the revilings – BDB 154
3. have taunted – BDB 357, KB 355, *Piel* PERFECT
4. became arrogant – BDB 152, KB 178, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*, note Zeph. 2:10; Ezek. 25:3,8

2:9 “as I live” This is YHWH taking an oath by the veracity of His own name (YHWH)!

This is a word play on the covenant name for God, YHWH (BDB 217), and the VERB “to live” (BDB 217). He is the ever-living, only-living One. He has no stronger oath than to swear by Himself.

▣ **“the LORD of hosts”** See Special Topic: LORD of Hosts.

Notice it is in a parallel relationship with “the God of Israel.” “God” (*Eloah*, BDB 43, see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C) is the SINGULAR form of *Elohim*. It is used in Zeph. 2:7,9; 3:2,17.

▣ **“Sodom...Gomorrah”** See the account of their destruction in Genesis 19. This area was known for its tar pits and surface petroleum.



NASB, NRSV,
NJB “nettles”
NKJV, TEV,
REV, JPSOA “weeds”

This term (BDB 355) occurs only in three places in the OT.

1. Job 30:7
2. Pro. 24:31
3. here

It denotes some type of weed that grows in uninhabited areas.

The phrase “a place of possession” (BDB 606; NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 971) occurs only here and means “the weeds took possession of the destroyed, abandoned, and uninhabited area of God’s judgment” on Sodom and now on all of Moab and Ammon.

▣ **“a perpetual desolation”** This is the word *‘olam* (BDB 761). It must be interpreted by its immediate context. See Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*). This context shows clearly that this word does not always mean “forever,” because this very land will be inhabited by the remnant of Judah.

2:11 I think Zeph. 2:11 is a separate paragraph expressing a theological summary (i.e., one day all the nations will worship YHWH, cf. Exod. 19:5-6; 1 Kgs. 8:41-43,60; Ps. 22:27-29; 96:7-10; Isa. 2:2-4; 12:4-5; 25:6-9; 42:6-12; 45:22-23; 49:5-6; 51:4-5; 60:1-3; 66:20-23; Micah 4:1-4; Zeph. 3:9-11; Zech. 14:16-17; Mal. 1:11). And what a summary (i.e., YHWH’s universal worship; see Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan). It would be the theological opposite of Ps. 2:1-4.

The gods of the nations are nothing, vanity! Only the God of Israel is the true Creator Deity. See Special Topic: Monotheism and Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (NT).

If this is true, the Bible is true; if it is not, we are left without hope. This is a violent universe. Humanity cannot survive here. If there is no God, there is no morality, no revelation, no salvation, no future, no hope. You must decide! You must live in light of that choice!



NASB “The LORD will be terrifying to them”
NKJV “The LORD *will be* awesome to them”
NRSV “The LORD will be terrible to them”
TEV “The LORD will terrify them”
NJB “The LORD will be fearsome to them”
JPSOA “The Lord will show Himself terrible against them”

REB “The Lord will bring terror on them”

LXX “The Lord will appear against them”

The VERBAL (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) means “fear” and has two connotations.

1. terrify
2. awesome, respect

The question is to whom does “them” refer: the arrogant nations or their idols? If the first option is in the prophet’s mind, then the word refers to the mighty acts of God that bring deliverance (cf. Deut. 10:21; Ps. 65:6; 66:3,5; 145:6; see Special Topic: Fear).

God will destroy the idols but bring the people to Himself (cf. Zeph. 3:9-10)!

▣ **“He will starve all the gods of the earth”** There are two issues here.

1. The rare VERB (BDB 930, KB 1209, *Qal* PERFECT) means “make lean.” It is used only here in *Qal* and in *Niphal* only in Isa. 17:4. This implies all sacrifices of the surrounding pagan nations will be stopped!
2. Does *erets* (“earth”) mean
 - a. the surrounding nations mentioned in Zeph. 2:4-15
 - b. all the earth (cf. Zeph. 2:3b)? See Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:12-15

¹²**“You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.”**

¹³**And He will stretch out His hand against the north**

And destroy Assyria,

And He will make Nineveh a desolation,

Parched like the wilderness.

¹⁴**Flocks will lie down in her midst,**

All beasts which range in herds;

Both the pelican and the hedgehog

Will lodge in the tops of her pillars;

Birds will sing in the window,

Desolation *will be* on the threshold;

For He has laid bare the cedar work.

¹⁵**This is the exultant city**

Which dwells securely,

Who says in her heart,

“I am, and there is no one besides me.”

How she has become a desolation,

A resting place for beasts!

Everyone who passes by her will hiss

And wave his hand *in contempt*.

2:12 It is surprising that Ethiopia (BDB 469 I) is found in only one verse. It was a powerful nation in this period of time. Ethiopia controlled Egypt from 715 B.C. to 663 B.C. Zephaniah may have had family ties with this people group (i.e., *Cushi*, cf. Zeph. 1:1). Possibly it was only mentioned to complete the points of the compass (see note at Zeph. 2:4-15 above).

▣ **“My sword”** This is a theological comment on the sovereignty of God (i.e., one causality, cf. 2 Chr. 20:6; Eccl. 7:14; Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13; 45:7; 54:16; Jer. 18:11; Lam. 3:33-38; Amos 3:6). History is in His Hand!

2:13 “He will stretch out His hand” See note at Zeph. 1:4.

The VERB “stretch” (BDB 639, KB 692) is a *Qal* JUSSIVE, as are the next two VERBS in this verse.

1. “destroy” – BDB 1, KB 2, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. “will make” – BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* JUSSIVE

Maybe this is a prayer for YHWH to judge the surrounding nations, i.e., “Let Him. . .”

▣ **“Nineveh”** See the book of Nahum for the sudden and complete fall of this ANE empire (612 B.C.) by a coalition led by Neo-Babylon. In Zephaniah’s day this would have seemed impossible.

2:14 This animal terminology is often used of

1. total destruction
2. total deportation
3. cursed ground with elements of the demonic present (see Special Topic: The Demonic in the OT)

▣ **“all beasts”** The MT has “beasts of the nations” (NKJV). Although “nations” is given a “B” rating by the UBS Text Project, p. 378; “valley” or “field” makes more sense contextually (i.e., “nation,” נַגַּל [BDB 156] to “valley,” נַחַל [BDB 161]).

▣ **“Both the pelican and the hedgehog”** This exact kind of animal (BDB 866, BDB 891) is uncertain (cf. Isa. 14:13; 34:11), but it seems from this context (i.e., “will lodge in the tops of her pillars”) that both must refer to some type of bird that dwells away from human habitation (i.e., unclean birds of prey, cf. Deut. 14:12-18).

▣ **“the threshold. . .the cedar work”** This imagery was used of the destroyed pagan temples (see Zeph. 1:9; 2:11).

Some translations change “desolation on the threshold” to “the raven croaks on the threshold” (NRSV, NJB) or “raven in the doorway,” following the LXX. The UBS Text Project, p. 379, gives “destruction” a “C” rating (considerable doubt). The questions are

1. Do the last two poetic lines of Zeph. 1:14 go together, referring to a pagan temple?
2. Does line f go with the animal imagery of lines a-e?

2:15 Nineveh thought she was impregnable but she was not!

1. now beasts dwell in her ruins
2. passers-by
 - a. hiss – 1 Kgs. 9:8; Jer. 18:16; 19:8; 25:9; 50:13; Lam. 2:15-16; Ezek. 27:36
 - b. give hand gestures – Job 16:4; 27:23; Ps. 22:7; Isa. 37:22; for similar gestures see Jer. 18:16; Lam. 2:15

▣ **“I am, and there is no one beside me”** This is language typically used to describe YHWH (see Special Topic: Monotheism). It clearly illustrates the arrogance of Assyria.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. To whom is God speaking in Zeph. 2:1 and what does He want them to do?

2. What does it mean “to seek the Lord”?
3. Who is “the remnant of the house of Judah”?
4. What does it mean when YHWH takes an oath by Himself (Zeph. 2:9a)?
5. Why is Zeph. 2:11 so theologically significant?
6. What does the presence of wild animals in a city imply?
7. To what city is Zeph. 2:15 referring?

ZEPHANIAH 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Woe to Jerusalem and the Nations	The Wickedness of Jerusalem	Woe to Jerusalem	Jerusalem's Sin and Redemption	Against the Rulers of Judah
3:1-7 (1-7)	3:1-5 (1-5)	3:1-2 (1-2) 3:3-5 (3-5)	3:1-5	3:1-4 (1-4) 3:5 (5) The Examples of the Nations
	3:6-7 (6-7) A Faithful Remnant	3:6-7 (6-7) The Nations Will Be Converted and a Righteous Remnant Will be Left in Israel	3:6-7	3:6-7 (6-7)
3:8-11 (8-11)	3:8 (8)	3:8 (8)	3:8	3:8 (8) Conversion of the Nations
	3:9-13 (9-13)	3:9-10 (9-10)	3:9-13	3:9-10 (9-10) The Humble Remnant of Israel
A Remnant of Israel		3:11-13 (11-13)		3:11-13 (11-13)
3:12-13 (12-13)	Joy in God's Faithfulness	The Glorious Gospel of Salvation	A Song of Joy	Psalms of Joy in Zion
3:14-20 (14-20)	3:14-15 (14-15) 3:16-17 (16-17) 3:18-20 (18-20)	3:14-20 (14-20)	3:14-20 (14-20)	3:14-15 (14-15) 3:16-18a (16-18a) Return of Exiles
				3:18b-19 (18b-19) 3:20 (20)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

I must admit that my theological bias shows brightly in Zephaniah 2-3. I view all texts through the Great Commission (i.e., Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8). It is difficult to know if these chapters are using universal themes as hyperbole or emphasizing God's universal redemption (see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).

It is quite possible that this context refers only to repentant, restored Israel/Judah. But there are so many OT texts about God's love for all humans that I consciously err on this side of universal hope. I believe in a universal offer but a divine mandate for repentance and faith for inclusion. I do not believe in universalism, but I do believe in a universal offer! Oh, how I love John 1:12; 3:16; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:1; 4:14!

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-7

¹Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
The tyrannical city!
²She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.
She did not trust in the LORD,
She did not draw near to her God.
³Her princes within her are roaring lions,
Her judges are wolves at evening;
They leave nothing for the morning.
⁴Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men;
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.
They have done violence to the law.
⁵The LORD is righteous within her;
He will do no injustice.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He does not fail.
But the unjust knows no shame.
⁶"I have cut off nations;
Their corner towers are in ruins.
I have made their streets desolate,
With no one passing by;
Their cities are laid waste,
Without a man, without an inhabitant.
⁷I said, 'Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.'
So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds."

3:1 "Woe" This INTERJECTION referred to Nineveh in Nah. 3:4 (cf. Zeph. 2:12-13) but here, shockingly, to Jerusalem (specifically stated in Zeph. 3:14). This literary technique of mentioning God's judgment on

other nations first (cf. Amos 1:3-2:16) and then on His own people (cf Amos 3:1-6:13) is clearly seen in Amos

Notice how she is characterized in Zeph. 3:2-5, 5e, 7e; Hab. 1:3-4.

1. rebellious, Zeph. 3:1a – BDB 598, KB 632, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. Jer. 4:17; 5:23; 6:28
2. defiled, Zeph. 3:1a – BDB 146 II, KB 169, *Niphal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. Ezek. 23:30
3. the tyrannical city, Zeph. 3:1b – BDB 413, KB 416, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, literally “oppressing,” cf. Jer. 6:6; 22:17
4. heeded no voice, Zeph. 3:2a – BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Jer. 7:23-28
5. accepted no instruction, Zeph. 3:2b – BDB 542, KB 534, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Jer. 2:30; 5:3; 32:33; 35:13
6. did not trust in the Lord, Zeph. 3:2c – BDB 105, KB 120, *Qal* PERFECT; for the positive usage of the VERB see 2 Kgs. 18:5; 19:10; 1 Chr. 5:20; Isa. 26:3-4; Jer. 17:7
7. did not draw near to her God, Zeph. 3:2d – BDB 897, KB 1132, *Qal* PERFECT, this denotes worship, cf. 1 Sam. 14:36; Isa. 48:16; Ezek. 44:15
8. her leaders (all corrupt)
 - a. her princes are roaring lions (see Special Topic: Lions in the Old Testament)
 - b. her judges are wolves at evening, cf. Ezek. 22:27
 - c. her prophets are reckless and treacherous, cf. Jer. 23:32
 - d. her priests have profaned the temple and done violence to the law, cf. Jer. 2:8; Ezek. 22:26
9. knows no shame, Zeph. 3:5e, cf. Isa. 42:17; Jer. 2:26; 3:25; see Special Topic: Shame
10. eager to corrupt (two *Hiphil* PERFECTS) all their deeds, Zeph. 3:7e – a person’s repeated choices and actions reveal the heart

Oh my, what a terrible list of the characteristics of YHWH’s people!

Notice numbers 4-7 are all NEGATED PERFECTS, which denotes a settled attitude of defiance.



NASB, NKJV,

TEV, NJB “rebellious”

NRSV “soiled”

JPSOA “sullied”

REB “filthy”

LXX, Peshitta totally different text

The MT has “rebellious” (רמה, BDB 598, KB 632, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE). But as you can see, several English translations see it as coming from הארמ, KB 630 I (NET Bible). This second option (NRSV, JPSOA, REB) fits the parallelism best (cf. Nah. 3:6).

The UBS Text Project, p. 380, suggests that “rebellious” (BDB 598) is a play on the word “Moriah” (BDB 599), which is another name for Jerusalem (see Special Topic: Moriah, Salem, Jebus, Jerusalem, Zion).

3:2 “She” The feminine form of the NEGATED VERB reflects the Holy City of YHWH as a fallen, disobedient, and idolatrous woman (cf. Ezekiel 8; 21; 23).

3:3-4 The leadership of God’s people were often condemned by the prophets for their greedy, godless exercise of power (cf. Isa. 56:9-12; Jer. 5:30-31; 6:13-14; 8:8-12; 14:13-18; 22:1-30; 23:1-40; 26:12-15; 28:1-17; 36:30-31; Ezek. 13:1-23; 22:23-31; Micah 3:1-12; 7:3). As the leadership goes, so go the people!

3:5 Notice how the LORD (i.e., YHWH; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D) characterizes His future relationship with Jerusalem.

1. He is righteousness within her.
2. He will do no injustice.
3. Every morning He bring His justice to light.
4. He does not fail.

The “New Jerusalem” will reflect His character (cf. Revelation 21-22; the new abode of the redeemed people of God, Jew and Gentile (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13); the promise of Gen. 3:15 is fulfilled at last). See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

▣ **“But the unjust knows no shame”** This must refer to Zeph. 3:2-4. It seems out of place in 3:5, as does 3:7e.

3:6 Because Jerusalem has “no shame” (Zeph. 3:5), YHWH will bring judgment (3:6) on a universal scale (cf. Zeph. 1:2-18). See Special Topic: Cities (the two cities in Isaiah).

The purpose of this judgment (cf. Zeph. 1:2-6,7-13,14-18) is a universal redemption brought about by Israel’s Judean Messiah (Zeph. 3:7d).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:8-11

**⁸“Therefore wait for Me,” declares the LORD
 “For the day when I rise up as a witness.
 Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,
 To assemble kingdoms,
 To pour out on them My indignation,
 All My burning anger;
 For all the earth will be devoured
 By the fire of My zeal.
⁹For then I will give to the peoples purified lips,
 That all of them may call on the name of the LORD
 To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.
¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
 My worshipers, My dispersed ones,
 Will bring My offerings.
¹¹In that day you will feel no shame
 Because of all your deeds
 By which you have rebelled against Me;
 For then I will remove from your midst
 Your proud, exulting ones,
 And you will never again be haughty
 On My holy mountain.”**

3:7 His judgment is for a redemptive purpose (Zeph. 3:7).

1. surely you (FEMININE, i.e., Jerusalem) will revere Me, cf. Zeph. 3:9-10 (opposite of 3:2)
2. surely you (FEMININE, i.e., Jerusalem) will accept instruction (opposite of 3:2)
3. surely you (FEMININE) will be secure
4. surely His purposes in “her” (Jerusalem) will be fulfilled

There is coming a new day of fellowship with God. His people, all people, will return to Him. This was the purpose/goal of creation! See Special Topic: Why Do OT Covenant Promises Seem so Different from NT Covenant Promises?

3:8 It is interesting to note that Zeph. 3:8 is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible that contains all twenty-two Hebrew consonants. (Now you are ready for Bible trivia!)

▣ **“You”** This is MASCULINE, possibly the faithful survivors of Zeph. 2:10 (i.e., “remnant”; see Special Topic: The Remnant, Three Senses).

▣ **“wait for Me”** This is a *Piel* IMPERATIVE (BDB 314, KB 313, cf. Hab. 2:3). It is an idiom for trusting (i.e., “endure, expect, hope,” NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 129-130) God to act in an appropriate way at an appropriate time. God will set everything right in His own time and in His own way. His ways are not always clear to fallen humans (cf. Isa. 55:9-11).

“Waiting” for God is an act of faith in His word (cf. Isa. 8:17; 25:9; 30:18; 64:4; Hab. 2:3).

The NASB Study Bible footnote sees this as a sarcastic statement, affirming Judah’s unwillingness to repent, p. 1324 (also *Tyndale OT Commentaries*, p. 114).

▣ **“the day”** See Special Topic: That Day and Special Topic: The Day of the Lord (NT).



NASB (1970) “when I rise up to the prey” (different from my text)

NKJV, NET “I rise up for plunder”

NASB (1995),

NRSV, LXX,

Peshitta “when I rise as a witness”

TEV “when I rise to accuse the nations”

NJB, JPSOA “when I rise as accuser”

REB “when I stand up to accuse you”

The MT has **וְעַד** (BDB 729), which can be pointed (i.e., vowel points) as

1. plunder
2. witness
3. forever (PREPOSITION plus root)

The UBS Text Project, p. 382, gives option 1 a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

▣ **“All My burning anger. . .the fire of My zeal”** See Special Topic: Fire.

▣ **“My decision is to gather nations”** Notice the series of INFINITIVE CONSTRUCTS

1. to the prey – the JPSOA emends this to “when I arise as an accuser”
2. to gather, cf. Ezek. 22:19,20
3. to assemble
4. to pour out

All speak of YHWH’s judgment at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way.

▣ Notice the number of PRONOUNS in English denoting YHWH’s personal action.

1. wait for Me
2. I rise up
3. My decision
4. My indignation

5. My burning anger
6. My zeal (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 937-939)

This Divine activity has a redemptive purpose (cf. Zeph. 3:9; 2:11; see Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan).

3:9-10 These verses speak of a universal worship of YHWH (while Zeph. 3:11-13 refers to His covenant people, see Contextual Insights).

He gives to the peoples purified lips, i.e., examples

1. Egypt – Isa. 19:18
2. “those far away” – Isa. 57:19
3. “among all the wise men of the nations” – Jer. 10:6-7
4. “among the nations” – Mal. 1:11

If YHWH is the one, true, creator, then He must also be the one, true redeemer! A universal God demands universal worship. Israel was a means to an end (i.e., the gospel is for all humans, Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8)! See Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan.

Notice it is God who must “give” (lit. “change”). This is “the new covenant” of Jer. 31:31-34 (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38) based on God's actions and not human performance (i.e., Mosaic Covenant, cf. Leviticus 26: Deuteronomy 28-30). But remember, He acts on our behalf so that we can be holy (cf. Matt. 5:48; see Special Topic: Sanctification).

3:9

NASB	“I will give”
NKJV	“I will restore”
NRSV, TEV,	
LXX	“I will change”
NJB	“I will purge”
JPSOA	“I will make”
REB, Peshitta	“I will restore”
NET	“I will enable”

The MT has the VERB (BDB 245, KB 253, *Qal* IMPERFECT), which basically means “to turn” or “to overturn.” KB suggests “restore.” Notice the two theological questions.

1. YHWH takes the initiative (FIRST PERSON SINGULAR); this is in line with Jer. 31:31-34 (i.e., the new covenant, cf. Ezek. 36:22-36), but is there a mandated human response?
2. Does YHWH “purge” pagan speech (i.e., the nations) or “restore” (i.e., His covenant people); see my bias at Contextual Insights.

▣ “all of them may call on the name of the LORD” See Special Topic: Call on the Name (Isa. 12:4), Special Topic: “The Name” of YHWH (OT), and Special Topic: The Name of the Lord (NT).

This terminology implies an altar, a sacrifice, and the presence of the Lord. This is not just the speaking of a name (cf. Matt. 7:21-23) but an act of worship from the heart (cf. Deut. 10:16).

▣ “To serve Him shoulder to shoulder” This is a Hebrew idiom for unity (i.e., one burden, two carriers).

3:10 Some see this as referring only to dispersed, exiled Israel and Judah (cf. Zeph. 3:11-13) but the context of universal judgment (i.e., Zeph. 1:2-3,18; 2:3b,11) implies a universal opportunity for inclusion (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 12:4-5; 25:6-9; 42:6-12; 45:22-23; 49:5-6; 51:4-5; 56:6-8; 60:1-3; 66:23; Mic. 4:1-4; Mal. 1:11).

There are three texts in Isaiah that speak specifically of the conversion of Ethiopia/Egypt – Isa. 18:7; 19:18-25; 45:14.

3:10b

NASB “My worshipers, My dispersed ones”

NKJV “My worshipers, The daughter of My dispersed ones”

NRSV “my supplicants, my scattered ones”

TEV “my scattered people”

NJB “My suppliants”

The JPSOA translates this line as no standard English translation.

“Shall bring offerings to Me in Fair Puzai”

The Jewish Study Bible offers three suggestions (p. 1241).

1. “Fair scattered (i.e., Israel in exile), shall bring my offerings”
2. “Fair Puzai (i.e., a faraway nation) shall bring my offering” (so too, AB, pp. 126, 135)
3. “Fair scattered (i.e., Israel in exile), they (i.e., the nations) shall bring as my offering” (cf. Isa. 66:20)

3:11 “you” This is FEMININE SINGULAR and refers to Jerusalem (cf. Zeph. 3:2).

▣ YHWH will remove the wicked people from His people.

1. the ones who rebel
2. the proud ones
3. the exulting ones
4. the haughty ones (see NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 797-799)

It is hard for modern western people to acknowledge that sin and rebellion against God results in death and separation. The right and dignity of the individual in western thought has eclipsed the biblical view of God’s righteous judgment. Some humans are going to die!

A helpful book on this is John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God*.

▣ **“from your midst”** There is a play on this word (BDB 899) in Zephaniah 3.

1. Zeph. 3:1 – Judah’s corrupt leaders are in her midst
2. Zeph. 3:5 – YHWH is in her midst
3. Zeph. 3:11 – YHWH removes “the proud, exulting, haughty ones” from their midst
4. Zeph. 3:12 – YHWH leaves a humble lowly people in His midst
5. Zeph. 3:15 – YHWH, the King of Israel, is in her midst!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:12-13

¹²“But I will leave among you

A humble and lowly people,

And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD

¹³The remnant of Israel will do no wrong

And tell no lies,

Nor will a deceitful tongue

Be found in their mouths;

For they will feed and lie down

With no one to make them tremble.”

3:12-13 The people of YHWH will be characterized as

1. humble (in a spiritual sense, cf. Zeph. 2:3)
2. lowly
3. those who take refuge in the name of the Lord, see Special Topic: Refuge (OT)

4. do no wrong
5. tell no lies, cf. Zech. 8:3,16
6. have no deceitful tongue

God is their shepherd (i.e., Zeph. 3:13e,f). This is the result of the repentance of Zeph. 2:3. See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT. They are now secure in their land (i.e., “no one to make them tremble or be afraid,” cf. Jer. 30:10; 46:27; Ezek. 34:28; 39:26; Mic. 4:4)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:14-20

- ¹⁴**Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!**
Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
- ¹⁵**The LORD has taken away *His* judgments against you,**
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD is in your midst;
You will fear disaster no more.
- ¹⁶**In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:**
“Do not be afraid, O Zion;
Do not let your hands fall limp.
- ¹⁷**The LORD your God is in your midst,**
A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.
- ¹⁸**I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts—**
They came from you, O Zion;
***The reproach of exile* is a burden on them.**
- ¹⁹**Behold, I am going to deal at that time**
With all your oppressors,
I will save the lame
And gather the outcast,
And I will turn their shame into praise and renown
In all the earth.
- ²⁰**At that time I will bring you in,**
Even at the time when I gather you together;
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,
When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,”
Says the LORD

3:14 There is a series of IMPERATIVES.

1. shout for joy – BDB 943, KB 1247, *Qal*
2. shout *in triumph* – BDB 929, KB 1206, *Hiphil*
3. rejoice – BDB 970, KB 1333, *Qal*
4. exult with all your heart – BDB 759, KB 831, *Qal*

Notice “Zion,” “Israel” and “daughter of Jerusalem” are parallel. See Special Topic: Zion and Special Topic: Israel (the name).

The strophe, Zeph. 3:14-20, is a psalm of joy. It is a contrast to the universal judgment of the rest of the book. The judgment of “that day” will bring about “a new day” (cf. Zeph. 3:9-10)!

3:15 The first two VERBS, “taken away” and “cleared away” are both FIRST PERSON PERFECTS. They refer to future actions of YHWH that have not yet happened, but the assurance that they will caused the author to state them as completed acts (i.e., PROPHETIC PERFECT; note Isa. 55:9-11).

▣ **“The King of Israel, the LORD”** YHWH is the true King of His covenant people; the earthly king was merely His representative (cf. 1 Sam. 8:5-7). The rabbis call Him “the King of the Universe”!

Notice the two names for God that appear in Zeph. 3:17.

1. The LORD (YHWH) your God (*Elohim*) – see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and D.
2. A victorious warrior – this is Holy War terminology for YHWH as the Divine Warrior, cf. Exod. 15:3; Deut. 1:30; Jos. 5:13-15; 1 Chr. 20:29; Ps. 24:8; Isa. 42:13; 59:17. The title “Lord of Hosts” reflects this same imagery; see Special Topic: LORD of Hosts.

▣ **“is in your midst”** This is the greatest promise (see note at Zeph. 3:11)! YHWH was with Moses. YHWH was in the midst of Israel. This Divine-human fellowship is the purpose of creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 3:8). Humans were created for fellowship. Sin has separated us from our Creator (see Special Topic: The Fall). God’s promises in Isaiah 7; 9; and 11 is that One is coming Who is “Emmanuel” (i.e., God with us).

The Bible starts with God and mankind in fellowship in a garden (i.e., Genesis 1-2) and the Bible ends with God and mankind in fellowship in a garden (Revelation 21-22).

His people will not need an earthly king because the Divine King is with them! One wonders how this relates to 1 Cor. 15:25-28.

3:16 This verse has two IMPERFECTS that function as JUSSIVES.

1. do not be afraid – BDB 431, KB 432; see Special Topic: Fear
2. do not let our hands fall limp – BDB 951, KB 1276

The lack of “fear” shows their faith in YHWH’s word and presence.

3:17 This verse repeats the great promise of Zeph. 3:15 (“in your midst”; see full note at Zeph. 3:11) and expresses God’s joy (cf. Isa. 65:19) at the renewal of fellowship with His human creation.

1. He will exult over you with joy (cf. Deut. 30:9; Isa. 62:5; 65:19; Jer. 32:41).
2. He will renew you in His love (following the LXX, Peshitta; the MT has “be silent”; the difference is the Hebrew “r” and “d” confusion).
3. He will rejoice over you with shout of joy

See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“A victorious warrior”** See note at Zeph. 3:15.

3:18-20 This verse is uncertain in Hebrew (see JPSOA’s footnote) but seems to address the exiled people of God who, one day, will be able to attend the feast days (cf. Exodus 23; Leviticus 23) in Jerusalem, in the temple again!

These verses seem to address restored, repentant Israel/Judah. The Gentiles (cf. Zeph. 3:20) will recognize YHWH as Israel’s God. They will praise Him (cf. Jer. 3:17,19; 4:2; 16:19; 33:9). He has a universal redemptive purpose in her! See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Who is “the rebellious” city of Zeph. 3:1?
2. List the reasons why she is called rebellious.
3. How is Zeph. 3:7 so different from 3:1-6?
4. What does the VERB “wait” mean?
5. For what two purposes will YHWH gather the nations?
6. How is Zeph. 3:8 like Zephaniah, chapter 1?
7. Why is Zeph. 3:9-10 so theologically significant?
8. Does Zeph. 3:15 speak of a Messianic reign (i.e., 1,000 years) or an eternal reign (cf. Dan. 7:13)?

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENTATIONS

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. In Hebrew (MT) the title is the first word of the book which is “Ah How” (*‘echah*, cf. 1:1, 2:1, 4:1). This was a common term used at funerals.
- B. In the Septuagint (LXX) it was titled “wailings” from the Greek root “to cry aloud.”
- C. The Talmud called it “Lamentations.”
- D. The Vulgate entitled it, “It comprises the lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet.”

II. CANONIZATION

- A. It is in the specialized list of books from the Writings section of the Hebrew canon called the *Megilloth* (five scrolls). Each one was read at an annual feast day.
 - 1. Song of Songs – Passover
 - 2. Ruth – Pentecost
 - 3. Ecclesiastes – Booth of Tabernacles
 - 4. Esther – Purim
 - 5. Lamentations – fall of Jerusalem and destruction of Solomon’s Temple
- B. The Writings section of the Hebrew canon places Song of Songs after Psalms, Proverbs, and Job and before Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. The English Bible follows the order of the LXX.
- C. Lamentations is read on the 9th day of *Ab* (mid July) in commemoration of the destruction of Solomon’s Temple by the army of Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 B.C. In later Judaism it also commemorated the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman general, Titus, in A.D. 70.

III. GENRE

- A. Each of the five chapters is a separate lament/funeral dirge. These types of poems are common in the Ancient Near East, going back to Sumer, and is a lament over the fall of Ur. For Israel they express sorrow over current conditions but hope for the future.
- B. The first four poems are acrostics (see NJB). Each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 characters). This may have been a symbolic way of expressing extreme grief.
- C. Hebrew poetry is based on thought parallelism, not rhyme (i.e., sound parallelism).
 - 1. The poetic line, not the words, is the literary key.
 - 2. The parallelism is usually two or three lines.
 - a. synonymous parallelism — the lines express the same thought in different words
 - (1) Ps. 3:1; 8:40; 83:14; 103:3
 - (2) Pro. 20:1
 - (3) Lam. 1:2, 3
 - (4) Isa. 1:3

- (5) Amos 5:24
 - b. antithetical parallelism — the lines express the opposite thoughts by the use of contrast or stating the positive and negative of an issue
 - (1) Ps. 1:6; 90:6
 - (2) Pro. 1:29; 10:1, 12; 15:1; 19:4
 - c. synthetic parallelism — the lines develop the thought
 - (1) Ps. 1:1-2; 19:7-9
 - (2) Lam. 1:4
- See Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. The book itself gives no author. It is obvious that it was written by an eyewitness to the siege and fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
- B. *Baba Bathra* 15a (Talmud) and the Targums of Jer. 1:1 ascribe authorship to Jeremiah.
- C. The Septuagint prefaces the book with, “and it came to pass after Israel had gone into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping and composed this lament over Jerusalem and said. . .” It placed the book after Jeremiah.
- D. The Vulgate prefaces the book with, “It comprises the lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet.”
- E. The Peshitta (a 5th century A.D. Syriac translation) entitled the book, “The Book of Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet.”
- F. Evidences of authorship:
 - 1. for Jeremiah:
 - a. Jeremiah is thought to have been the author because of 2 Chr. 35:25. But notice this refers to a lament for Josiah, not Jerusalem.
 - b. Many passages in Jeremiah speak of his grieving over the situation of his day, cf. Jer. 7:29; 8:21; 9:1,10,20 (cf. Lam. 3:48-51).
 - c. There is a similarity of vocabulary between Jeremiah and Lamentations.
 - d. The “I” of Lam. 3:1 may refer to Jeremiah.
 - e. The author was obviously an eyewitness of the fall of Jerusalem.
 - 2. against Jeremiah:
 - a. Jeremiah says God sent Babylon to judge but Lam. 3:59-66 seems different.
 - b. Jeremiah would not have said that prophetic messages have ceased, Lam. 2:9c.
 - c. Jeremiah would not have advocated help from Egypt, Lam. 4:17.
 - d. Jeremiah would not hope in King Zedekiah, Lam. 4:20.
 - e. These acrostic poems are highly structured which is very different from Jeremiah’s spontaneous style.
 - f. The structured style of each of the 5 poems is also different. Some have long lines, some short. The number of lines that begin with the same letter differs. The metaphors change from poem to poem. All this points toward more than one author.

V./VI. DATE/HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. The historical situation is the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army in 586 B.C.
- B. For the historical setting read 2 Kings 25:8-12 and Jeremiah 52.
- C. Some see this book as relating to Jews who remained in Judah and annually remembered the fall of Jerusalem, Jer. 41:4-5.

VII. LITERARY UNITS

- A. Jerusalem personified, wife to slave, chapter 1.
- B. Privilege brings responsibility, YHWH's covenant wrath, chapter 2.
- C. Grief individualized, chapter 3.
- D. Privilege brings responsibility, the covenant people's sin, chapter 4.
- E. Trust and hope in the Covenant God, chapter 5.

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. These poems express the grief and sense of loss that the people of God felt because of:
 - 1. the loss of Jerusalem
 - 2. the destruction of the Temple
 - 3. YHWH's dissolving of the Mosaic Covenant. These were felt so sharply because of God's promises in:
 - (a) 2 Sam. 7:10-16
 - (b) Isa. 37:30-35
- B. These poems emphasize:
 - 1. God's sovereignty
 - 2. God's justice
 - 3. God's judgment
 - 4. God's promises of restoration
- C. Judah is destroyed because she broke the Mosaic Covenant (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-28). The defeat by Babylon is not the weakness of YHWH, but because of the sin of His people. YHWH will bring victory out of His power in a future time (Lam. 3:22-23, 25).
- D. God's promises are both conditional and unconditional. The concept of covenant demands an appropriate response. See Special Topic: Covenant.

LAMENTATIONS 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Sorrows of Zion	Jerusalem In Affliction	A Lament Over Zion	The Sorrows of Jerusalem	First Lamentation
1:1-22 (1-22)	1:1-11 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11)	1:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11)	1:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11)	1:1 <i>Aleph</i> 1:2 <i>Bet</i> 1:3 <i>Gimel</i> 1:4 <i>Dalet</i> 1:5 <i>He</i> 1:6 <i>Waw</i> 1:7 <i>Zain</i> 1:8 <i>Het</i> 1:9 <i>Tet</i> 1:10 <i>Yod</i> 1:11 <i>Kaph</i>
	1:12-17 (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	(12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	(12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	1:12 <i>Lamed</i> 1:13 <i>Mem</i> 1:14 <i>Nun</i> 1:15 <i>Samek</i> 1:16 <i>Ain</i> 1:17 <i>Pe</i>
	1:18-22 (18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	(18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	(18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	1:18 <i>Zade</i> 1:19 <i>Qoph</i> 1:20 <i>Resh</i> 1:21 <i>Shin</i> 1:22 <i>Taw</i>

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. It is hard for us to even imagine the pain and confusion that the descendants of Abraham felt at the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile of the Judean king. What about God's promise of
 1. the covenant to Abraham, Genesis 12; 15; 22
 2. Judah's reign, Gen. 49:10
 3. Moses' blessing, Deut. 33:26-29
 4. David's descendant on the throne, 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17
 They had forgotten the conditional nature of God's covenant promises/blessing (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). The "two ways" of Deut. 30:1,15,19; Psalm 1 are both a warning and a call to obedience.
- B. This chapter is a lament in 3/2 timing (i.e., funeral dirge).
- C. Notice how God's people move
 1. from a numerous people, great among the nations, Lam. 1:1
 2. to a widow and forced laborer, Lam. 1:1

- D. Notice how her opponents are characterized.
1. her lovers, Lam. 1:2,19 (i.e., political alliances)
 2. her friends, Lam. 1:2
 3. her enemies, Lam. 1:2,5,10,16,21
 4. her pursuers, Lam 1:3,6
 5. her masters, Lam. 1:5
 6. the adversary, Lam. 1:5,7 (twice), 17
- E. The key theological affirmation is repeated often (cf. Lam. 1:5,8,12,13-15,17d,18,21). The fall of Jerusalem (and the Temple) and the exile of her people were
1. done by her God (Lam. 1:5,12-15)
 2. because of her sin (cf. Jer. 3:22; Ezek. 39:23)
- All of this was not because of YHWH's weakness or oath-breaking, but His people's violation of His covenant (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30). See Special Topic: Covenant.
- F. But there is hope in the character of YHWH. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT).
- G. The references to
1. lovers, Lam. 1:2
 2. nakedness, Lam. 1:8
 3. uncleanness of her skirts, Lam. 1:8
- are all imagery of fertility worship. Israel had become idolatrous. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-22

¹How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!

²She weeps bitterly in the night
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She has none to comfort her
Among all her lovers.
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.

³Judah has gone into exile under affliction
And under harsh servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
But she has found no rest;
All her pursuers have overtaken her
In the midst of distress.

⁴The roads of Zion are in mourning
Because no one comes to the appointed feasts.
All her gates are desolate;
Her priests are groaning,
Her virgins are afflicted,
And she herself is bitter.

⁵Her adversaries have become her masters,
Her enemies prosper;
For the LORD has caused her grief
Because of the multitude of her transgressions;
Her little ones have gone away
As captives before the adversary.

⁶All her majesty
Has departed from the daughter of Zion;
Her princes have become like deer
That have found no pasture;
And they have fled without strength
Before the pursuer.

⁷In the days of her affliction and homelessness
Jerusalem remembers all her precious things
That were from the days of old,
When her people fell into the hand of the adversary
And no one helped her.
The adversaries saw her,
They mocked at her ruin.

⁸Jerusalem sinned greatly,
Therefore she has become an unclean thing.
All who honored her despise her
Because they have seen her nakedness;
Even she herself groans and turns away.

⁹Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
She did not consider her future.
Therefore she has fallen astonishingly;
She has no comforter.
“See, O LORD, my affliction,
For the enemy has magnified himself!”

¹⁰The adversary has stretched out his hand
Over all her precious things,
For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
The ones whom You commanded
That they should not enter into Your congregation.

¹¹All her people groan seeking bread;

**They have given their precious things for food
To restore their lives themselves.
See, O LORD, and look,
For I am despised.”**

**¹²“Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?
Look and see if there is any pain like my pain
Which was severely dealt out to me,
Which the LORD inflicted on the day of His fierce anger.**

**¹³From on high He sent fire into my bones,
And it prevailed *over them*.
He has spread a net for my feet;
He has turned me back;
He has made me desolate,
Faint all day long.**

**¹⁴The yoke of my transgressions is bound;
By His hand they are knit together.
They have come upon my neck;
He has made my strength fail.
The LORD has given me into the hands
Of *those against whom* I am not able to stand.**

**¹⁵The LORD has rejected all my strong men
In my midst;
He has called an appointed time against me
To crush my young men;
The Lord has trodden *as in* a wine press
The virgin daughter of Judah.**

**¹⁶For these things I weep;
My eyes run down with water;
Because far from me is a comforter,
One who restores my soul.
My children are desolate
Because the enemy has prevailed.**

**¹⁷Zion stretches out her hands;
There is no one to comfort her;
The LORD has commanded concerning Jacob
That the ones round about him should be his adversaries;
Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them.**

**¹⁸The LORD is righteous;
For I have rebelled against His command;
Hear now, all peoples,
And behold my pain;
My virgins and my young men**

Have gone into captivity.

¹⁹I called to my lovers, *but* they deceived me;
My priests and my elders perished in the city
While they sought food to restore their strength themselves.

²⁰See, O LORD, for I am in distress;
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is overturned within me,
For I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword slays;
In the house it is like death.

²¹They have heard that I groan;
There is no one to comfort me;
All my enemies have heard of my calamity;
They are glad that You have done *it*.
Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed,
That they may become like me.

²²Let all their wickedness come before You;
And deal with them as You have dealt with me
For all my transgressions;
For my groans are many and my heart is faint.”

1:1 Notice the contrast of Jerusalem before and after.

1. before (cf. Lam 1:7)
 - a. full of people (Abrahamic promise, Gen. 15:5)
 - b. great among the nations
 - c. princes among the provinces
2. after (cf. Lam 1:7)
 - a. a widow
 - b. forced laborer (cf. Isa. 31:8)

▣ **“How”** This (BDB 32) ADVERB often introduces laments, cf. Lam. 2:1; 4:1 (twice); also note Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:21; 48:17. A slightly different spelling is used in 2 Sam. 1:19; Jer. 2:21; 9:19.

▣ **“full of people”** This could refer to

1. those who lived in the city year round
2. those who came for feast days (Lam. 1:4)
3. those from the surrounding villages who fled to the walled Jerusalem in time of invasion

1:2 “She weeps bitterly” This is an intense grammatical form (i.e., INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 113, KB 129). The rabbis assert this is because of the loss of both the Temple and Jerusalem (cf. Lam. 2:11,18; Jer. 9:1,18; 14:17).

▣ **“She has none to comfort her”** This was YHWH’s task but now no one does it (cf. Lam. 1:2,9, 16,17,21).

▣ **“all her lovers”** This refers to political alliances (some paid for), cf. Jer. 3:1,20; 22:20-23; 30:14; Ezek. 16:28-29,37-41; 23:5-19; Hos. 8:9-10. Political treaties cannot save a faithless nation of privileged knowledge and position. Judah’s sins are all the more heinous because of her high standing (i.e., descendant of Abraham and David, cf. Rom. 9:2).

1:3 “Judah has gone into exile” This is referring to Nebuchadnezzar II’s siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

He had conquered Judah earlier and deported many.

1. elite leaders and families in 605 B.C. (i.e., Daniel)
2. large number exiled in 597 B.C. (i.e., Ezekiel)
3. major deportation at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
4. everyone who could be found after the murder of the Babylonian appointed governor, Gedaliah, in 582 B.C.

▣ **“she has found no rest”** Often “rest” (BDB 629) is an idiom for dwelling safely in one’s own land (cf. Deut. 28:65; see NT book of Hebrews, chapters 3-4).

▣ **“distress”** This is literally “narrow places,” which is a Hebrew idiom for distress (i.e., Gen. 42:21; Deut. 4:30; 1 Sam. 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9; 1 Kgs. 1:29; 2 Chr. 15:4; Job 15:24; 38:23; Ps. 66:14; 107:6,13,19,28; 119:143; Isa. 8:22; 25:4). The opposite Hebrew idiom for joy and freedom is “a wide place” (i.e., Ps. 4:1; 18:19; 31:8; 118:5).

1:4 “Zion” This name for one of the hills within the walls of Jerusalem became the collective title (i.e., Isa. 1:27; Jer. 3:14; Amos 6:1). See Special Topic: Zion.

For “daughter of Zion” see Lam. 1:6; 2 Kgs. 19:21.

▣ **“her gates”** This represented

1. a place of governance
2. a place of justice
3. a place of commerce
4. a place denoting security

▣ **“groaning”** This root (BDB 58) is found five times in this chapter (i.e., Lam. 1:4,8,11,21,22), but nowhere else in Lamentations. This might be an evidence of several poems by different eyewitness authors, combined later to form Lamentations.

▣ **“Her virgins”** This could refer to

1. cultic dancers (TEV, cf. Jdgs. 21:19-21; Jer. 31:4,13; Ps. 68:25)
2. normal life of the city (i.e., marriages). All aspects of the normal life:
 - a. justice
 - b. worship
 - c. commercewere affected.

▣

NASB, NKJV **“afflicted”**

NRSV **“grieve”**

NJB **“grief-stricken”**

RSV, LXX **“dragged away”**

JPSOA “unhappy”
REB “groan”
Peshitta “humbled (raped)”

This is a *Niphal* PARTICIPLE (BDB 387, KB 385). The *Hiphil* is used in Lam. 1:12; 3:32 and is translated “inflicted,” “caused grief.” The LXX slightly changed the Hebrew word to “dragged away” (RSV). See UBS Text Project, vol. 4, p. 333. It gives “afflicted” a “B” rating (some doubt).

1:5 See full note at Contextual Insights, E.

▣ **“her masters”** This is literally “head” (BDB 910; see Special Topic: Head). Here it is being used in Hebrew idiomatic language. Israel (i.e., God’s people) was to be the “head,” but now they are the tail (cf. Deut. 28:13,44) because of their rebellion and covenant faithlessness.

1:6 This verse’s key VERB is “has departed” (BDB 422, KB 425, *Qal* IMPERFECT with *waw*). Judah’s princes have deserted her and fled for the safety of the country.

Judah’s population has been exiled, her allies failed to show up, her worship leaders are in despair, her civil leaders have fled, her military is useless, her Temple is looted, and her children sold into slavery (or even eaten for food during the siege, Lam. 1:11)!

▣ **“the daughter of Zion”** This is collective imagery (also used in Jeremiah, cf. 2 Kgs. 19:21; Isa. 1:8; 16:1; 52:2; 62:11; Jer. 6:2,23; Lam. 2:13). Also note Lam. 1:5, “the virgin daughter of Judah.”

1:7 “homelessness” The MT has the PLURAL, which denotes a Hebrew way of showing intensity (PLURAL OF MAJESTY or INTENSITY).

▣
NASB “ruin”
NKJV, NRSV,
TEV, NJB,
JPSOA “downfall”

Vulgate “her sabbaths”
LXX “being settled”

This NOUN (BDB 992) occurs only here. It is similar to “sabbath” (BDB 992); this is where the Vulgate gets its translation. BDB lists its meaning as “cessation” or “annihilation.” The LXX misread the Hebrew VERB (“lease” to “dwell,” BDB 442).

1:8 See note at Lam. 1:2d.

▣
NASB, NJB “an unclean thing”
NKJV “vile”
NRSV, JPSOA “mockery”
REB “a filthy rag”

This term (BDB 622, KB 696) is found only here. KB suggests “a shaking of the head,” as a mocking gesture (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 53, #6). This would be a good parallel to “despise,” which can also denote the shaking of the head (i.e., “mockery”). It is not the same as a similar root (BDB 622) in Lam. 1:17, “an unclean thing.”

▣ **“despise”** This Hebrew root (BDB 272, KB 272) can mean

1. make light of (see usage at Lam. 1:11)
2. shake (idiom for “shake the head in contempt,” cf. Jer. 18:16)

▣ **“because they have seen her nakedness”** The NOUN “nakedness” (BDB 788) can refer to

1. exposed prisoners marched into Assyrian exile (cf. Isa. 20:4; also possibly Jer. 13:22,26; Nah. 3:5)
2. shame of participation in fertility worship (i.e., idolatry, cf. Lam. 1:8-9; Ezek. 22:4,9-11; 23:29)

▣ **“turns away”** This is an idiom for shame (cf. Isa. 42:17) related to idolatry (cf. Ps. 97:7; Isa. 1:29; 44:9,11; 45:16).

1:9 “uncleanness was in her skirts” This refers to ceremonial pollution by menstrual flow (cf. Lev. 15:25,26,30; 18:19; Ezek. 36:17). Any bodily fluid which came out of the body made one ceremonially unclean.

▣ **“fallen astonishingly”** As the beginning of Israel was a miracle of God (i.e., Exodus), so too, the fall of Judah was an act of God!

The word “astonishingly” (BDB 810) is PLURAL, denoting intensity. The people of God have fallen and have no Divine comforter!

▣ **“See, O LORD”** This IMPERATIVE marks a prayer of petition (cf. Lam. 1:11).

“LORD” is the covenant name for Israel’s God. See letter D in Special Topic: Names for Deity.

1:10a “has stretched out his hand” See Special Topic: Hand.

1:10b “all her precious things” This refers to the treasures of the Temple (i.e., building ornaments, furniture, valuable stored items, cf. 2 Kgs. 25:13-17; 2 Chr. 36:10,19).

The same root (BDB 326) is used in Lam. 1:11 (BDB 327) for a high price of bread during a siege and breach.

▣ The last two lines have been attributed to Deut. 23:3, but this text addresses only Ammonites and Moabites. It is best to see it as an allusion to a well known truth (or proverb) and not a specific quote.

1:11 “They have given their precious things for food” Since the Babylonian invaders would have stolen all the valuables as booty, what does “precious things” refer to? Because of

1. the prophecy of Deut. 28:52-57
2. the references to eating their children in Lam. 2:20; 4:10
3. the historical texts of 2 Kgs. 6:28-29

It is possible it refers to cannibalism or the selling of the children into slavery, which at least gave them a chance for life (cf. Lam. 2:4; Hos. 9:16).

▣ **“See, O LORD, and look”** The personified Jerusalem calls out to YHWH in prayer to come to her rescue.

1. Lam. 1:9, “see” – BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. Lam. 1:11, “see. . .look” – BDB 906, KB 661, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
3. Lam. 1:12, “look. . .see” – BDB 613, KB 661, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
– BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

The prayer is for YHWH to take notice but the problem is not His lack of attention, rather His close attention to Judah's rebellion! Now Jerusalem asks for mercy amidst YHWH's predicted judgment (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; 30:1,19).



NASB, NJB **“For I am despised”**
NKJV **“For I am scorned”**
NRSV **“how worthless I have become”**
TEV **“see me in my misery”**
REB **“how cheap I am accounted”**
JPSOA **“How abject I have become”**
LXX **“that I have become one dishonored”**

The VERB (BDB 272, KB 272, *Qal* PARTICIPLE) can be understood in two ways.

1. to be worthless or insignificant
2. JPSOA's footnote, “or (ironically) what a glutton”; cf. Deut. 21:20; 23:20-21. Note the NRSV and REB translations.

1:12 Personified Jerusalem seeks consolation from those who passed by and saw her humiliated condition (imaginative imagery). YHWH gives no sympathy so she seeks it elsewhere, but there is none to comfort.

1. no one to help, Lam. 1:7,19
2. no one to comfort, Lam. 1:9,16,17,21 (see Special Topic: Comfort)

▣ **“Which the LORD inflicted”** This follows Lam. 1:8-9! YHWH is no longer Israel's defender; He is her punisher! Babylon is YHWH's chosen instrument (cf. Ezek. 12:13; 17:20; 19:1-14; 21:1-27).

▣ **“the day of His fierce anger”** Note Isa. 13:13; Joel 2:1; Amos 5:18; Obad. 15. See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language, Special Topic: The Day of the Lord (NT), and Special Topic: Judgment in the NT.

1:13-15 This is a personification of corporate Israel or Jerusalem, as in Lam. 1:1 and 11-22.

1:13 “fire” See Special Topic: Fire. YHWH's judgments:

1. fire
2. net (for Moab in Jer. 48:43-44; for Babylon in Jer. 50:34; for Egypt in Ezek. 32:3; and here for Judah, cf. Ezek. 12:13; 17:20)
3. turned back
4. sick/stunned

▣ **“bones”** This was an idiom for strength and health (cf. Lam. 4:7). Here it denotes weakness of spirit and body.

1:14 This verse is uncertain in the MT.



NASB, NKJV,
 NRSV, JPSOA **“the yoke of my transgression is bound”**
NJB, LXX **“He has watched out for my offences”**

The MT is reflected in the NASB. The VERB (BDB 974, KB 1350, *Niphal* PERFECT) is found only here. BDB suggests a slight emendation, ψ for Ψ , which follows the LXX, “watch is kept upon” (BDB 1052). Robert Gordis’ commentary follows this emendation (p. 130).

YHWH made note of (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1270 for the VERB) Judah/Jerusalem’s rebellions and wove them together (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1271 for BDB 974) to make them a yoke placed on Jerusalem’s neck (see imagery in Jer. 27:2,8,11,12).

▣ **“fail”** This VERB (BDB 505, KB 502, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is literally “to stumble.” In Hebrew thought a straight, level, unobstructed road/way was used as an idiom of health and prosperity. To stumble, fall, or slip was used of distress, failure, destruction.

The idea of stumbling steps parallels the stepping into a net/trap of Lam. 1:13.

1:15 “The Lord” This is the only use of *Adon* (BDB 10) in Lamentations 1. The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 707-708, takes this general title of deity and the NOUN (BDB 417) as referring to a joyful harvest festival to which not Judah, but her enemies are invited. This is imagery of Jerusalem’s defeat by pagans.

The NASB has “an appointed time.” This NOUN (BDB 417) suggests an appointed time and place for judgment on Judah’s defenders. The NET Bible, p. 1459, #1, suggests a legal assembly following the root’s use in Num. 16:2.



NASB, NRSV,

NJB, JPSOA “rejected”

NKJV “trampled underfoot”

TEV “laughed at”

REB “treated with scorn”

LXX “removed”

Peshitta “into subjection”

This VERB (BDB 699, KB 756, *Piel* PERFECT) is found only here (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 259). The *Qal* is in Ps. 119:118.

1. The BDB suggests “make light of” or “toss aside.”
2. The Aramaic root means “to despise.”
3. KB and the NET Bible chose a similar Akkadian or Assyrian root, “to hurl” (away).
4. The NKJV comes from the Arabic cognate “to trample.”

▣ **“a wine press”** This (BDB 387) is imagery of judgment (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:13). It is possible the whole verse is judgment as a harvest (cf. AB, p. 27).

▣ **“virgin daughter of Judah”** See note at Lam. 1:6.

1:16 This verse vividly expresses the feelings of utter hopelessness and pain in the fall of Jerusalem (i.e., double use of “my eyes, my eyes”).

There is no comforter (i.e., Lam. 1:9,16,17,21).

Weeping at Jerusalem’s fall is seen in Jer. 9:1; 13:17; 31:16; Lam. 1:2; 2:18. These are tears of

1. sorrow for the consequences of sin
2. sorrow for the sin (repentance); see Special Topic: Repentance in the OT

1:17 “Zion stretches out her hands” This is imagery for prayer. The Jews prayed with head lifted, eyes open, hands raised, speaking to God. It was a dialogue!

1:18-19 “virgins. . .young men. . .priests. . .elders” Every category of society will be exiled. There was no level of Judean society that escaped God’s judgment by the hands of Babylon.

Personified Jerusalem weeps over the loss of all her people, prestige, power, alliances, and former glory!

1:18 “righteous” Note Deut. 32:4; 2 Chr. 12:6; Ps. 119:137; Jer. 12:1. See Special Topic: Righteousness.

▣ **“Hear now, all peoples”** The two IMPERATIVES, “hear” and “see,” were used in Lam 1:9,11,20 to address YHWH but here they address the nations in witness to YHWH’s justice (i.e., judging His own disobedient people). This universal aspect is repeated in Lam. 4:12. See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **“I have rebelled against His command”** This VERB (BDB 598, KB 632, *Qal* PERFECT) denotes an intentional violation. Some examples of its usage are Num. 20:24; 27:14; 1 Sam. 12:14-15; Ps. 5:8-10; 105:28; Isa. 1:19-20; 63:10; Lam. 1:18,20; 3:42; Hos. 13:16. This kind of willful behavior always brings judgment from God. To whom much is given much is required (cf. Luke 12:48). With knowledge comes responsibility!

1:20 “See” This IMPERATIVE (BDB 906, KB 1157) marks a prayer request (cf. Lam. 1:9,11). Lamentations 1:12b also has it but there it addresses “passers by.”

Lamentations 1:20-22 is a long prayer request of repentance and a call for vengeance.



NASB	“spirit”
NKJV, TEV, Peshitta	“soul”
NRSV, JPSOA	“I am”
NJB	“my inmost being”
REB	“my bowels”
LXX	“my stomach”

This is not the word for “spirit” (*ruah*) nor “soul” (*nephesh*). This is “inward parts” (BDB 588, i.e., intestines, bowels, belly). This part of the body was viewed as the seat of the emotions (cf. Job 30:27; Isa. 16:11; 63:15; Jer. 4:19; 31:20; Lam. 1:20; 2:11).

▣ **“I have been very rebellious”** This is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB (here, a PERFECT form) of the same root (BDB 598, KB 632), which showed intensity. Israel (i.e., corporate lament) admits her guilt.

▣ **“My heart is overturned within me”** The JPSOA translates this phrase as “I know how wrong I was” or “how very bitter I am.” See Jewish Study Bible, p. 1592.

1:21 “All my enemies. . .are glad” This VERB (BDB 965, KB 1314, *Qal* PERFECT) refers to the rejoicing of Judah’s neighbors at her fall (cf. Lam. 4:21; Obad. v. 12).

▣ **“That they may become like me”** This is one of two IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense (i.e., prayer wish).

1. Lam. 1:21f
2. Lam. 1:22a (followed by an IMPERATIVE in v. 22b)

This is connected to the “eye for an eye” justice (cf. Neh. 4:4,5; Ps. 137:7-8).

1:22 “my heart is faint” This is a metaphor for weakness, sickness (cf. Lam. 5:17; Isa. 1:5; Jer. 8:18). See Special Topic: Heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the historical setting of the book?
2. Show the stated contrast between Jerusalem before and after.
3. Who are Jerusalem's lovers?
4. Why are Lam. 1:5-6 and 14 so theologically significant?
5. What does Lam 1:8-9 refer to?
6. Is it possible that Lam. 1:11 refers to cannibalism?
7. Was Jerusalem's fall based on the weakness of YHWH compared to *Marduk*?
8. Did YHWH cause Jerusalem's fall?
9. What is “the day” referred to in Lam. 1:21?

LAMENTATIONS 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
God's Anger Over Israel	God's Anger with Jerusalem	The People's Agony and Their Cry to God for Mercy	The Lord's Punishment of Jerusalem	Second Lamentation
2:1	2:1-10 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)	2:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)	2:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)	2:1 <i>Aleph</i>
2:2				2:2 <i>Bet</i>
2:3				2:3 <i>Gimel</i>
2:4				2:4 <i>Dalet</i>
2:5				2:5 <i>He</i>
2:6				2:6 <i>Waw</i>
2:7				2:7 <i>Zain</i>
2:8				2:8 <i>Het</i>
2:9				2:9 <i>Tet</i>
2:10				2:10 <i>Yod</i>
2:11	2:11-17 (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	(11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	(11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17)	2:11 <i>Kaph</i>
2:12				2:12 <i>Lamed</i>
2:13				2:13 <i>Mem</i>
2:14				2:14 <i>Nun</i>
2:15				2:15 <i>Samek</i>
2:16				2:16 <i>Ain</i>
2:17				2:17 <i>Pe</i>
2:18	2:18-19 (18)	(18)	(18)	2:18 <i>Zade</i>
2:19	(19)	(19)	(19)	2:19 <i>Qoph</i>

2:20	2:20-22 (20) (21) (22)	(20)	(20)	2:20 <i>Resh</i>
2:21		(21)	(21)	2:21 <i>Shin</i>
2:22		(22)	(22)	2:22 <i>Taw</i>

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1

**¹How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion
With a cloud in His anger!
He has cast from heaven to earth
The glory of Israel,
And has not remembered His footstool
In the day of His anger.**

2:1 “How” This is a textual marker for a lament (i.e., funeral dirge). See full note at Lam. 1:1.

▣ **“Lord”** This is *Adon* (BDB 10). It was found in only two verses of chapter 1 (i.e., Lam. 1:14,15). The use of YHWH dominates the first lament but the title *Adon* predominates the second (cf. Lam. 2:1,2,5,7,18,19,20). See Special Topic: Lord (*kurios*).



NASB, NKJV,

TEV “covered”

NRSV “humiliated”

NJB “enveloped”

JPSOA “shamed”

LXX “brought gloom”

The VERB (BDB 729, KB 794, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) is found only here. The root is related to “dark cloud” or “cloud mass which covers.” In this verse it has the ominous connotation of something God did to Israel (i.e., His Temple, cf. Isa. 64:11) in anger over rebellion.

1. He apparently hides them from Himself (as the incense did in the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*, Revelation 16).
2. He cast their glory (i.e., their special relationship with Himself) from His presence (cf. 2 Kgs. 13:23) to the earth (same as He does to the King of Babylon, Isa. 14:12-15 and King of Tyre, Ezek. 28:14-16).
3. He rejects the covenant, symbolized in the ark of the covenant, which was His footstool (cf. 1 Chr. 28:2; Ps. 99:1,15; 132:7; Isa. 66:1; Matt. 5:34-35). This was where heaven and earth, the invisible and the visible, met. AB (p. 35) suggests an emendation to
 - a. disgraced (Arabic root, see NRSV)
 - b. with contempt (NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 333)

▣ **“the daughter of Zion”** See notes at Lam. 1:6.

▣ **“His anger” (twice)** See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“the glory of Israel”** It could refer to

1. the Temple, see Isa. 64:11
2. Jerusalem, see Isa. 13:19
3. their covenant relationship with YHWH (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29)

Number 1 fits best the context from heaven to earth.

▣ **“has not remembered”** In the OT mankind repeatedly is admonished to remember his/her sin, but God is called on to forget/forgive mankind’s sin. The forgiveness reflects

1. the character of God; see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT)
2. His remembrance of His covenant promises to the Patriarchs; see Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs

▣ **“footstool”** In the ANE it was a royal system for a victorious king.

1. YHWH as creator is king (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7; Ps. 10:16; 29:10).
2. It often refers to Jerusalem/Zion (see Special Topic: Zion), the place God caused His ark/temple to dwell (Psalm 99; Lam. 2:1).
3. It specifically refers to the ark (see Special Topic: Ark of the Covenant and Special Topic: Mercy Seat) in the Holy of Holies overshadowed by the *Cherubim* (see Special Topic: *Cherubim*).
4. The Davidic Kings represented God’s power and presence. Their enemies were depicted as “footstools” (Ps. 110:1; also Messiah, 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:22; see Special Topic: Messiah).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:2

**²The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared
All the habitations of Jacob.
In His wrath He has thrown down
The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought *them* down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.**

2:2 “The Lord has swallowed up” This VERB in the *Piel* (BDB 118, KB 134, cf. Lam. 2:8) is an idiom of destruction (cf. Lam. 2:5 (twice), 8; Job 2:3; 10:8; Ps. 21:9; 5:9; 107:27). The *Qal* stem is also used of destruction, cf. Num. 16:32-34; Deut. 11:6 (*Sheol*); Ps. 69:15 (the deep); Ps. 124:3 (enemies).

The imagery is of the totality of the event. YHWH’s complete and full justice swallowed up faithless Judeans! He did not change His mind or spare them!

1. swallowed up (cf. Lam. 2:2,5,16)
2. did not spare (cf. Lam. 2:2,17,21; 1 Chr. 36:17; Jer. 13:14; 21:7; Ezek. 7:9)
3. threw down (cf. Lam. 2:17; Mic. 5:11)
4. brought to the ground
5. profaned (cf. Ps. 89:39; Isa. 43:28; 47:6)

These as all PERFECTS denoting completed action.

▣ **“habitations. . .strongholds”** These two terms refer to unwalled villages and walled cities (fortresses surrounding Jerusalem at key topological places like Lachish). All are destroyed.

▣ **“He has not spared”** The MT has “without mercy.” The Masoretic scholars have suggested “has shown no mercy” (*Qere*). See Lam. 2:17d, also a *Qal* PERFECT of BDB 328, KB 328.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:3

**³In fierce anger He has cut off
All the strength of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand
From before the enemy.
And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire
Consuming round about.**

2:3 During the exodus and conquest, YHWH was a warrior for Israel (i.e., Holy War), but now He no longer fights for them. He fights against them (cf. Lam. 2:5; Jer. 30:14) by using pagan invaders to judge His covenant people.

▣ **“All the strength of Israel”** The word “might” is literally “horn” (BDB 901). See full note at Lam. 2:17.

▣ **“His right hand”** See Special Topic: Hand and Special Topic: God Described As Human.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:4

**⁴He has bent His bow like an enemy;
He has set His right hand like an adversary
And slain all that were pleasant to the eye;
In the tent of the daughter of Zion
He has poured out His wrath like fire.**

2:4 This continues the thought of Lam. 2:3, but adds specifically YHWH’s destruction (i.e., YHWH as warrior, cf. Isa. 59:17; Eph. 6:14) of the Temple.

The sovereignty of the one true God (see Special Topic: Monotheism) was expressed in the theology of “one causality” (cf. 2 Chr. 20:6; Eccl. 7:14; Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13; 45:7; 54:16; Jer. 18:11; Lam. 3:33-38; Amos 3:6). YHWH used pagan nations but they did not know it was Israel’s God who gave them the victory. This is reverse Holy War!

▣ **“fire”** Notice how often “fire” has been mentioned (Lam. 2:3,4; 1:13; 4:11). Fire is first used as a judgment of God’s people in Korah’s rebellion of Num. 11:1-3. See Special Topic: Fire.

▣ **“all that were pleasant to the eye”** From the two previous lines of poetry, this may refer

1. from the poetic context, to “soldiers”
2. from Ezek. 24:16,25 (NET Bible), to “children/descendants”
3. from 1 Kgs. 20:6, to “possessions” (Lam. 1:10)

▣ **“In the tent”** This could refer to

1. the Tabernacle of the wilderness (anachronism)
2. imagery for weakness and vulnerability
3. a way of referring to Judean homes (cf. Ps. 91:10; 132:3)

Option #2 or 3 seems best because a different word, “booth” (BDB 968) is used of the Tabernacle/Temple in Lam. 2:6.

▣ **“He has poured out”** This VERB (BDB 1049, KB 1629, *Qal* PERFECT) has several usages (examples).

1. related to the sacrificial system’s placement of blood – Exod. 29:12; Lev. 4:7,18,25,30,34; 17:13
2. related to proper drainage of blood from animal meat – Deut. 12:16,24,27; 15:23
3. the shedding of human blood
4. imagery of how one prays – 1 Sam. 1:15; Ps. 42:4; 62:8; 102 (i.e., title); 142:2; Lam. 2:11,19
5. imagery of one’s strength – Job 30:16; Ps. 22:14
6. God giving His Spirit – Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 39:29 (cf. 36:27; 37:14); Joel 2:28,29; Zech. 12:10
7. God’s wrath – Ps. 69:24; 79:6; Isa. 42:25; Jer. 6:11; 10:25; 14:16; Lam. 2:4; 4:11; Ezek. 7:8; 9:8; 14:19; 20:8,13,33,34; 21:31; 22:22,31; Hos. 5:10; Zeph. 3:8; same concept but different word, BDB 677, used in 2 Chr. 34:21; Jer. 7:20; 42:18; Ezek. 22:22

See Special Topic: Poured Out (NT).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:5

**⁵The Lord has become like an enemy.
He has swallowed up Israel;
He has swallowed up all its palaces,
He has destroyed its strongholds
And multiplied in the daughter of Judah
Mourning and moaning.**

2:5 “The Lord has become like an enemy” This is the reverse of Holy War! YHWH, the true covenant God, is the covenant people’s adversary (cf. Isa. 63:10; Jer. 30:14). Oh my, oh my!

The MT has “Lord” (*Adon*) but the Masoretic scholars suggested a change to YHWH (*Qere*), cf. Lam. 1:14; 2:2,7,18,19,20.

▣ **“swallowed”** See full note at Lam 2:2a.

▣ **“Israel. . .the daughter of Judah”** It is possible that

1. Israel and Judah refer to the northern kingdom
2. Israel refers to the Assyrian exile and Judah refers to the Babylonian exile

Because of the last two poetic lines of Lam. 2:5, option #1 fits best.

▣ **“Mourning and moaning”** This is a purposeful sound play.

1. mourning – הִיבֵּאתַ
2. moaning – הִיבֵּאוּ

▣ **“He has destroyed”** This VERB (BDB 1007, KB 1469) is used several times of YHWH’s judgment.

1. Lam. 2:5, Judah’s strongholds (i.e., walled cities)
2. Lam. 2:6, Judah’s feasts and Temple
3. Lam. 2:8, the defensive walls of Jerusalem

This VERB is found only in these three places in Lamentations, but is common in Jeremiah.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:6

**‘And He has violently treated His tabernacle like a garden *booth*;
 He has destroyed His appointed meeting place.
 The LORD has caused to be forgotten
 The appointed feast and sabbath in Zion,
 And He has despised king and priest
 In the indignation of His anger.**

2:6-9 YHWH has rejected the festival calendar (cf. Exodus 23; Leviticus 25) and the sacrificial system (Leviticus 1-7). He has abandoned and destroyed

1. king and capital
2. priest and temple
3. prophets (cf. Lam. 2:9e-f, 14)

1 Chronicles 28:9 says it will be permanent but Lam. 3:1 offers a future hope based on Israel’s repentance and YHWH’s mercy (cf. Hosea 11:8-11; Zech. 6:10).

2:6

NASB “like a garden *booth*”
NKJV “as *if it were* a garden”
NRSV “his booth like a garden”
NJB, JPSOA “like a garden”
LXX “like a vine”

YHWH destroyed His Temple.

1. like a watchman’s shed/booth in a field
2. stripped (JPSOA, REB) like a vineyard (cf. Isa. 5:5-6; Jer. 5:10; 12:10)

This agricultural imagery denotes the removal of all restraints and allows animals and thieves to plunder the field/vineyard (cf. Lam. 2:12), here, plunder the Temple.

C. D. Ginsburg suggests a reading of “like a thief” from the context but it is not supported by the MT or any ancient version.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:7

**⁷The Lord has rejected His altar,
 He has abandoned His sanctuary;
 He has delivered into the hand of the enemy
 The walls of her palaces.
 They have made a noise in the house of the LORD
 As in the day of an appointed feast.**

2:7 Notice the parallelism between the first two poetic lines.

1. rejected His altar – BDB 276, KB 276, *Qal* PERFECT; Robert Gordis, in his commentary, p. 162, suggests this VERB is from an Arabic root, “to smell bad” (cf. Isa. 19:6; Hos. 8:5 [BDB 276 II])
2. abandoned His sanctuary – BDB 611, KB 658, *Piel* PERFECT; this VERB occurs only twice, both in *Piel*, here and Ps. 89:39. Suggestions from context and Arabic cognate roots:
 - a. abhor
 - b. insult
 In Ps. 89:39 it is parallel to “defile” or “pollute” (BDB 320 III, *Piel* PERFECT).

2:7e This refers to pagan invaders rejoicing in the destroyed Temple (i.e., Ps. 74:4). This possibly relates to Lam. 1:10-11 and Lam. 2:17e.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:8

**⁸The LORD determined to destroy
The wall of the daughter of Zion.
He has stretched out a line,
He has not restrained His hand from destroying,
And He has caused rampart and wall to lament;
They have languished together.**

2:8a “The LORD determined to destroy” This VERB (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* PERFECT) basically means “to think” or “to account.” But it is often used of “purposed plans of actions.”

1. God plans judgment
 - a. against Edom, Jer. 49:20
 - b. against Hazor, Jer. 49:30
 - c. against Babylon, Jer. 50:45
 - d. against His people, Jer. 28:8,15; 36:3; Lam. 2:8; Mic. 5:3; (because they planned against Him, Mic. 2:1)
2. Humans plan evil actions
 - a. against Jeremiah, Jer. 11:18,19
 - b. against God or His people, Ezek. 11:2; 38:10; Dan. 11:24,25; Hos. 7:15; Mic. 2:1
3. God plans good things
 - a. for those who repent, Jer. 18:8,18; 36:3
 - b. for Jeremiah, Jer. 29:11

2:8c This is an idiom of judgment (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:13; Isa. 28:17; 34:11; Amos 7:7-9).

2:8e “rampart” This NOUN (BDB 298, cf. Isa. 26:1) has several possible meanings.

1. a little wall(s) of outer defense(s), see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 233
2. the space between the outer and inner fortifications
3. a moat (“ditch,” Tregelles’ *Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon*), cf. Nah. 3:8

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:9

**⁹Her gates have sunk into the ground,
He has destroyed and broken her bars.
Her king and her princes are among the nations;
The law is no more.
Also, her prophets find
No vision from the LORD .**

2:9a The imagery of Lam. 2:8-9 is the personification of Jerusalem’s defensive structures bowing to the ground in grief.

1. rampart (see notes), Lam. 2:8
2. wall, Lam. 2:8

3. gates, Lam. 2:9

Notice the “virgins” (i.e., Temple singers, musicians, dancers) of Lam. 2:10 also are bowed in grief.

2:9d Think how devastating this statement would be to Judeans! It may refer only to priestly instruction, cf. Jer. 18:18; Hag. 2:11; Mal. 2:6.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:10

¹⁰**The elders of the daughter of Zion
Sit on the ground, they are silent.
They have thrown dust on their heads;
They have girded themselves with sackcloth.
The virgins of Jerusalem
Have bowed their heads to the ground.**

2:10 “The elders” See Special Topic: Elder.

▣ **“Sit on the ground”** See Special Topic: Grieving Rites. All the surrounding VERBS are PERFECTS except for this line of poetry (two *Qal* IMPERFECTS, which would mean they threw themselves on the ground repeatedly). The LXX, Targums, and Vulgate versions emend them to PERFECT TENSE VERBS.

▣ **“the virgins”** Probably “the elders” – “the virgins” was an idiomatic way (merism) to refer to all society.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:11

¹¹**My eyes fail because of tears,
My spirit is greatly troubled;
My heart is poured out on the earth
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
When little ones and infants faint
In the streets of the city.**

2:11 “My eyes fail because of tears” See note at Lam. 1:2. This may be the wail of the author Lamentations or Jerusalem itself personified. It seems the author addresses Jerusalem directly in Lam. 2:13-16.

▣ **“My spirit”** See full note at Lam. 1:20.

▣ **“My heart”** This is literally “liver” (BDB 458). This is parallel to the “inward parts” (BDB 588; Lam. 1:20; NJB, “inner most being”; NRSV, “stomach”). It was the seat of the emotions. The word itself denotes the heavy, thick, middle organ. The “liver” may be the true reading of Ps. 7:5c. This would mean changing “glory” (*kabod*) to “liver.”

1. glory – יָדָבַד, BDB 458
2. liver – יֶדֶבֶד, BDB 458

This is the suggestion of AB, p. 45.

▣ **“When little ones and infants faint”** The children die for lack of food (Lam. 2:19). Then they are eaten by their parents (v. 20; Lam. 1:11).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:12

¹²They say to their mothers,
“Where is grain and wine?”
As they faint like a wounded man
In the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out
On their mothers’ bosom.

2:12 “They say. . .” This is IMPERFECT. These children ask again and again for food.

▣ **“life”** This is the Hebrew word *nephseh* (BDB 659). See online note at Ezekiel 18:4.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:13

¹³How shall I admonish you?
To what shall I compare you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
To what shall I liken you as I comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin is as vast as the sea;
Who can heal you?

2:13e “O virgin daughter of Zion” This is a collective phrase of endearment. It is used of

1. Zion – 2 Kgs. 19:21; Ps. 9:14; Isa. 1:8; 16:1; 62:11; Jer. 6:23; Lam. 4:22; Mic. 4:8; Zeph. 3:14
2. Jerusalem – 2 Kgs. 19:21; Isa. 37:22; Lam. 2:13,15

Notice both are used in parallel in Lam. 2:13 and 2 Kgs. 19:21. This is another example of family terms used to describe God and His people. See Special Topic: Fatherhood of God, C.

The irony here is that God’s special unmarried daughter has played the harlot by being involved in ANE fertility worship or treaties with pagan nations. See Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East.

2:13g “Who can heal you” Healing in this context refers to sin and its consequences (cf. Isa. 1:5-6; Ps. 103:3; Jer. 3:22; 30:12-13) but there is hope if repentance occurs, Jer. 33:6-9. If God has become your enemy, who can reverse His actions? See Special Topic: Healing.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:14

¹⁴Your prophets have seen for you
False and foolish visions;
And they have not exposed your iniquity
So as to restore you from captivity,
But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.

2:14 The prophets of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 23:25-32) and Ezekiel’s day (cf. Ezek. 22:25,28) were prophesying false hope. They were assuring Judah that Jerusalem would never fall (i.e., Jer. 8:11; 14:13-16; Ezek. 13:10-16), probably based on the prophecies of Isaiah. However, they failed to note the conditional nature of

YHWH's covenant with the Patriarchs. See Special Topic: Covenant and Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs.



NASB, LXX “foolish”

NKJV, NRSV,

Peshitta “deceptive”

NJB “whitewash”

JPSOA “folly”

REB “painted sham”

This root (BDB 1074, KB 1776) has several possible meanings.

1. spoiled fish (Arabic root)
2. tasteless (cf. Job 6:6)
3. unseemliness
4. whitewash (i.e., deceptive, cf. Ezek. 13:10,13,14,15; 22:28)

BDB suggests #2 here, while KB suggested either #2 or #4. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 323, prefers “deceptive” (NKJV, NRSV, JPSOA).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:15

¹⁵**All who pass along the way
Clap their hands in *derision* at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
“Is this the city of which they said,
‘The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth’?”**

2:15 This verse uses several physical gestures of surprise and contempt (JPSOA claims that this verse refers to superstition related to curses, using Job 27:23 and Jer. 18:16).

1. clap their hands – Num. 24:10; Job 27:23
2. hiss – Lam. 2:16; 1 Kgs. 9:8; 2 Chr. 29:8; Job 27:23; Jer. 18:16; 19:8; 25:9,18; 49:17; 50:13; 51:37; Ezek. 27:36; Zeph. 2:15
3. shake their heads – possibly Lam. 1:8b; 2 Kgs. 19:21; Job 16:4; Ps. 22:7; 109:25; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:16; Zeph. 2:15; Matt. 27:39; Mark 15:29

God's people had claimed to be “the perfection of beauty” and “a joy to all the earth” (cf. Ps. 48:2; 50:2; Ezek. 16:14,15). If so, why has their God let them be so utterly destroyed (cf. Deut. 29:24-26; Jer. 22:8-9)? Their rebellion and covenant disobedience has caused this (cf. Lam. 1:5-6,14; Ezek. 16:25), not any character fault or weakness on YHWH's part. They had been warned (by Moses, Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; and the prophets), but they would not see or hear (cf. Isa. 6:9-13).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:16

¹⁶**All your enemies
Have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash *their* teeth.
They say, “We have swallowed *her* up!
Surely this is the day for which we waited;**

We have reached it, we have seen it.”

2:16 “gnash *their* teeth” This was a gesture of anger and aggression (cf. Job 16:9); Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16; Matt. 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28; Acts 7:54.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:17

**¹⁷The LORD has done what He purposed;
He has accomplished His word
Which He commanded from days of old.
He has thrown down without sparing,
And He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the might of your adversaries.**

2:17 Judah’s demise, caused by her sin and rebellion, was predicted in Lev. 26:21-39; Deuteronomy 28; and Joshua 24:19-28. Now it has come to pass!

For “He purposed” (BDB 273, KB 273, *Qal* PERFECT) see Jer. 4:28; 51:12,29; Zech. 8:14; note the opposite plan in Zech. 8:15.

▣ **“the might”** This is literally “horn.” Animal’s horns were idiomatic and proverbial for power. Note the different usages.

1. on the altars (cf. Exod. 27:2; 29:12; 30:2,3,10; 37:25,26; Lev. 4:7,18,25,30,34; Rev. 9:13)
2. imagery of human strength/power (cf. Deut. 33:17; 1 Sam. 2:1,10; Ps. 89:17)
3. imagery of national strength (cf. Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3)
4. imagery of God (cf. 2 Sam. 22:3)
5. imagery of Messiah (cf. Ps. 132:17; Ezek. 29:21; Luke 1:69; Rev. 5:6)
6. imagery of anti-God nations and persons (cf. Daniel 8; Rev. 12:3; 13:1,11; 17:3,7,12,16)

How different is the “horn” of the pagan invaders compared to Judah’s horn (Lam. 2:3).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:18

**¹⁸Their heart cried out to the Lord,
“O wall of the daughter of Zion,
Let your tears run down like a river day and night;
Give yourself no relief,
Let your eyes have no rest.**

2:18-19 This describes how Judah should pray.

1. “Let your tears run down like a river day and night” – BDB 432, KB 434, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. “Give yourself no relief” – BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
3. “Let your eyes” (lit. “the daughter of your eye,” an idiom of affection, cf. Deut. 32:10; Ps. 17:8; Pro. 7:2; Lam. 2:18; Zech. 2:8) – BDB 198, KB 226, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. “Arise” – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (usually prayer was done standing, eyes open, hands up [cf. Lam. 2:19e], out loud [2:19a])
5. “Cry aloud” – BDB 943, KB 1247, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
6. “Pour out your heart like water” – BDB 1049, KB 1629, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (cf. Ps. 62:8; see note on VERB at Lam. 2:4)

7. “Lift up your hands to Him” – BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERATIVE

2:18 “Their heart cried out to the Lord” The MT has the VERB (BDB 858, KB 1042) as a *Qal* PERFECT, but many scholars and translations support an emendation to a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (NRSV, TEV, NJB, and JPSOA footnote).

There are two *Qal* IMPERFECTS used as JUSSIVES in Lam. 2:18 and these are followed by four *Qal* IMPERATIVES in Lam. 2:19.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:19

¹⁹“Arise, cry aloud in the night
At the beginning of the night watches;
Pour out your heart like water
Before the presence of the Lord;
Lift up your hands to Him
For the life of your little ones
Who are faint because of hunger
At the head of every street.”

2:19 “Before the presence of the Lord” This is literally “face.” It is imagery that denotes

1. personhood
2. closeness

See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:20

²⁰See, O LORD, and look!
With whom have You dealt thus?
Should women eat their offspring,
The little ones who were born healthy?
Should priest and prophet be slain
In the sanctuary of the Lord?

2:20 This verse starts with the same two IMPERATIVES as Lam. 1:11,12; and the VERB “see” by itself in Lam. 1:9,20.

▣ **“Should women eat their offspring”** This was the terrible reality of siege warfare. The overloaded, walled cities ran out of food and water. This very thing was prophesied in Lev. 26:29 and Deut. 28:53,55 and recorded in Jer. 19:9; Lam. 4:10; Ezek. 5:10 (note 2 Kgs. 6:28).

▣ **“born healthy”** This is literally “tenderly cared for” (BDB 381, KB 378). This root is found only here but a related one (BDB 381) is in Lam. 2:22e. KB suggests “health and beauty of a newborn child.”

▣ **“Should priest and prophet be slain”** Notice the powerful word in Jer. 23:11-12. The apostasy of the religious leaders caused the downfall of the whole society.

1. children die of hunger
2. children are then eaten
3. leaders killed

4. young and old die
5. virgins and young men die
6. none spared (cf. Lam. 2:20-21)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:21

²¹**On the ground in the streets
Lie young and old;
My virgins and my young men
Have fallen by the sword.
You have slain *them* in the day of Your anger,
You have slaughtered, not sparing.**

2:21 “Your anger” See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

▣ **“not sparing”** Often YHWH relented of His planned judgment on His people (cf. Jer. 18:8,18), but they continued to become more idolatrous. The only way to heal the spiritual cancer was to perform radical surgery (i.e., the exiles) and begin again. As YHWH removed the idolatrous Canaanites from His land (cf. Gen. 15:12-21), so now He removes His own covenant people from His Promised Land. He is no respecter of persons. We reap what we sow (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:22

²²**You called as in the day of an appointed feast
My terrors on every side;
And there was no one who escaped or survived
In the day of the LORD’S anger.
Those whom I bore and reared,
My enemy annihilated them.**

2:22 “the day of an appointed feast” The feast was for the victorious pagan invaders (cf. Lam. 1:15). Judah’s feast days have ceased (cf. Lam. 2:6d).

▣ **“My terrors on every side”** This phrasing is reminiscent of Ps. 31:13; Isa. 24:17-18; Jer. 6:25; 20:3,10; 46:5; 49:29.

▣ **“there was no one who escaped or survived”** This is hyperbolic language (i.e., Isa. 24:17-18; Jer. 11:11; 42:17; 44:14; Amos 5:18-20). Obviously no part of Judah’s society, no family, was unaffected by YHWH’s judgment (cf. Jer. 1:11).

▣ **“In the day of the LORD’S anger”** Notice this lament starts with this phrase (Lam. 2:1f) and ends with it. This whole chapter is about YHWH’s judgment on faithless Judah.

▣ **“Those whom I bore and reared”** This is imagery of YHWH as Israel/Judah’s parent (cf. Isa. 1:2; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 11:3). See Special Topic: Fatherhood of God.

The VERB “bore” (BDB 381, KB 378, *Piel* PERFECT) basically means “healthy children.” Notice the contrast.

1. Judah ate her healthy children, Lam. 2:20
2. YHWH’s children (i.e., the descendants of Abraham) were born healthy but rebelled and acted unhealthily and now are all dead (by YHWH’s will and the hand of Babylonian invaders).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Has YHWH cancelled His covenant with Abraham’s descendants?
2. How is the chapter “reverse Holy War”?
3. What were the false prophets saying about Jerusalem and Babylon?
4. How is this lament different from Hos. 11:8-9?
5. Is Lam. 2:18-19 a call to repentance?

LAMENTATIONS 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jeremiah Shares Israel's Affliction	The Prophet's Anguish and Hope	A Psalm of Personal Distress and Trust in God	Punishment, Repentance, and Hope	Third Lamentation
3:1-18 (1-18)	3:1-18 (1-3) (4-6) (7-9) (10-12) (13-15) (16-18)	3:1-18 (1-3) (4-6) (7-9) (10-12) (13-15) (16-18)	3:1-66 (1-3) (4-6) (7-9) (10-12) (13-15) (16-18)	3:1-3 <i>Aleph</i> 3:4-6 <i>Bet</i> 3:7-9 <i>Gimel</i> 3:10-12 <i>Dalet</i> 3:13-15 <i>He</i> 3:16-18 <i>Waw</i>
Hope of Relief in God's Mercy		A Sage Counsels Submission and Penitence in Acknowledgment of God's Righteousness and Mercy		
3:19-39 (19-39)	3:19-42 (19-21) (22-24) (25-27) (28-30) (31-33) (34-39)	3:19-51 (19-21) (22-24) (25-30) (31-33) (34-36) (37-39)	 (19-21) (22-24) (25-27) (28-30) (31-33) (34-36) (37-39)	3:19-21 <i>Zain</i> 3:22-24 <i>Het</i> 3:25-27 <i>Tet</i> 3:28-30 <i>Yod</i> 3:31-33 <i>Kaph</i> 3:34-36 <i>Lamed</i> 3:37-39 <i>Mem</i>
3:40-66 (40-66)	(40-42) (43-45) (46-48) (49-51) (52-54)	(40-42) (43-45) (46-48) (49-51)	(40-42) (43-45) (46-48) (49-51)	3:40-42 <i>Nun</i> 3:43-45 <i>Samek</i> 3:46-48 <i>Pe</i> 3:49-51 <i>Ain</i>
		An Individual Psalm Reading God's Past Mercies and Praying for Vindication and the Requiting of the Enemy		
		3:52-66 (52-54)	(52-54)	3:52-54 <i>Zade</i>
	3:55-66 (55-57) (58-60) (61-63) (64-66)	(55-57) (58-60) (61-63) (64-66)	(55-57) (58-60) (61-63) (64-66)	3:55-57 <i>Qoph</i> 3:58-60 <i>Resh</i> 3:61-63 <i>Shin</i> 3:64-66 <i>Taw</i>

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

*BRIEF OUTLINE

- A. God's wrath, Lam. 3:1-18
- B. Hope in God's love and faithfulness, Lam. 3:19-38
- C. Awareness of sin, both personal and corporate, Lam. 2:39-42

D. Sin's consequences, Lam. 3:43-54

E. Call for help and vengeance on the invaders, Lam. 3:55-66

*I do not remember where I got this outline, or if I wrote it.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. This lament does not mention specifically the fall of Jerusalem or the Temple (unless Lam. 3:5 is literal and not idiomatic).

B. It is a person speaking on behalf of the feelings of the nation.

This is where many commentators see this chapter reflecting the life of Jeremiah ("I," "my," "a man"), as well as the troubles of Judah ("us" of Lam. 3:40-48).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-18

¹I am the man who has seen affliction

Because of the rod of His wrath.

²He has driven me and made me walk

In darkness and not in light.

³Surely against me He has turned His hand

Repeatedly all the day.

⁴He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away,

He has broken my bones.

⁵He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.

⁶In dark places He has made me dwell,

Like those who have long been dead.

⁷He has walled *me* in so that I cannot go out;

He has made my chain heavy.

⁸Even when I cry out and call for help,

He shuts out my prayer.

⁹He has blocked my ways with hewn stone;

He has made my paths crooked.

¹⁰He is to me like a bear lying in wait,

Like a lion in secret places.

¹¹He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces;

He has made me desolate.

¹²He bent His bow

And set me as a target for the arrow.

¹³He made the arrows of His quiver

To enter into my inward parts.

¹⁴I have become a laughingstock to all my people,

Their *mocking* song all the day.

¹⁵**He has filled me with bitterness,
He has made me drunk with wormwood.**

¹⁶**He has broken my teeth with gravel;
He has made me cower in the dust.**

¹⁷**My soul has been rejected from peace;
I have forgotten happiness.**

¹⁸**So I say, “My strength has perished,
And so has my hope from the LORD.”**

3:1-18 The author expresses his personal pain, yet faith in YHWH, in the first verses of this acrostic lament. See Brief Outline at the beginning of the chapter.

3:1 “affliction” Usually this NOUN (BDB 777) is used of the rich oppressing the poor, but here it is YHWH chastising His faithless community by Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C.

▣ **“rod”** This was a shepherd’s rod (BDB 986) used for discipline (i.e., 2 Sam. 7:14; Job 9:34; 21:9; Ps. 2:9; 89:30-37; Pro. 10:13; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13,14; 26:3; 29:15). Here it refers to national affliction of YHWH’s people by pagan nations invading the Promised Land.

1. Assyria – Isa. 10:5; 30:31
2. Babylon – Jer. 50:23; 51:20; Habakkuk 1-2

Eschatologically the imagery is used of the reign of Messiah (cf. Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

▣ **“wrath”** In Lamentations this is always YHWH’s wrath (BDB 720, cf. Ps. 78:49; 85:3; 90:9,11; Isa. 9:19; 10:6; 13:9,13; 14:6; 16:6; Jer. 7:29; 48:30; Lam. 2:2; Ezek. 7:19; 21:31; 22:21,31; 38:19; Hos. 5:10; 13:11; Amos 1:1; Hab. 3:8; Zeph. 1:15,18). See Special Topic: God Described As Human.

3:2 “driven” This VERB (BDB 624, KB 675, *Qal* PERFECT) is often used of driving animals. This pastoral imagery is reenforced by the use of “rod” in Lam. 3:16.

However, in a non-judgment context, the VERB can be used positively of God’s leadership (i.e., Ps. 23:2; Isa. 49:10; 63:14). God’s people are depicted as His sheep!

The VERB is also used of prisoners being led away to exile and slavery (cf. 1 Sam. 30:2; Isa. 20:4). In some places it is the Lord Himself to whom the exile is attributed (cf. Deut. 4:27; 28:27).

▣ **“walk”** This is a biblical idiom for daily life.

▣ **“In darkness and not in light”** This imagery could refer to

1. depression of one’s spirit, cf. Ps. 143:2-4
2. *Sheol*, cf. Lam. 3:6,53; Job 10:21-22; 17:13; 18:18; Ps. 88:11-12; see Special Topic: *Sheol*
3. no wisdom or knowledge of God, resulting in judgment, Job 5:14; 12:25; 38:15; Amos 5:18-20

3:3 The author accuses YHWH of attacking him continually (Lam. 3:3b). For “hand” see Special Topic: Hand.

This verse has two words for “turn” (lit. “he returns, he turns,” BDB 996, BDB 245), which, like the IMPERFECT VERB, expresses repeated actions.

3:4 The verse is physical imagery for a depressed spirit (cf. Ps. 31:9-10; 38:2-8).

1. flesh to waste away
2. skin to waste away
3. bones broken (cf. Ps. 32:3; 102:3-5)

Like Lam. 3:2, this may refer to *Sheol*, implying the author was at the point of death (cf. Lam. 3:6).

▣ **“He has broken my bones”** Bones (BDB 782) are used (4 times in Lamentations) in several senses.

1. positively
 - a. physical strength or health – Job 20:11; 21:23-24; Pro. 3:8; 15:30; Isa. 58:11; 66:14; Lam. 4:7
 - b. divine protection – Ps. 34:19-20; 35:9-10
2. negatively
 - a. shaking bones as symbol of fear – Job 4:14; Jer. 23:9; Hab. 3:16
 - b. emotional or physical pain – Job 30:17,30; 33:19; Ps. 31:10; 32:3; 42:10; Lam. 1:13
 - c. illness – Job 19:20; 33:21; Ps. 6:2; 38:3; 102:5; Lam. 3:4; 4:8
 - d. divine judgment – Ps. 51:8; Isa. 38:13; Lam. 3:4
 - e. divine defeat – Ps. 53:5; 141:7; Jer. 8:1-2; Ezek 6:5

3:5 “He has besieged me” YHWH has “besieged” (BDB 124, KB 139, *Qal* PERFECT) the author’s spirit, as Babylon had besieged and “encompassed” (BDB 668, KB 722, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) Jerusalem. No way of escape!

The NJB translates Lam. 3:5 with an emendation as “He has besieged me and made hardship a circlet round my head,” which follows the LXX. See UBS Text Project, p. 343.

▣ **“and encompassed me”** This VERB (BDB 668, KB 722, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT with *waw*) basically means “to surround.” Here it may be

1. parallel to besiege (i.e., surrounding a city)
2. the VERB is used in imagery of enclosure
 - a. nets – Job 19:6
 - b. dogs – Ps. 22:16
 - c. water – Ps. 88:17
 - d. bitterness – Lam. 3:5
3. similar imagery using (BDB 685)
 - a. the wicked – Ps. 17:11
 - b. bulls – Ps. 22:12
 - c. the nations – Ps. 118:10-12

▣ **“bitterness”** This (BDB 912) refers to a bitter, poisonous herb (cf. Deut. 29:18; 32:32,33; Ps. 69:21; Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:19; Amos 6:12).

The JPSOA emends the word to read “misery.” The AB, p. 54, suggests “poverty” (cf. Pro. 6:11; 30:8).

▣ **“hardship”** This (BDB 521) means “a weariness,” “a burden,” “a hardship,” here caused by foreign invaders.

1. Assyria – Neh. 9:32
2. Babylon – Lam. 3:5

It is used in Exod. 18:8; Num. 20:14 for the problem with the nations during the exodus and wilderness wandering period.

3:6 See notes at “darkness” in Lam. 3:2. This verse is very much like Ps. 143:3.

3:7 “He has walled me in” This is similar imagery to “narrow places” in Lam. 1:3; see notes there. Jerusalem thought their walls would protect them but they were “walled in” by YHWH Himself to destruction.

3:8 The imagery of walls or barriers continues, from the physical wall to the emotional walls. The author feels there is a wall to his prayer (cf. Lam. 3:44; Job 3:23; 19:8; Ps. 18:41; 22:2; Pro. 1:28; Jer. 7:16).

The usual imagery for this is “hide Your face” (cf. Job 19:7; 30:20; Ps. 13:1; 22:1; 44:24; 88:14; 89:46; Isa. 59:2; Hab. 1:2).

3:9 The imagery of a wall or blocked road continues. The author feels abandoned and unheard by God.

3:10-11 God not only has blocked and made difficult his life, He has become as an animal attacker (cf. Isa. 38:13; Jer. 15:3; Hos. 13:8). This imagery occurs often.

1. bear (BDB 179, cf. Isa. 59:11)

2. lion (BDB 71, cf. Job 16:9,12; Ps. 10:9; 22:13; see Special Topic: Lions in the Old Testament)

They often appear together, cf. 1 Sam. 17:34,36,37; Pro. 28:15; Amos 5:19.

The VERB “lying in wait” (BDB 70, KB 83, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is usually used of the wicked ambushing faithful followers (cf. Ps. 10:8,9; 17:12; 64:4), but only here is it used of God ambushing.

God, the great shepherd (Psalm 23), is now the attacker. This was the predicted action of covenant disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:22; Deut. 32:24c). The instrument of protection, “the rod” (Lam. 3:1), has been replaced with the imagery of the very animal it once protected. What powerful, horrible imagery!

3:11 “He has turned aside my ways” This is the only occurrence of the *Polel* stem of this VERB (BDB 693, KB 747). Robert Gondis, in his commentary, pp. 176-177, suggests an emendation

from רוט – “turn aside” (VERB)

to ריט – “thorn” (BDB 696 II, a NOUN, cf. Hos. 2:8)

The resulting translation would be “He has hedged my way with thorns” (similar imagery in Lam. 3:7).

This seems a good possibility to me because of the strong language of Lam. 3:3-10, 12-18.

▣ **“torn me to pieces”** This VERB (BDB 832, KB 979, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*) occurs only here. What does it mean?

1. If one connects it to an animal attack (lion, bear), then NASB fits.

2. If one compares it to trying to push through a hedge of thorns, then “shredded me to pieces” fits well (Gondis’ emendation).

▣ **“He has made me desolate”** Desolate (BDB 1030, NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 169, #5) denotes the author’s sense of being deserted and abandoned by YHWH. What a hopeless and terrible feeling!

Notice the use of the root

1. Jerusalem’s gateways desolate – Lam. 1:4

2. the author himself, Lam. 1:3; 3:11

3. the author’s children, Lam. 1:16

4. the wealthy of Jerusalem, Lam. 4:5

5. Mount Zion, Lam. 5:18 (cf. Jer. 12:11)

3:12-13 YHWH is depicted as “the Divine Warrior” (cf. Isa. 59:17). Normally He fights on Israel/Judah’s behalf but now He fights against them (i.e., Holy War reversal).

Divine arrows are depicted as

1. instruments of Holy War on Israel's behalf – Ps. 18:14; 45:5; 144:5-8; Hab. 3:8-15
3. judgment for sinners – Deut. 32:24-25; Ps. 38:2-3

3:12 “set me as a target” Wow! This is powerful imagery (cf. Job 7:20; 16:12-13). The imagery of arrows hitting their mark is found in Ps. 38:2; Lam. 2:4. YHWH has become an enemy (reversal of Holy War) and He is a good archer!

3:13 “arrows” This is literally the typical Hebrew idiom using “son of. . .” (BDB 129 CONSTRUCT BDB 80).

▣ **“inward parts”** This is literally “kidneys” (BDB 480). See notes on “liver” (BDB 458) at Lam. 2:11 (cf. Job 16:13). All of the inward organs were viewed as the seat of emotions (cf. Ps. 73:21; Pro. 23:16).

3:14 “laughingstock” If Jeremiah is the author, he mentions this very thing in Jer. 20:7. This was not a minor issue to ANE people (cf. Lam. 1:7; Ps. 22:6,7; 123:3-4; Lam. 3:63; see Special Topic: Shame).

▣ **“mocking song”** This is paralleled in Lam. 3:63; Job 30:9; Ps. 69:12. He/they have become a joke (cf. Job 12:4; 30:1).



NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, LXX “to all my people”

TEV “people”

NJB “all my own people”

JPSOA “to all people”

REB, Peshitta “to all nations”

The UBS Text Project, p. 344, gives the NASB translation a “B” rating (some doubt). The JPSOA translation seems justified in light of the ridicule by the surrounding nations. The author himself stands for the nation (cf. Lam. 2:15-16).

3:15 “bitterness. . . wormwood” These were poisonous (cf. Job 20:14; Jer. 9:14; 23:15). In this context they refer to “bitterness” (i.e., of one's soul).

Notice the VERBS used.

1. filled – BDB 959, KB 1302, *Hiphil* PERFECT, cf. Lam. 3:30; Jer. 31:14; 44:17; 46:10; 50:10,19
2. sated – BDB 924, KB 1194, *Hiphil* PERFECT, cf. Jer. 31:14,25; 46:10

They are used together, here and in Jer. 31:14; 46:10.

3:16 This verse is difficult to interpret because the VERBS are rare.

1. crushed – BDB 176, KB 203, found only here and Ps. 119:20
2. cower – BDB 499, KB 495, only here

The imagery of judgment as damaged teeth is also found in Job 4:10; Ps. 3:7; 58:6; Pro. 20:17. It could refer to

1. eating bread with grit in it (cf. Pro. 20:17, i.e., traveling to exile or sweeping up the last few grains during famine to bake bread)
2. pushing one's face into the ground (idiom of defeat and submission)

3:17 “soul” This is the Hebrew *nephesh* (BDB 659), which denotes the whole person; see notes online at Ezek. 18:4.

There are two other words used in this lament which refer to a person.

1. adam (BDB 149), cf. Lam. 3:39
2. “life” (BDB 313), cf. Lam. 3:53,58

▣ **“has been rejected from peace”** The LXX makes YHWH the subject who acts on the author, following Lam. 3:4-16.

▣ **“peace”** See Special Topic: *Shalom* (peace).



NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB,

JPSOA

“happiness”

NKJV, REB,

Peshitta

“prosperity”

LXX

“good things”

This term (BDB 375) has several connotations.

1. peace and prosperity (paralleled with peace, as here) – Deut. 23:6; Ezra 9:12
2. part of “cursings and blessings” of Deut. 28:11; 30:9
3. prosperity and happiness – Eccl. 7:14
4. good – Eccl. 6:6; Jer. 18:20; 24:6; 32:42
5. welfare – Neh. 2:10
6. often contrasted “evil not good” – Jer. 21:10; 39:16; 44:27

3:18 The author had lost all

1. strength or endurance (BDB 664)
2. hope (BDB 404), cf. Lam. 3:21; Ps. 39:7; Pro. 10:28; 11:7

Thank God for Lam. 3:18,21,24,29 (BDB 876, cf. Jer. 31:17)! Because of God’s unchanging character (cf. Mal. 3:6), there will be hope. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT).

▣ **“hope”** The root “wait”/“hope” is used several times in this context.

1. Lam. 3:18, the NOUN “hope” – BDB 404, cf. Ps. 39:8
2. Lam. 3:21, VERB – BDB 403, KB 407, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, cf. 2 Kgs. 6:33; Job 32:11; Ps. 38:15; 42:5,11; 43:5; 130:5; Mic. 7:7
3. Lam. 3:24 – same as #2
4. Lam. 3:26, ADJECTIVE (BDB 404) used as a VERB, found only here

Hope/wait expresses a faith worldview that trusts in YHWH’s mercy and limited anger (cf. Ps. 103:8-14; 130:5-8).

▣ **“the LORD”** The title for God, YHWH, appears in Lam. 3:1-18 only in verse 18. Its absence in 3:1-18 may be due to

1. its poetic, acrostic needs
2. its adding to the author’s sense of being abandoned by God

See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:19-39

¹⁹Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.

²⁰Surely my soul remembers

And is bowed down within me.

²¹This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.

²²The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.

²³They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."

²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
To the person who seeks Him.

²⁶*It is good that he waits silently*
For the salvation of the LORD.

²⁷It is good for a man that he should bear
The yoke in his youth.

²⁸Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid *it* on him.

²⁹Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.

³⁰Let him give his cheek to the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.

³¹For the Lord will not reject forever,

³²For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.

³³For He does not afflict willingly
Or grieve the sons of men.

³⁴To crush under His feet
All the prisoners of the land,

³⁵To deprive a man of justice
In the presence of the Most High,

³⁶To defraud a man in his lawsuit—
Of these things the Lord does not approve.

³⁷Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded *it*?

³⁸*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High*
That both good and ill go forth?

³⁹Why should any living mortal, or any man,
Offer complaint in view of his sins?

3:19-38 This begins a new topic in the lament.

3:19 "Remember" This IMPERATIVE (BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERATIVE or INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT, LXX) could refer to

1. the author himself (Lam. 3:20a; 21a implies the author)
2. YHWH, “He” of Lam. 3:2-17

Notice the things to be remembered.

1. my affliction (BDB 777, cf. Lam. 3:1)
2. my wandering (BDB 924, REB); in Lam. 1:7 and Isa. 58:7 it refers to homelessness (NRSV), but here possibly to restless straying; JPSOA translates it as “misery” to match the first NOUN, “a distress” (BDB 777)
3. wormwood – BDB 542, cf. Lam. 3:15
4. bitterness – BDB 912, cf. Lam. 3:5

3:20 “Surely my soul remembers” This is an intensified grammatical structure, an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and an IMPERFECT VERB of the same root (BDB 269, KB 269).

What is to be remembered is stated in Lam. 3:22-26.



NASB, NRSV ,

JPSOA “bowed down within me”

NKJV, NJB “sinks within me”

TEV “spirit is depressed”

REB “filled with despondency”

LXX “complain to my soul”

The Masoretic scholars suggest the *Hiphil* stem (*Qere*), which means “be depressed,” but the *Qal* stem (MT, BDB 1001) means “sink down” or “bow down.” UBS Text Project, p. 346, gives it a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

3:21-26 The NASB Study Bible, p. 1151, calls these lines of poetry “the theological high point of the book of Lamentations.”

3:21 “mind” This is literally “heart.” See Special Topic: Heart.

▣ The “hope” is based on the character of Israel’s God.

1. lovingkindness (BDB 338), see Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*)
2. compassions (BDB 933), originally strong feelings of love between family members; see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT)

Both are never ceasing (cf. Mal. 3:6; the online notes there mention they relate to):

1. God’s covenant faithfulness, cf. Lam. 3:22-23
2. God’s purpose, cf. Ps. 33:11
3. God’s character, cf. Psalm 127; James 1:17

3:22

NASB “indeed never cease”

NKJV, NASB margin “we are not consumed”

NRSV, Targum,
Pehsitta, NET “never ceases”

TEV “continue”

NJB “are not over”

JPSOA “has not ended”

REB “not exhausted”

LXX “we have not expired”

The MT has “we are not consumed” but the LXX, NKJV, Targums, Peshitta see a different root (BDB 1070, KB 1752, *Qal* PERFECT), so either

1. God’s mercies are never ending (emendation found in LXX and Targums)
2. because of God’s mercy and lovingkindness we are not consumed (MT) or “cease to be”

See a brief note in NET Bible, p. 1468, #6.

This VERB is used here negated and in Lam. 4:22, where it refers to the punishment of Judah’s iniquity as complete and finished.

3:23 What a great truth (cf. Zeph. 3:5). I think this is the same truth as Ps. 103:8-14! YHWH’s lovingkindness and compassion are linked to His faithfulness. See Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT.

3:24 “The LORD is my portion” Originally this word “portion” (BDB 324) referred to

1. YHWH being the inheritance of the priests and Levites (i.e., no land allotment), cf. Num. 18:20
2. the people of Israel were YHWH’s special inheritance, cf. Deut. 32:9; Jer. 10:16; 51:19
3. the phrase came to be an affirmation of faith for every covenant member, cf. Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Lam. 3:24

▣ **“I have hope in Him”** This VERB (BDB 403, KB 407, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) has the connotation of “wait patiently” (cf. 2 Kgs. 6:33; Ps. 38:15; 42:5,11; 43:5; 130:5; Mic. 7:7). Faith was expressed by trusting that God would act in His own time and way and in accordance with His unchanging character of love, mercy, grace, and willingness to forgive and restore!

In Lam. 3:25 another root for “wait” (BDB 875, KB 1082, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is used in parallel.

Biblical faith is in a Person. It is a personal relationship, not a creed (doctrines) or moral lifestyle (commandments) but a daily communication (prayer and reading His revelation). Faithful followers hope in Him because they know Him!

3:25 Notice the two criteria for YHWH’s positive response (i.e., good to those who. . . , cf. Ps. 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,29)

1. “wait for Him,” which is parallel to Lam. 3:24b, cf. Isa. 8:17; 25:9; 33:2; 40:31; the word denotes “wait eagerly” or even “crave”
2. “seek Him,” this VERB (BDB 205) is parallel to BDB 134, cf. Jer. 13:29. There is an element of sincere personal response necessary for the covenant relationship. Not all the descendants of Abraham seek YHWH. See full note online at Amos 5:4.

It is interesting to note that the word “good” (BDB 373, KB 370) is the first word of Lam. 3:25,26,27. “Good” is God’s purpose for creation (Gen. 1:31). This would invoke the “blessings” of Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30; Psalm 1:1.

The opposite of good (the current fallen nature of creation and humanity) is seen in Lam. 3:34-36. This is not the world God intended it to be. See John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*.

3:26 “the salvation of the LORD” See Special Topic: Salvation (OT).

▣ **“he waits silently”** There is no VERB in this verse. An ADJECTIVE (BDB 404) used as a VERB (“wait,” is found only here, although the VERB is used in Lam. 3:21,24, BDB 403, KB 407, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT).

3:27-30 There is a series of IMPERFECTS used as JUSSIVES which describe what a faithful follower should do under YHWH’s judgment.

1. bear the yoke in/from his youth (i.e., start early)
2. sit alone (imagery of being forsaken, cf. Lam. 1:1)

3. be silent (cf. Lam. 2:10)
4. put his mouth in the dust (cultural idiom of submission)
5. give his cheek to the smiter
6. be filled with reproach

3:29 “Perhaps there is hope” The unexpressed object is YHWH, which is unusual (cf. Job 5:16; 6:8; 11:18; Pro. 23:18). This hope relates to

1. the character of YHWH; see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT)
2. the repentance of His people; see Special Topic: Repentance in the OT

3:31 This is such a wonderful promise of restoration and renewal (cf. Ps. 77:7; 85:4-7; 103:8-14; Isa. 57:16). This is a basic characteristic of the unchanging, merciful God (i.e., limited punishment, Ps. 103:8-14)! He does discipline His children but it is for their restoration and good (cf. Deut. 8:5; Pro. 3:11; Heb. 12:5-13; Rev. 3:19).

YHWH’s anger over covenant disobedience is like a father’s anger over children doing dangerous activities (cf. Heb. 12:5-13). The goal of discipline is always restoration (except Hell). This verse has only one line of poetry. A line has been omitted. The MT is not the oldest OT manuscript. Even though there is a missing line, the thrust of the context provides the divine message for us. See a new book about how oral societies pass on their traditions: John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, which helps modern people understand the manuscript issues of the Hebrew Bible.

3:32 Lamentations 3:32 relates the truth of the preceding verse. YHWH will have

1. compassion – BDB 933; it comes from the word “womb” (i.e., tender loving care), cf. Ps. 78:38; Hos. 11:8-9
2. lovingkindness – BDB 338, cf. Jer. 9:24; 31:3; 33:11; Lam. 3:22

For both of these wonderful character aspects of God see Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (OT) and Special Topic: Lovingkindness (*hesed*).

▣ **“He causes grief”** This VERB (BDB 387, KB 385) is used several times in Lamentations (and only two other places, Job 19:2; Isa. 51:23).

1. Lam. 1:4 – Jerusalem is grieved because no one comes on feast days (*Niphal* PARTICIPLE)
2. Lam. 1:5 – YHWH Himself has caused Judah’s grief (*Hiphil* PERFECT)
3. Lam. 1:12 – same as #2
4. Lam. 3:22 – same as #2
5. Lam. 3:33 – YHWH does not grieve the sons of men from His heart (*Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*)

YHWH, Israel’s creator, parent, shepherd, and defender, has now become her adversary (i.e., reversal of Holy War!). This was not only shocking but devastating to the worldview of the descendants of Abraham and YHWH’s promises to David (cf. 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17). See Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs.

Thank God for Lam. 3:32b-c! YHWH’s judgment is time sensitive. It does not last forever (cf. Ps. 103:8-14; 130:5-8).

3:33 God’s judgment is the direct result of the rejection of His love. Judgment is designed to cause fallen mankind to repent and seek God. It is one aspect of parental discipline (cf. Heb. 12:5-11). It is for our benefit, not just an outburst of emotional release on God’s part (cf. Ezek. 18:23,32; 2 Pet. 3:9). It is purposeful and always in response to destructive rebellion.

This is such an important theological verse. It speaks directly to the merciful character of God (cf. Lam. 3:32). The context from Lam. 3:21-25,31 is positive, so it is difficult to see how Lam. 3:34-38 seems

to be negative. Robert Gordis, in his commentary, pp. 181-183, suggests that Lam. 3:34-38 is all parallel, which shows the things, “the Most High” will not do.

1. to crush prisoners
2. to pervert justice
3. to do harm to a good man

He bases #3 on an emendation by Ehrlich. See my following notes on another option for interpreting Lam. 3:37-38.

3:33-36 These verses describe

1. some of the sinful things that humans do to fellow humans (NJB, JPSOA)
 - a. Lam. 3:34 – violence, war, slavery
 - b. Lam. 3:35 – deprive justice (cf. Exod. 23:6,8; Deut. 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; Ps. 140:12; Amos 2:7)
 - c. Lam. 3:36 – deprive legal process (i.e., bribery, partiality), cf. Jer. 22:3
2. YHWH knows when His people are hurting and their covenant rights denied or violated (TEV)

All three (a, b, c) are INFINITIVES.

3:34 “land” This word (BDB 75, KB 90) has a wide semantic field and must be interpreted in context. See Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth (OT).

3:35 “Most High” This is the Hebrew title *Elyon* (BDB 751, cf. 3:38); see Special Topic: Names for Deity, B. This is a more general name for deity in the ANE, like *El*.

3:36-39 The NRSV and NJB make all these verses questions. The JPSOA makes Lam. 3:37-39a a question, as does the NASB of Lam. 3:37-39b. However, there is no textual marker in the MT.

3:36 The main VERB linked to the three INFINITIVES in Lam. 3:34-36a is “see” (NASB, “approve,” BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* PERFECT). God does see what is happening to Judah and He does not approve. He sent both Assyria and Babylon to judge His people, but they went too far and will themselves now be judged (cf. Lam. 3:59-66).

3:37-38 These verses address the theological issue of the sovereignty of YHWH.

1. He controls history
2. He brings cursing and blessing in response to disobedience or obedience to His covenant (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-29; 30:1,15,19; 36:1,15,19; Ps. 1:1)

In the OT all causality is attributed to YHWH in order to demonstrate His sovereignty (cf. 2 Chr. 20:6; Eccl. 7:14; Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13; 45:7; 54:16; Jer. 18:11; Lam. 3:33-38; Amos 3:6; 4:6-11).

The author is pleading with YHWH, the all-knowing God of compassion (Lam. 3:32,33), to act on Judah’s behalf. When He chooses to act, no one can thwart His will (cf. Jer. 31:28; 32:42; Zech. 8:14-17).

3:37 This may reflect Ps. 33:9,11a. God’s words and plans, not mankind’s, stand!

3:39-42 These verses are united in “awareness of sin, both personal and corporate,” see Brief Outline at the beginning of the chapter.

3:39 This is an affirmation of the sinfulness of all humans (cf. Rom. 3:9-18,23) because of the Fall. See Special Topic: The Fall (Genesis 3 in the NT).

▣ “offer complaint” This VERB (BDB 59, KB 72, *Hithpolel* IMPERFECT) is found only here and in Num. 11:1.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:40-66

- ⁴⁰Let us examine and probe our ways,
And let us return to the LORD.
- ⁴¹We lift up our heart and hands
Toward God in heaven;
- ⁴²We have transgressed and rebelled,
You have not pardoned.
- ⁴³You have covered *Yourself* with anger
And pursued us;
You have slain *and* have not spared.
- ⁴⁴You have covered *Yourself* with a cloud
So that no prayer can pass through.
- ⁴⁵You have made us mere offscouring and refuse
In the midst of the peoples.
- ⁴⁶All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.
- ⁴⁷Panic and pitfall have befallen us,
Devastation and destruction;
- ⁴⁸My eyes run down with streams of water
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.
- ⁴⁹My eyes pour down unceasingly,
Without stopping,
- ⁵⁰Until the LORD looks down
And sees from heaven.
- ⁵¹My eyes bring pain to my soul
Because of all the daughters of my city.
- ⁵²My enemies without cause
Hunted me down like a bird;
- ⁵³They have silenced me in the pit
And have placed a stone on me.
- ⁵⁴Waters flowed over my head;
I said, “I am cut off!”
- ⁵⁵I called on Your name, O LORD,
Out of the lowest pit.
- ⁵⁶You have heard my voice,
“Do not hide Your ear from my *prayer for* relief,
From my cry for help.”
- ⁵⁷You drew near when I called on You;
You said, “Do not fear!”
- ⁵⁸O Lord, You have pleaded my soul’s cause;
You have redeemed my life.

⁵⁹**O LORD, You have seen my oppression;
Judge my case.**
⁶⁰**You have seen all their vengeance,
All their schemes against me.**
⁶¹**You have heard their reproach, O LORD,
All their schemes against me.**
⁶²**The lips of my assailants and their whispering
Are against me all day long.**
⁶³**Look on their sitting and their rising;
I am their mocking song.**
⁶⁴**You will recompense them, O LORD,
According to the work of their hands.**
⁶⁵**You will give them hardness of heart,
Your curse will be on them.**
⁶⁶**You will pursue them in anger and destroy them
From under the heavens of the LORD!**

3:40-41 These verses offer three steps (COHORTATIVES) for how a covenant person (or people) can approach God.

1. let us examine our ways – lit. “search,” BDB 344, KB 341, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
 - a. humans – Ps. 119:59; Lam. 3:40; 2 Cor. 13:5
 - b. YHWH – Ps. 139:1,23-24; Pro. 20:27
2. let us probe our ways – BDB 350, KB 347, *Qal* COHORTATIVE; another word for “search” (i.e., self-examination)
3. let us return to the Lord – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* COHORTATIVE; this is a common word for repentance (see Special Topic: Repentance in the OT); here it denotes a turning back to God. Notice the following examples of its use:
 - a. Israel/Judah will not return – Isa. 9:13; 10:21; Jer. 3:7; Hos. 5:4; 7:10
 - b. if only she would – 1 Kgs. 8:33,48; 2 Chr. 30:9; Jer. 4:1; 7:12-14
 - c. she will return – 2 Chr. 15:4; Isa. 31:6-7; Hos. 3:5
 - d. a call from God – Jer. 7:22; Hos. 6:1; 14:1-2
4. let us lift up our hearts and hands toward God in heaven – BDB 669, KB 724, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense, cf. Ps. 25:1; 28:2; 86:4; 141:2; 143:8. This imagery is drawn from the heave offering where the worshiper or priest lifts the gift/offering with their hand to God. But here, they lift up themselves to God (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

3:41 “Toward God in heaven” This PREPOSITION (עַל, BDB 39) and the name for Deity (אֱלֹהִים, BDB 42) are spelled the same, just different vowel pointing.

▣ **“heart”** The MT has the PLURAL (לִבִּים, Peshitta, Vulgate), which fits better the author speaking on behalf of the nation. See Special Topic: Heart.

3:42 This is the author’s confession of sin on behalf of the nation (cf. Ps. 106:6; Jer. 14:20; Dan. 9:5).

1. transgressed – BDB 833; KB 981, *Qal* PERFECT; this is the only use of this VERB in Lamentations, but it is used in Jer. 2:8,29; 3:13; 33:8; the NOUN is used in Lam. 1:5,14,22 (and Jer. 5:6), cf. Neh. 9:26

2. rebelled – BDB 598, KB 632, *Qal* PERFECT; this is used of Israel/Judah in Num. 20:10; Ps. 78:8; Isa. 63:10; Jer. 4:17; 5:23; 6:28; Lam. 1:20

These activities and attitudes are what caused YHWH to take His own people out of the Promised Land (cf. Jer. 4:14-18; 5:20-29; Ezekiel 5; Hos. 13:15-16). He did this to the Canaanites and now to His people (cf. Gen. 15:12-31).

3:43-47 YHWH has cut Himself off from His covenant people.

1. not pardoned, Lam. 3:43, cf. Deut. 29:10-21; 2 Kgs. 24:1-7; Jer. 5:4-6
2. covered Himself with anger (KB 754 III), Lam. 3:43 (i.e., so no prayer can pass through, Lam. 3:44b)
3. pursued, Lam. 3:43
4. slain, Lam. 3:43
5. not spared, Lam. 3:43 (cf. Lam. 2:3,17,21)
6. hidden (lit. “covered,” cf. 3:43) Himself with a cloud, Lam. 3:44 (cf. Lam. 2:1)
7. does not hear their prayers, Lam. 3:44 (cf. 3:8)
8. made them offscouring (BDB 695, KB 749), found only here but related to the VERB “to scrape,” cf. Ezra 26:4; Lam. 3:45
9. made refuse (BDB 549, KB 539), found only here (possibly “rubbish”), Lam. 3:45
10. object of disgust (possibly related to Lam. 1:11 [despised]); hissing (cf. Lam. 2:15,16, see notes there), Lam. 3:46
11. Lam. 3:47 lists four things that have befallen the Judeans.
 - a. panic (BDB 809, see note below)
 - b. pitfall (BDB 809, see note below)
 - c. devastation (BDB 981, see note below)
 - d. destruction (BDB 991)

3:46 This is a gesture of contempt (cf. Job 16:10; Ps. 22:13; Lam. 2:16; 3:46).

3:47 “panic” The term (BDB 808) shows how the God who called Judah into being, protected her, fought for her, is now her enemy.

1. used of her opponents – Deut. 2:25; 11:25
2. part of the cursing and blessing sections of Deuteronomy 27-30, esp. Deut. 28:67
3. became a reality – Lam. 3:47; Jer. 30:5

▣ **“pit”** This term (BDB 809, a sound word play on the word above) denotes an animal trap.

“Panic” and “pitfall” were used by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as word play proverbs of God’s judgment (cf. Isa. 24:17-18; Jer. 48:42-43).

▣ **“devastation”** This rare term (BDB 981, KB 1381) is found only here. It may mean “the sound of battle.” There is another obvious sound play between “devastation” and “destruction.”

▣ **“destruction”** This term (BDB 991, KB 1405, #4) possibly means “collapse” or “crush,” cf. Jer. 4:17; 50:23; Lam. 3:48; 4:10. In Lam. 2:13 it may refer to sea waves “breaking” on the shore.

3:48-51 These verses (though involving both the Hebrew consonants *Pe* and *Ain*) are linked by the imagery of sight and weeping.

1. my eyes, Lam. 3:48 (the author’s weeping), cf. Lam. 1:2,16; 2:11,18-19
2. my eyes, Lam. 3:49 (cf. Lam. 1:2,16; 2:11,18-19)
3. until the LORD looks down, Lam. 3:50 (i.e., takes notice, cf. Lam. 1:9,11,12,20; 2:20; 3:63)

4. my eyes, Lam. 3:51 (the author's weeping)

3:50 This is anthropomorphic language; see Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

3:51 This is a difficult verse to understand. The TEV catches the thought, "my heart is grieved when I see what has happened to the women of the city."

1. became involved in fertility worship
2. sexually violated by invaders
3. sold into slavery by Babylonian conquerors

3:53-54 These verses (i.e., the Hebrew consonant *Zade*) give the reasons for the author's distress and grief.

1. his (corporate sense) enemies have hunted him down (intensive form, INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and PERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 844, KB 1010)
2. they have buried him (or cast Judah into a pit, cf. Lam. 3:55)
 - a. stoned him (Peshitta, NRSV, JPSOA)
 - b. placed a stone ("boulder," REB) over the opening (MT, LXX, NASB, TEV, NJB)
3. they drowned Judah and he died (lit. "cut off," cf. Ps. 69:1-2; 88:5-6; Isa. 53:8)

3:53 "silenced" This VERB (BDB 856, KB 1035, *Qal* PERFECT) is literally "put to an end" (LXX has "put to death"; JPSOA has "they have ended my life").



NASB, LXX	"placed"
NKJV	"threw"
NRSV	"hurled"
NJB, REB	"closed"
JPSOA, Peshitta	"cast"

This VERB (BDB 392, KB 389, *Piel* IMPERFECT with *waw*) occurs only three times in the OT.

1. Jer. 50:14, of shooting arrows at Babylon
2. Lam. 3:54
 - a. placing a stone over a cistern
 - b. stoning someone thrown into a pit
3. Zech. 1:21, of destroying the "horns" (power) of post-exilic Judah's surrounding national enemies

3:54 "Waters flowed over my head" This is imagery for

1. death and *Sheol* (cf. 2 Sam. 22:5-6; Ps. 18:4-5; 89:1-2,14-15; Jonah 2:5-6); see Special Topic: Waters
2. distress (cf. Job 27:20; Ps. 42:7; 66:12; 88:7; 124:4-5; Isa. 43:2)

3:55-57 This is the Hebrew letter *Qoph*. This set of poetic lines changes the discussion from YHWH's judgment to a plea for His mercy. The covenant nation turns to their covenant God.

1. "I called on Your name, O YHWH" – Lam. 3:55; see Special Topic: "The Name" of YHWH (OT) and Special Topic: Call on the Name
2. "Out of the lowest pit" – Lam. 3:55, BDB 92 and 1066, which refers to *Sheol* (i.e., Ps. 28:1; 30:4; 143:7; Isa. 38:18; Ezek. 26:20; 32:25,29,30)
3. "You have heard my voice" – Lam. 3:56 (the NOUN in Lam. 3:56c, "cry," [BDB 926, NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1071, #3]) means an appeal for deliverance from *Sheol*.

4. “You have drawn near and said, ‘Do not fear.’” – Lam. 3:57, cf. Deut. 4:7; Ps. 34:18; 119:151; 145:18; His presence removes all fear; see Special Topic: Fear

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1598, suggests these PERFECT VERBS are used as IMPERATIVES OF REQUEST for YHWH’s future actions, instead of the normal function of the PERFECT TENSE as past action. This fits the context better.

3:59-60 These verses are the letter *Resh*. They have a legal connotation of YHWH’s actions in court (i.e., justice in court).

1. “You pleaded my case” (i.e., Judah), Lam. 3:58, cf. Jer. 50:34; 51:36; Mic. 7:9
2. “You have redeemed my life,” Lam. 3:58; it is used here in the sense of saved, similar to OT term, salvation; see Special Topic: Ransom/Redeem and Special Topic: Salvation (OT)
3. “Judge my case,” Lam. 3:59 – BDB 1047, KB 1627, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, a prayer request, cf. Ps. 9:4; 26:1; 35:24; 43:1
4. the evidence is clear to men and to God, Lam. 3:60 (thought continues in Lam. 3:61-63, which is the Hebrew letter *Shin*)

3:60 Notice the inclusive language of Lam. 3:60-62 (i.e., 4 “alls,” BDB 481). YHWH has seen His people’s oppression.

1. all the enemy’s vengeance, Lam. 3:60
2. all their schemes, Lam. 3:60b, 61b
3. their whispering all day long, Lam. 3:62

3:63 “their sitting and rising” This imagery describes YHWH’s complete and full knowledge of the invaders’ lives. This imagery is also found in Deut. 6:7; 11:19; and Ps. 139:3; Isa. 37:28. In Job 14:16; 31:4, people claim God does not see, but He surely does. Our lives are an open book to the Creator God, who is above time and space!

▣ **“I am their mocking song”** This NOUN (BDB 618) occurs only here, but is related to a different form of the same root in Lam. 3:14.

3:64-66 The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet is *Taw*. It expresses the author’s desire that YHWH will judge the Babylonians in the same way He judged Judah.

1. “according to the work of their hands,” Lam. 3:64, see full note online at Jer. 17:10; 32:19
2. “harden their hearts,” Lam. 3:65; this NOUN (BDB 171) is found only here; it is related to “shield” and means a covering or hard shell around the heart. The Arabic root may mean “make them mad or confused.”
3. “curse them,” Lam. 3:65
4. “pursue them in anger,” Lam. 3:66
5. “totally destroy them,” Lam. 3:66

3:66 “The heavens of the LORD!” This phrase is found only here. The Peshitta has “under Your heavens, O LORD”; LXX has “beneath the sky, O LORD.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is this lament different from the others in Lamentations?
2. Did the Judeans see the source of their problems as other ANE powers or YHWH? Why?
3. Is this lament about Jeremiah or Judah?
4. Why is Lam. 3:21-24 called the theological heart of the whole book?
5. What experience is Lam. 3:25-30 referring to? How is there hope? (3:31)
6. Explain what Lam. 3:32 means.
7. Does Lam. 3:34-36 refer to human or Divine action?
8. Why is Lam. 3:42 crucial to the book of Lamentations?
9. Describe what the author wants YHWH to do to Judah's invaders.

LAMENTATIONS 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Distress of the Siege Described	The Degradation of Zion	The Horrors of the Siege and Sack of Jerusalem	Jerusalem After Its Fall	Fourth Lamentation
4:1-22 (1-22)	4:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	4:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	4:1-22 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22)	4:1 <i>Aleph</i> 4:2 <i>Bet</i> 4:3 <i>Gimel</i> 4:4 <i>Dalet</i> 4:5 <i>He</i> 4:6 <i>Waw</i> 4:7 <i>Zain</i> 4:8 <i>Het</i> 4:9 <i>Tet</i> 4:10 <i>Yod</i> 4:11 <i>Kaph</i> 4:12 <i>Lamed</i> 4:13 <i>Mem</i> 4:14 <i>Nun</i> 4:15 <i>Samek</i> 4:16 <i>Pe</i> 4:17 <i>Ain</i> 4:18 <i>Zade</i> 4:19 <i>Qoph</i> 4:20 <i>Resh</i> 4:21 <i>Shin</i> 4:22 <i>Taw</i>

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-22

- ¹How dark the gold has become,
How the pure gold has changed!
The sacred stones are poured out
At the corner of every street.
- ²The precious sons of Zion,
Weighed against fine gold,
How they are regarded as earthen jars,
The work of a potter's hands!
- ³Even jackals offer the breast,
They nurse their young;
But the daughter of my people has become cruel
Like ostriches in the wilderness.
- ⁴The tongue of the infant cleaves
To the roof of its mouth because of thirst;
The little ones ask for bread,
But no one breaks it for them.

⁵Those who ate delicacies
 Are desolate in the streets;
 Those reared in purple
 Embrace ash pits.

⁶For the iniquity of the daughter of my people
 Is greater than the sin of Sodom,
 Which was overthrown as in a moment,
 And no hands were turned toward her.

⁷Her consecrated ones were purer than snow,
 They were whiter than milk;
 They were more ruddy *in* body than corals,
 Their polishing *was* like lapis lazuli.

⁸Their appearance is blacker than soot,
 They are not recognized in the streets;
 Their skin is shriveled on their bones,
 It is withered, it has become like wood.

⁹Better are those slain with the sword
 Than those slain with hunger;
 For they pine away, being stricken
 For lack of the fruits of the field.

¹⁰The hands of compassionate women
 Boiled their own children;
 They became food for them
 Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

¹¹The LORD has accomplished His wrath,
 He has poured out His fierce anger;
 And He has kindled a fire in Zion
 Which has consumed its foundations.

¹²The kings of the earth did not believe,
 Nor *did* any of the inhabitants of the world,
 That the adversary and the enemy
 Could enter the gates of Jerusalem.

¹³Because of the sins of her prophets
 And the iniquities of her priests,
 Who have shed in her midst
 The blood of the righteous;

¹⁴They wandered, blind, in the streets;
 They were defiled with blood
 So that no one could touch their garments.

¹⁵“Depart! Unclean!” they cried of themselves.
 “Depart, depart, do not touch!”
 So they fled and wandered;

Men among the nations said,

“They shall not continue to dwell *with us*.”

¹⁶The presence of the LORD has scattered them,

He will not continue to regard them;

They did not honor the priests,

They did not favor the elders.

¹⁷Yet our eyes failed,

***Looking* for help was useless;**

In our watching we have watched

For a nation that could not save.

¹⁸They hunted our steps

So that we could not walk in our streets;

Our end drew near,

Our days were finished

For our end had come.

¹⁹Our pursuers were swifter

Than the eagles of the sky;

They chased us on the mountains,

They waited in ambush for us in the wilderness.

²⁰The breath of our nostrils, the LORD’s anointed,

Was captured in their pits,

Of whom we had said, “Under his shadow

We shall live among the nations.”

²¹Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,

Who dwells in the land of Uz;

***But* the cup will come around to you as well,**

You will become drunk and make yourself naked.

²²*The punishment* of your iniquity has been completed, O daughter of Zion;

He will exile you no longer.

***But* He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom;**

He will expose your sins!

4:1 “How” This is the same exclamatory term (BDB 32) that starts the lament in chapters 1 and 2 (cf. Isa. 14:4,12), usually translated, “Alas” (JPSOA, NET Bible).

▣ **“dark”** This is imagery of gold losing its value compared to the value of the covenant people of Judah (cf. Lam. 4:2a). AB, p. 78, suggests an emendation to “despised.” Judah’s sin and rebellion have tarnished her glory and value.

▣ **“the sacred stones”** This may refer to the twelve stones on the breastplate (see Special Topic: Breastplate of the High Priest) of the High Priest. Here it would refer to Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, who were part of the southern kingdom of Judah.

The JPSOA translation suggests in a footnote an emendation from “sacred” (BDB 871) to “precious” (BDB 429). The gold would still be from the Temple but the change would parallel Lam. 4:2a.

It is even possible that the imagery comes from Zech. 9:16, where the covenant people are described as the jewels in YHWH's royal crown (cf. Isa. 62:3).

4:2 “sons of Zion” This refers to the population of Jerusalem. They are the “sacred stones” of Lam. 4:1 because of Jerusalem's association with the Temple. They are worth their weight in gold (BDB 698, KB 756, *Pual* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE).

▣ **“earthen jars”** What a contrast! The precious ones are the easily broken and discarded ones. This imagery may suggest

1. the violent fall of Jerusalem
2. God's part (i.e., the Divine potter, cf. Isa. 48:9; Jeremiah 18) in the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple

4:3

NASB, NKJV,
NRSV, NJB,
JPSOA

“jackals”

TEV

“a wolf”

REB

“whales”

LXX

“dragons”

The MT has תנינ (BDB 1072), which means

1. serpent – Deut. 32:33; Ps. 91:13
2. dragon – Neh. 2:13; Jer. 51:34
3. sea monster – Gen. 1:21; Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; 148:7; Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2; see Special Topic: Leviathan

The Masoretic scholars suggested תנ (BDB 1072), cf. Job 30:29; Ps. 44:19; Isa. 13:22; 43:20; Jer. 9:11; 10:22; 49:33; 51:37; Mic. 1:8; Mal. 1:3.

The UBS Text Project gives “jackals” an “A” rating (very high probability), p. 350.

▣ **“the daughter of my people”** The MT has the SINGULAR “daughter” (BDB 123) but the Targums, LXX, and Peshitta change it to the PLURAL (REB).

1. SINGULAR – the city of Jerusalem seen as women (collective)
2. PLURAL – refers to all the mothers in Jerusalem

▣ **“cruel like ostriches”** Ostriches (*Qere*, BDB 419, LXX and Peshitta) were an ANE proverb of careless parents (cf. Job 39:13-18). Both jackals and ostriches were desert animals connected to abandoned, destroyed ruins. Their presence was seen as the presence of the demonic (cf. Isa. 13:21-22; 34:13-15; Rev. 18:2). See Special Topic: The Demonic in the OT.

It is possible that “ostrich” could be “eagle-owl.” See NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 489.

4:5 This verse addresses the privileged and wealthy people of Jerusalem.

1. they ate delicacies (BDB 726, cf. Gen. 49:20)
2. they dressed in purple (BDB 1068)

But now they scavenge (lit. “embrace,” BDB 287, KB 287, *Piel* PERFECT) in the trash heaps (BDB 1046, cf. Job 2:8; Ps. 113:7; at a gate in Jerusalem in Neh. 2:13; 3:13,14; 12:31) like everyone else!

For “desolate” see notes at Lam. 1:13,16; 3:11.

4:6

NASB

“iniquity”

NKJV, JPSOA footnote	“punishment of the iniquity”
NRSV	“chastisement”
TEV	“have been punished”
NJB	“wickedness”
LXX	“lawlessness”
JPSOA	“guilt”
REB	“penalty inflicted”

The MT has a comparison of the divine punishment brought on Sodom (cf. Gen. 19:1-11,27-29; Deut. 32:32; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:44-59) and the punishment brought on Judah (cf. 2 Kings 25; 2 Chr. 36:9-21).

This punishment was greater because the level of the knowledge of YHWH (and His will) was greater (i.e., Rom. 9:4).

▣ **“and no hands were turned toward her”** The MT is difficult here and might mean

1. JB, REB, “no time to wring his hands”
2. NRSV, JB, JPSOA, “without a hand being laid on it”
3. TEV, “which met a sudden downfall at the hands of God”
4. NKJV, NET, “with no hand to help her”

The idea is that Sodom fell in a supernatural/natural event initiated by YHWH so quickly that even the Sodomites did not have time to fear (cf. JB, REV). But Jerusalem fell by the hands of the Babylonians (at YHWH’s initiation).

4:7-9 There is a contrast between the healthy Jerusalemites in Lam. 4:7 and the hungry, emaciated ones in Lam. 4:8.

The conclusion is drawn in Lam 4:9 that a quick death in the invasion (or final assault) is better than the slow death of hunger and disease in a besieged city.

4:7

NASB	“consecrated ones”
NKJV, LXX,	
Peshitta	“Nazirites”
NRSV, TEV,	
NET	“princes”
NJB	“young people”
JPSOA	“elect”
REB	“crowned princes”

The MT has “consecrated one” (BDB 634).

1. Nazirite – Numbers 6; Jdgs. 13:5,7; 16:17
2. prince, ruler – Gen. 49:26; Deut. 33:16
3. NJB comes from a change of roots (BDB 654 II: boy, lad, youth, cf. Lam. 2:21; Deut. 28:50; Ps. 148:12; Jer. 1:6,7)

▣

NASB	“polishing”
NRSV	“hair”
NJB	“hue”
REB	“limbs”
NET	“appearance”
LXX	“branch”

The problem comes because the Hebrew root is uncertain.

1. stem, trunk – עֵזָב, BDB 160
2. cut, polish – הִרְזָג, BDB 160
3. cut, divide – רָזַב, BDB 160
4. NRSV follows ANE parallels of putting lapis lazuli in the beard or hair of statues

There are so many contrasts in this lament between verses (antithetical parallelism). Note the contrast between Lam. 4:7 and 8.

It is obvious that Lam. 4:7 is describing handsome, healthy, viral, young men (see Song of Songs 5:11-16).

4:9 There are obviously two kinds of death being contrasted.

1. a slow death by starvation – the VERB (BDB 264, KB 266, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to flow,” or “to gush”; only here is it translated “pine away.” Some scholars suggest an emendation to “feed” (BDB 266).
2. a fast death by the sword – the VERB (BDB 201, KB 230, *Pual* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE, NASB, “slain”) means “to be pierced.” The VERB should be translated to reflect which VERB goes with which death.

4:10 This describes the horrible nature of siege warfare in the ANE. The people of besieged Jerusalem ate their children (cf. Lam. 2:20; 2 Kgs. 6:26-29; Jer. 19:9). This was part of YHWH’s “cursing and blessing” predictions about disobedience to His covenant (cf. Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53-57).

▣ **“compassionate women”** This ADJECTIVE is found only here. This root is used of God in Lam. 3:22. These were not bad, mean mothers who ate their children, but starving mothers who could no longer nurse, thus the babies died.

▣ **“food”** The MT has בָּרָה, which is a *Piel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT (BDB 136, KB 154). It means “devouring” and is found only here in *Piel*. Most English translations change this to the root וָרָבָה (BDB 136), which means “food” (cf. Ps. 69:21) and is found only there (NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 739, “a food ration”).

4:11 The PERFECT VERBS of lines a and b foreshadow Lam. 4:22a-b. YHWH did (1) fully punish and (2) not spare (cf. Lam. 2:2,12,21; Ezek. 7:2-9), but (3) His punishment was limited (cf. Lam. 3:31-33; Ps. 103:8-14).

▣ **“fire”** See Special Topic: Fire.

4:12 “inhabitants” This VERB (BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) means “to sit,” “to remain,” or “to dwell.” Most translations choose the third option and translate “inhabitants,” but because it can mean “to sit” (i.e., sit on a throne), it could mean “rulers,” which parallels “kings” better (cf. AB, p. 82,76).

So the interpretive question, is verse 12

1. synonymous parallelism?
2. antithetical parallelism?

See Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry.

▣ **“the earth. . .the world”** This is hyperbolic language for the surrounding nations of the ANE. These two words also appear parallel in Jer. 10:12.

▣ **“did not believe”** This is the usual word for “faith” (see Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT), but here it denotes “considering something true” (cf. Ps. 116:10). The surrounding

nations had heard Israel's/Judah's claim of Divine protection (cf. Deut. 23:14; Ps. 46:5; 48:3,4-8; Ezek. 43:7,9; Joel 2:27).

4:13-16 These verses must be interpreted together because Lam. 4:13 starts with “because” and the PRONOUN “they” is ambiguous.

1. the sin and judgment of the religious leaders (i.e., priests and prophets, cf. Lam. 2:14; Jer. 5:31; 6:13-15; 23:11-12; 26:7-15; Ezek. 22:26,28, TEV)
2. the judgment on the people of Judah because of the sins of the religious leaders (cf. Lam. 4:16)

4:13 “prophets” See special Topic: Prophecy (OT) and Special Topic: Apostasy (*aphistēmi*).

4:14 “They wandered, blind in the streets” This may reflect the “cursing” for disobedience in Deut. 28:28-29; Isa. 59:10; Zeph. 1:17.

4:15 There are several commands.

1. depart – BDB 693, KB 747, *Qal* IMPERATIVE (three times)
2. do not touch – BDB 619, KB 668, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense

This imagery is connected to Lam. 4:14c. This is leper imagery (cf. Lev. 13:45). Their treatment of the poor and powerless in court had made them unclean like murderers (cf. Zeph. 3:1). These judged spiritual lepers fled and wandered among the surrounding nations but no one wanted them.

▣ **“fled and wandered”** The first VERB (BDB 663, KB 715, *Qal* PERFECT) occurs only here. The JPSOA takes it as another root for “wander.” Most translations connect it to the root “plumage” (BDB 663), therefore, “fly.”

The second VERB (BDB 631, KB 681, *Qal* PERFECT) in the *Qal* stem means “to totter” or “to faint.” The *Hiphil* root can mean “to wander aimlessly” (cf. Num. 32:13; 2 Sam. 15:20; Ps. 59:11; 109:10).

4:16 This is either

1. a continuation of the bad treatment the Judean religious leaders experienced (cf. Lam. 4:16 c-d)
2. dealing with the exile of the entire nation of Judah (cf. Deut. 28:49-50)

▣ **“the presence of the LORD”** This is literally “the face of,” which denotes the personal presence of YHWH (cf. Exod. 33:14,15; Lev. 20:3,6; 26:17; Deut. 4:37; Ps. 34:16; 80:16; Jer. 21:10; 44:11; Lam. 3:35; Ezek. 14:8), here for judgment (i.e., exile, lit. “scattered them,” BDB 323, KB 322, *Piel* PERFECT).

The Targums (Aramaic translation and commentaries), which are nervous about anthropomorphisms, change “face” to “anger.”

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, TEV,

REB

“has scattered”

NJB

“destroyed”

JPSOA

“turned away from”

LXX

“is their portion”

The MT has the VERB (BDB 323, KB 322, *Piel* PERFECT) which means “to divide” or “to apportion,” like the Promised Land to the tribes (cf. Deut 4:19; Jos. 14:5; 22:9; Neh. 9:22), but it means “scatter.” The LXX translation catches the meaning of the verbal root in “their portion.” This, then, would be a way of asserting YHWH as Judah's covenant Deity. The rest of the verse would assert that YHWH showed no

favoritism to the priests or elders (“lift the face” is an idiom of partiality). See *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 6, pp. 33-34.

The other way to interpret (Robert Gordis, p. 193) is to see Lam. 4:16 split, with lines a-b describing YHWH’s disfavor of Judah but lines c-d referring to the invaders’ lack of respect for Judah’s leaders (i.e., priests and elders).

▣ **“elders”** See Special Topic: Elder.

4:17 “a nation that could not save” This may refer to Isa. 36:6-10; Jeremiah 37; Ezekiel 29, where Egypt brought a temporary respite from the siege of Jerusalem.

4:18 This may refer to the breach of the city’s defenses. Anyone in the street, in the general area of the breach, was slain as a possible combatant.

▣ **“our days were finished”** The VERB (BDB 569, KB 583, *Qal* PERFECT) means “to be full.” This is an idiom for the end of life (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Chr. 17:11).

4:19 “Our pursuers were swifter

Than the eagles of the sky” This imagery of a fast moving Babylonian invading army is also found in Isa. 5:26-28; Jer. 4:13; 48:40; Ezek. 17:3; Hab. 1:8.

4:20 “the breath of our nostrils” This is imagery for the Davidic King Zedekiah, cf. 2 Kgs. 25:4-7; Jer. 39:4-7; 52:7-11). He was captured in the “wilderness” (cf. Lam. 4:19d).

For “breath” (*ruah*, BDB 924) see Special Topic: Spirit in the Bible.

▣ **“the LORD’S anointed”** This is the Judean Davidic King, Zedekiah. See Special Topic: Anointing in the Bible.

▣ **“pits”** This NOUN (BDB 1605) occurs only here and Ps. 107:20, where it is translated by NASB as “destruction.”

The VERB “captured” (BDB 539, KB 530, *Niphal* PERFECT) is often used of animal traps.

▣ **“under his shadow”** This imagery is often used of YHWH (see Special Topic: Shadow As a Metaphor for Protection and Care), but here it is parallel to “the Lord’s anointed,” which refers to Zedekiah. He was to be the protector of God’s people (see similar imagery for Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:12).

4:21 Notice the two *Qal* IMPERATIVES “rejoice” and “be glad,” which are used sarcastically because Edom is about to be judged for participating in the invasion and looting of Judea (cf. Ps. 137:7; Ezekiel 25; Obad. vv. 10-15; see Special Topic: Edom and Israel).

▣ **“the cup”** This is an idiom of judgment (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17,22; Jer. 25:15-16,27-28; Ezek. 23:31-34). For the positive usage, see notes on Ps. 11:6 online.

Often “the cup” is associated with drunkenness and folly (here, “nakedness,” cf. Lam. 4:22d).

▣ **“drunk”** See Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism.

4:22a-b What great news! Judah’s punishment is complete and its consequences are coming to an end (cf. Isa. 40:1-2; Jer. 16:14-15; 33:7-8)!

This is another contrast, so common in this lament.

▣ “He will punish your iniquity. . .” See Jeremiah 49:7-22.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What or who are the sacred stones?
2. Explain Lam. 4:6 in your own words.
3. Is Lam. 4:12 hyperbolic or proverbial?
4. Who does this lament say is responsible for Judah’s fall?
5. About whom is Lam. 4:15 talking?
6. Who is the “He” and “they” of Lam. 4:16?
7. To what nation is Lam. 4:17 referring?
8. To whom is Lam. 4:20 referring?
9. Why is Lam 4:22a-b so theologically significant?

LAMENTATIONS 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
A Prayer for Mercy	A Prayer for Restoration	A Community Psalm of Lament and Petition for Restoration	A Prayer for Mercy	Fifth Lamentation
5:1-22 (1-22)	5:1-9 (1-3)	5:1-22 (1-18)	5:1-22 (1)	5:1-22 (1)
	(4-6)		(2)	(2)
	(7-9)		(3)	(3)
	5:10-18 (10-14)		(4)	(4)
	(15-18)		(5)	(5)
	5:19-22 (19-22)		(6)	(6)
			(7)	(7)
			(8)	(8)
			(9)	(9)
			(10)	(10)
			(11)	(11)
			(12)	(12)
			(13)	(13)
			(14)	(14)
			(15)	(15)
			(16)	(16)
			(17)	(17)
			(18)	(18)
			(19)	(19)
			(20)	(20)
			(21)	(21)
			(22)	(22)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is not an acrostic as
 1. chapters 1; 2; 4, where every verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (i.e., slight variation)
 2. chapter 3, where every three verses start with the next 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet
 3. chapter 5 is not an acrostic but a prayer started with a *Qal* IMPERATIVE, “remember,” as Lam. 3:19; it is a corporate prayer for forgiveness and restoration
- B. The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple were devastating to the covenant people who built their hopes on YHWH’s promises, but failed to see the crucial aspect of obedience (i.e., conditional covenant) to the Mosaic Covenant. See Special Topic: Covenant and Special Topic: Covenant Promises to the Patriarchs and Special Topic: Covenant Requirements of Israel.
 Even the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Samuel 7; 1 chronicles 17), which promised discipline but not total rejection, seemed to be annulled because of the loss of the king and the ark.
- C. The author of Lamentations 5 was one of the few Judeans, like Jeremiah, who was not exiled in 586 B.C. but remained in Judah. These few survivors had very hard lives of poverty, famine, and lack of security (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:14; 25:12; Jer. 39:10).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-22

- ¹Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
Look, and see our reproach!
- ²Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
Our houses to aliens.
- ³We have become orphans without a father,
Our mothers are like widows.
- ⁴We have to pay for our drinking water,
Our wood comes *to us* at a price.
- ⁵Our pursuers are at our necks;
We are worn out, there is no rest for us.
- ⁶We have submitted to Egypt *and* Assyria to get enough bread.
- ⁷Our fathers sinned, *and* are no more;
It is we who have borne their iniquities.
- ⁸Slaves rule over us;
There is no one to deliver us from their hand.
- ⁹We get our bread at the risk of our lives
Because of the sword in the wilderness.
- ¹⁰Our skin has become as hot as an oven,
Because of the burning heat of famine.
- ¹¹They ravished the women in Zion,
The virgins in the cities of Judah.
- ¹²Princes were hung by their hands;
Elders were not respected.
- ¹³Young men worked at the grinding mill,
And youths stumbled under *loads* of wood.
- ¹⁴Elders are gone from the gate,
Young men from their music.
- ¹⁵The joy of our hearts has ceased;
Our dancing has been turned into mourning.
- ¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head;
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
- ¹⁷Because of this our heart is faint,
Because of these things our eyes are dim;
- ¹⁸Because of Mount Zion which lies desolate,
Foxes prowl in it.
- ¹⁹You, O LORD, rule forever;
Your throne is from generation to generation.
- ²⁰Why do You forget us forever?
Why do You forsake us so long?
- ²¹Restore us to You, O LORD, that we may be restored;
Renew our days as of old,

²²**Unless You have utterly rejected us
And are exceedingly angry with us.**

5:1 “Remember” This *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 269, KB 269, cf. Lam. 3:19) requests YHWH to take notice of the plight of His people. This word is a common element of ANE laments.

▣ **“LORD”** This is the special covenant name for Deity, YHWH. See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

▣ **“Look”** This is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE (BDB 613, KB 661, cf. Lam. 1:11; 2:20; 3:63), which pleads with YHWH to take notice of what His judgment has allowed to happen.

▣ **“see”** This is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 906, KB 1157, cf. Lam. 1:9,22,26; 2:20). It is the third emphatic request for YHWH to take notice (cf. Lam. 3:59-60).

▣ **“reproach”** This (BDB 359) is described well in Ps. 44:13-16.

5:2 “inheritance” This refers to the land of Canaan allotted to the tribes in Joshua 12-19. Notice how Moses emphasizes that Canaan is God’s gift and inheritance to Israel (cf. Deut. 4:38; 25:19; 26:1; Jer. 3:18; Amos 9:15; see full note online at Deut. 26:1).

5:2b-16 But notice what has taken place in YHWH’s anger.

1. The land has been given to non-Israelites (i.e., “strangers” and “aliens”), Lam. 5:2
2. The Judeans are like orphans (i.e., death of parents in invasions), Lam. 5:3
3. They are forced to buy
 - a. water, Lam. 5:4
 - b. fuel, Lam. 5:4
4. There is no home place (i.e., rest, cf. Neh. 9:36-37), Lam. 5:5
5. They beg for food from other nations. Lam. 5:6
6. They are ruled over by domineering slaves (i.e., Judean slaves paid by Babylon), Lam. 5:8
7. They are attacked by marauding bands of raiders, Lam. 5:9 (for alternatives see note)
8. They are experiencing famine. Lam. 5:10, cf. Lam. 4:8
9. Their women are being abused. Lam 5:11, cf. Isa. 13:16
10. Their tribal leaders are killed and disrespected. Lam 5:12, cf. Deut. 28:50
11. Their young men are worked to the point of collapse. Lam. 5:13 (for alternative see note)
12. They have no local court, no access to legal justice (or no law at all). Lam. 5:14
13. Their normal social and religious events are silenced. Lam 5:14b-15, cf. Isa. 24:7-11; Jer. 7:34
14. Their “crown” has fallen from their head (double word meaning of “crown,” BDB 742)
 - a. the king’s crown
 - b. festival wreath

5:3 This could refer to

1. parents killed in invasion
2. God as parent (i.e., Hos. 11:1-4)

5:4 The payment for these essentials was to

1. the one who provides them
2. the one who brings them

5:5 “at our necks” This is an ANE idiom of defeat (cf. Gen. 49:8; Josh. 10:24; 2 Sam. 22:38-39; Ps. 18:40). This very imagery is used in Deut. 28:48 (Deuteronomy 28 is the source of much of the imagery of Lamentations).

5:6

NASB	“submitted to”
NKJV, LXX	“given our hand to”
NRSV, NJB	“made a pact with”
TEV	“went begging to”
JPSOA	“hold out a hand to”
REB	“came to terms with”

The question is how to take the gesture.

1. a hand shake agreement (NRSV, NJB, REB)
2. a hand out for help (TEV, JPSOA)

In an invasion and takeover by Babylon, #1 seems impossible. Even #2 seems figurative, for why would a traditional enemy help a conquered people?

The very mention of “Assyria” shows the verse is imagery.

The imagery of a hand shake to seal a political ANE covenant is common (note 2 Kgs. 10:15; 2 Chr. 30:8; Ezra 10:19; Ezek. 17:18).

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1601, and the Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 6, p. 36, both suggest the two nations stand for east and west (i.e., anyone, anywhere). No one helped (cf. Jer. 2:18).

5:7 This verse sees the current crisis and judgment as the fault of past generations (cf. Jer. 14:20). This is true but must be supplemented by

1. the sins of priest and prophet, Lam. 2:14; 4:13; Jer. 6:13; 8:10; 14:14-16; 23:9-10
2. the current generation’s continuing sins, Lam. 3:42; 5:16a; Jer. 16:12

Notice how past sins cannot be used as an excuse for current problems (cf. Jer. 31:29-31; Ezekiel 18).



NASB	“It is we who. . .”
NKJV	“But we. . .”
NRSV, NJB	“we. . .”
JPSOA	“and we. . .”

The MT is reflected in NRSV and NJB, but the Masoretic scholars suggest (*Qere*) the addition of a *waw*, which would make the second line a contrast, “But we. . .” (NKJV, Targums, Peshitta, Vulgate).

5:8 This verse addresses the abuse caused by Babylonian-appointed Judean slave governmental officials (i.e., 2 Kgs. 25:24; Neh. 2:10,19; 5:15).

5:9 “our lives” This is the word *nephesh* (BDB 659). See full note online at Ezek. 18:4.

▣ **“the sword in the wilderness”** Robert Gordis, p. 195, suggests that the word “sword” (BDB 352) should be repointed (change vowels, not consonants) to “heat” (BDB 151 I, cf. Gen. 31:40; Isa. 4:6; Jer. 36:30). The lack of bread was not because of marauding Bedouins but lack of rain (cf. Deut. 28:22). The last line of Lam. 5:9 would foreshadow Lam. 4:10.

5:12 “princes” These leaders are also mentioned in Lam. 1:6; 2:2,9; 4:16; see notes there. Exactly what “hanging by the hands” refers to is uncertain (see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 294-297).

▣ **“elders”** See Special Topic: Elder.

5:13 This may refer to several different activities.

1. young men doing a slave woman’s work (cf. Exod. 11:5; Jdgs. 16:21)
2. young men carrying a grinding stone (rather unusual)
3. young men carrying the grain to the place where it is ground
4. children forced to hard labor (Lam. 5:13b)

5:17-18 Notice the parallelism in NASB, “because” (BDB 260, only in 5:17) referring to Lam. 5:2-16

1. their heart is faint, cf. Lam. 2:11
2. their eyes are dim, cf. Lam. 2:11
3. Mt. Zion lies desolate, Lam. 5:18

5:18 “Foxes prowl in it” The presence of “foxes” (or “jackals,” BDB 1043, possibly related to Lam. 4:3, BDB 1072) may be a way of describing not only a ruined city/place, but the presence of evil (cf. Isa. 13:19-22; 34:11-15; Zeph. 2:14).

▣ **“Zion”** See Special Topic: Zion.

5:19 This verse is asserting YHWH’s sovereignty and eternal reign. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (NT).

The LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate start the verse with “But,” which is not found in the MT.

▣ **“rule forever”** This is literally “sit” (BDB 442, KB 444, *Qal* IMPERFECT). YHWH is the everlasting, universal King (cf. Ps. 45:6; 93:2; Heb. 1:8).

For “forever” see Special Topic: Forever (‘*olam*).

5:20 This is the theological confusion of unconditional covenant vs. conditional covenant. Judah was totally surprised by YHWH’s judgment. But her hope was in the limited nature of God’s punishment (see Lam. 3:31; Ps. 103:8-14; Jer. 3:5,12; Mic. 7:18).

5:21 This verse starts out with two or three commands.

1. “Restore us to You” – BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE
2. NASB, “that we may be restored.” The MT has a *Qal* PERFECT of the VERB used in #1, but the Masoretic scholars suggest a *Qal* COHORTATIVE.
3. “Renew us to You” – BDB 293, KB 293, *Piel* IMPERATIVE

The theological question is

1. does God give repentance (cf. Ps. 85:4-7; Jer. 31:18-19; Acts 5:31; 11:18; Rom. 2:4)
2. is it part of human covenant requirement of faith and repentance (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21)

See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT and Special Topic: Repentance (NT), Special Topic: Faith, Believe, or Trust, and Special Topic: Election/Predestination and the Need for A Theological Balance.

5:22a The first line of this verse has an emphatic Hebrew grammatical form—an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and a PERFECT TENSE VERB of the same root (BDB 549, KB 540).

This shows the doubt of the author. Was God so angry that restoration was impossible or delayed? Isaiah 44:24-28 and 45:1-7 clearly show that YHWH will send Cyrus II to destroy Babylon and restore His people to be a part of Judah. The ultimate restoration will wait until Jesus!

Lamentations 5:22 starts with a CONJUNCTION (BDB 471) and a HYPOTHETICAL PARTICLE (BDB 49). This has been translated various ways.

1. NASB, NKJV, NRSV, NJB – “unless”
2. TEV, RSV – “or” (a question)
3. JPSOA – “for truly”
4. REB, KJV – “But”
5. NEB – “For if”
6. LXX, Peshitta, and some Hebrew MSS – omitted

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Lamentations 5 different from Lamentations 1-4?
2. Why are Egypt and Assyria mentioned in Lam. 5:6?
3. How are Lam. 5:7 and 16 related?
4. Explain Lam. 5:12a.
5. What is the implication of “foxes” in Jerusalem?
6. How are Lam. 5:20,22 related to 3:16?

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. It is named after the prophet.
- B. The name Habakkuk (BDB 287) is related to the similar Hebrew root “to caress” or “to embrace” (BDB 287).
- C. In the Septuagint, he is called “Hambakoum,” which is an Akkadian term that means:
 - 1. a vegetable flower
 - 2. a fruit tree
 - 3. vegetable

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book is part of the “latter prophets” (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).
- B. It is one of “the Twelve,” a grouping of minor prophets (*Baba Bathra* 14b)
 - 1. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, together they fit on one scroll.
 - 2. The number twelve may represent the twelve tribes or the symbolic number of organization. See Special Topic: The Number Twelve
 - 3. Their order reflects the traditional view of the book’s chronology.
- C. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah form a historical unit.

III. GENRE

- A. Hebrew Prophetic Poetry (see Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry)
- B. The first literary unit (Hab. 1:2-2:5) is a diatribe or a means of communicating truth through a dialogue. It is very unusual for a prophet to speak to God on behalf of the people. Usually prophets spoke for God to the people.
- C. The second literary unit is a series of “woes” (Hab. 2:6-20). This is reminiscent of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, which reflect the covenant woes for disobedience.
- D. The final literary unit (Habakkuk 3) is a psalm, probably used as liturgy.

IV. AUTHOR

- A. This prophet speaks with YHWH concerning Judah. All other prophets speak to the people for YHWH.
- B. This prophet fits into the same general period as Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, and Zephaniah. We call these men the Seventh Century Prophets.
- C. He is possibly a musician related to the Temple Choir because:

1. The use of the term *Shigionoth* in Hab. 3:1. The NASB footnote calls it a “highly emotional poetic form.” This is a musical term of unknown meaning, possibly a rest or crescendo.
2. the use of another possible musical term, *Selah*, in Hab. 3:3,9,13
3. use of the phrase, “for the choir director, on my stringed instruments” in Hab. 3:19

D. Surprisingly neither his father or geographical home is mentioned.

V. DATE (There have been two major theories about Habakkuk 1)

- A. The reign of Manasseh (687-642 B.C.). This is usually linked to Habakkuk’s place in “the Twelve” and the rise of the Chaldeans, Neo-Babylonian empire (cf. Hab. 1:6).
- B. The reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). This would put it in the period of Pharaoh-Neccho II’s sacking of the city and later, Nebuchadnezzar’s take-over of the entire area after his defeat of the remnant of the Assyrian army and the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.
- C. Pseudo-Epiphanius, in *Lives of the Prophets*, says that Habakkuk is from the tribe of Simeon. He fled Nebuchadnezzar II’s advance in 586 B.C. and returned after the fall of the city. He died two years before his return from exile. However, this source is late and unreliable.
- D. Habakkuk 2 seems to prophesy the fall of Babylon to Persia. The fall of Babylon was in 539 B.C. and the decree of Cyrus II to allow the Jewish exiles to return to Palestine was in 538 B.C.
- E. Habakkuk 3 has no specific historical setting but is a psalm of praise for YHWH’s deliverance.

VI. HISTORICAL SETTING – see VI. Historical Setting in my commentary on Jeremiah online: www.freebiblecommentary.org

VII. LITERARY UNITS

- A. The book falls into two major sections:
 1. chapters 1 and 2 – a dialogue between the prophet and God
 2. chapter 3 – a psalm of praise for God’s control of history
- B. The dialogue between God and His prophet, Hab. 1:2-2:20
 1. Habakkuk’s complaint against God’s slowness to punish Judah, Hab. 1:2-4
 2. God’s first answer, Hab. 1:5-11
 3. Habakkuk’s moral problem with God’s use of wicked Babylon, Hab. 1:12-2:1
 4. God’s second response, Hab. 2:2-5
 - a. God’s plan is sure, write it down, Hab. 2:20
 - 1) blessing on faith, Hab. 2:4, 14, 20
 - 2) judgment on evil, Hab. 2:5, 6-20
 - b. God’s people are responsible for covenant fidelity, Hab. 2:4-5 (3:16-19)
 - c. God will punish pagan aggression and godlessness, Hab. 2:6-20 (5 woes)
 - 1) Hab. 2:6-8, violent aggression
 - 2) Hab. 2:9-11, violent aggression
 - 3) Hab. 2:12-14, violent aggression
 - 4) Hab. 2:15-17, violent aggression
 - 5) Hab. 2:18-20, idolatry

- C. A psalm blessing for God's faithful acts of deliverance in the past and hope for deliverance in the future, Hab. 3:1-19
 - 1. God's past acts of deliverance expressed in highly poetic form, using metaphors from (Hab. 3:1-15):
 - a. the exodus
 - b. creation
 - c. the conquest
 - 2. the prophet's faith and patience in God's deliverance though there is no outward sign, (Hab. 2:4; 3:16-19)

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. This is a moral universe. Sin will be judged. Even God's chosen people are responsible for their acts (Gal. 6:7).
- B. Even in this fallen world God is still in control of events. He uses evil for His purposes, but it will also be judged!
- C. It is acceptable to question God. However, often it is God's presence, not rational answers, that satisfy (Job).
- D. This book is the source of Paul's famous theological theme "justification by faith" (cf. Hab. 2:4). Evil will destroy itself eventually. God's people must exercise faith in the midst of evil days! Faith must not be linked to current circumstances, Hab. 3:17-19.

HABAKKUK 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows LXX versing)
Chaldeans Used to Punish Judah		Title		Title
1:1	1:1 The Prophet's Question	1:1 A Dialogue in Two Cycles	1:1 Habakkuk Complains of Injustice	1:1 First Complaint of the Prophet; Lawlessness Prevails
1:2-4	1:2-4	1:2-4	1:2-4	1:2 1:3 1:4
	The LORD's Reply		The LORD's Reply	First Answer: The Chaldeans as Instrument of God's Justice
1:5-11	1:5-8 1:9-11	1:5-11	1:5-7 1:8 1:9-11	1:5-7 1:8 1:9 1:10 1:11
	The Prophet's Second Question (1:12-2:1)	(1:12-2:5)	Habakkuk Complains to the LORD Again	Second Complaint of the Prophet: The Tyranny of the Conqueror
1:12-17	1:12-14 1:15-17	1:12-14 1:15-17	1:12-13 1:14-16 1:17	1:12 1:13-15 1:16

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Notice the dialogue of Habakkuk 1.
 1. Habakkuk speaks to YHWH, Hab. 1:1-4
 2. YHWH responds, Hab. 1:5-11
 3. Habakkuk responds, Hab. 2:12-17
- B. There is a question concerning to what period and to whom Hab. 1:2-4 relate.
 1. unfaithful Judean society
 2. Judah under Babylonian dominance

- C. Judah is not invaded because of the weakness of YHWH but because of His Holiness. He sent Babylon (cf. Deut. 28:38-57; 2 Kgs. 24:1-7; Isa. 10:5-27; 41:2-4; 42:24-25; 44:28; 45:1-7; Jer. 5:14-19; 25:1-13; 27:6-22; 51:20-23; Amos 3:11).
- D. Habakkuk's address to YHWH is structured as rhetorical questions, Hab. 1:2,3,12,13 (twice), 14,17. How does a God of holiness and covenant promise:
1. not respond to the prayers of His people?
 2. allow the sins of Judah to continue?
 3. allow a godless, arrogant invader to judge His people?

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1

¹The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

1:1 “oracle” This term (BDB 672, KB 639) means “burden” or “load.” It denotes

1. a voice lifted to proclaim a divine message (i.e., Nah. 1:1; Mal. 1:1)
2. a message carried by someone to a recipient
3. a heaviness associated with a judgment message (i.e., Isa. 13:1; 15:1; 19:1; 22:1)

▣ **“the prophet”** See Special Topic: Prophecy (OT).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:2-4

²How long, O LORD, will I call for help,

And You will not hear?

I cry out to You, “Violence!”

Yet You do not save.

³Why do You make me see iniquity,

And cause *me* to look on wickedness?

Yes, destruction and violence are before me;

Strife exists and contention arises.

⁴Therefore the law is ignored

And justice is never upheld.

For the wicked surround the righteous;

Therefore justice comes out perverted.

1:2-4 The prophet addresses YHWH about the unfaithfulness of Judah to His covenant. Why has He not acted!

1:2-3 “How long. . .why” This begins Habakkuk's lament against God in the form of questions as to how God is manifesting Himself in history. We must remember that the fate of a nation was related to its national God. The injustice of the people of God in Habakkuk's day caused him to question the holiness and justice of God (cf. Job, Psalm 73; Jer. 12:1-4).

▣ **“How long”** This is literary imagery (cf. Ps. 13:1-2; Jer. 12:4), a prayer for God to act on behalf of His people.

1:2 “O LORD” This is just one of several names/titles for Israel’s God used in this chapter.

1. LORD, Hab. 1:1,12 – this is the covenant name for Israel’s Deity, YHWH; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D
2. God, Hab. 1:12 – This is the SINGULAR form of *Elohim*; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C
3. Holy One, Hab. 1:12 – See Special Topic: The Holy One
4. Rock – This title (BDB 849) was used of God in Deut. 32:15,18,30, and Ps. 18:1-2; 19:14; 2 Sam. 22:2ff; Ps. 78:35; Isa. 44:8). It speaks of (a) the strength, stability, and unchanging nature of the one true God or (b) God as a mighty, impregnable fortress.

▣ **“You will not hear”** YHWH is silent (cf. Hab. 1:13e,d; Ps. 28:1; 35:22; 39:12; 83:1; 109:1). This was the great fear of faithful Israelites. This was one of Job’s complaints! In times of distress, fallen humans feel God has abandoned them. This is where

1. a knowledge of Scripture
2. a review of history
3. a personal relationship with God

helps faithful followers overcome their feelings with biblical theology!

▣ **“save”** See Special Topic: Salvation (OT).

▣ Habakkuk 1:2-3 describes the sins of God’s covenant people. YHWH has made some promises and warnings (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) but it seems He has not acted on them (Hab. 1:4)!

Habakkuk 1:3-4 describes what is happening in Judean society in the seventh century, as Amos did in the eighth century B.C.

1. there is destruction, Hab. 1:3
2. there is violence, Hab. 1:3 (cf. Hab. 1:2,9; 2:8,17)
3. there is strife, Hab. 1:3
4. there is contention, Hab. 1:3
5. the law is ignored, Hab. 1:4
6. justice is not upheld, Hab. 1:4
7. the wicked surround the righteous, Hab. 1:4
8. justice is perverted, Hab. 1:4

All of these imply the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and powerful. Collectively, they speak of a corrupt court system.

Some scholars (JB) think that this is a description of Judah under the domination of Babylon, but I think it refers to faithless Judah before the invasion and exile.

1:4 “law” See Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation.



NASB	“ignored”
NKJV	“powerless”
NRSV, Peshitta	“becomes slack”
TEV	“weak and useless”
NJB	“loses its grip”

REB	“ineffective”
LXX	“has been dispersed”

The MT has the VERB (BDB 806, KB 916, *Qal* IMPERFECT), which means

1. Arabic – grow cold

2. MT – grow numb
3. later Hebrew – vanish

It is found in only three passages in *Qal* (one in *Niphal*, Gen. 38:8).

1. Gen. 45:26 – stunned (NASB)
2. Ps. 77:2 – without weariness (NASB)
3. here

Because of Judah’s flagrant covenant disobedience, God’s word, which was meant to bring peace, joy, and stability in society, was ineffective! We ignore it (and Him) at our own peril!

▣ **“justice”** Justice (BDB 1048, cf. Exod. 23:6; Deut. 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; 1 Sam. 8:3; Pro. 17:23; Lam. 3:35; and Amos 2:7) is YHWH’s will for everyone in Israelite society because it reflects His character and treatment of them (cf. Deut. 32:4).

The words “justice” in Deut. 16:20 and “righteousness” (see Special Topic: Righteousness) in Deut. 16:18 are from the same Hebrew root (BDB 841), which speaks of a standard. A judge ruled according to the standard which was the revealed will of God (“justice, *and only* justice”). Leaders (local and priestly judges) were to model the mercy, yet fairness, of YHWH (cf. Exod. 23:6-8).

▣ **“the wicked”** Here in Hab. 1:4 this refers to disobedient Judeans, while in Hab. 1:13 the same word (BDB 957) refers to the Babylonian invaders.

▣ **“perverted”** This VERB (BDB 785, KB 874, *Pual* PARTICIPLE) occurs only here in the OT. It is from a root that denotes “twisted” or “crooked.” Without God’s revelation, fallen humans and their societies become corrupt and self-seeking! God’s laws are not restrictions from joy but aids to peace, stability, and fairness.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:5-11

- ⁵**“Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because *I* am doing something in your days—
You would not believe if you were told.**
- ⁶**For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.**
- ⁷**They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.**
- ⁸**Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping *down* to devour.**
- ⁹**All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces *moves* forward.
They collect captives like sand.**
- ¹⁰**They mock at kings**

And rulers are a laughing matter to them.

They laugh at every fortress

And heap up rubble to capture it.

¹¹Then they will sweep through *like* the wind and pass on.

But they will be held guilty,

They whose strength is their god.”

1:5-11 In response to Habakkuk’s question of Hab. 1:2-4, YHWH responds that He has/is addressing the covenant violations of His people. However, He is bringing judgment from an unexpected group (i.e., the Babylonians/Chaldeans). The surprise of Hab. 1:5 must date the prophecy before the fall of Assyria’s capitals in the early 600’s B.C.

1:5 There is a series of four PLURAL IMPERATIVES.

1. look – BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal*
2. observe – BDB 613, KB 661, *Hiphil*
3. be astonished – BDB 1069, KB 1744, *Hithpael*
4. wonder – BDB 1069, KB 1744, *Qal*

What YHWH is going to reveal to Habakkuk will utterly surprise him (Hab. 1:5d). This is quoted in Acts 13:41.



NASB, NKJV,

REV, Vulgate “among the nations”

NEB “you treacherous people”

LXX “you despisers”

Peshitta “you presumptuous”

The MT has “among the nations” (בְּיַמֵּי), which is followed by most English translations. But notice how the NEB follows the LXX and Peshitta (בְּיַמֵּי, BDB 93, which is used in Hab. 1:13; 2:5; also note Acts 13:41). The UBS Text Project gives the MT a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

▣ **“Because I am doing something”** The MT has “for a work is working” (NOUN and *Qal* PARTICIPLE from same root, BDB 821, KB 950). The SUBJECT is not specifically addressed.

1. YHWH – LXX, Peshitta, NASB, NKJV, TEV, NJB
2. undefined – NRSV, JPSOA, REB

The UBS Text Project supports #2 but gives it a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

▣ **“your days”** This is PLURAL and refers to Habakkuk and the covenant people. God will act in the prophet’s lifetime.

1:6-11 Notice how YHWH describes the Chaldeans (i.e., Isa. 5:26-29; 13:17-22; Jer. 4:5-9,12-13;5:15-17; 6:22-26; Ezek. 23:22-35).

1. fierce (lit. “bitter,” BDB 600 I, cf. Jdgs. 18:25)
2. impetuous (lit. “hasty,” BDB 554 I; NET Bible suggests “greedy,” but the word itself denotes speed; there is a sound similarity between #1 and #2)
3. who march through the earth to seize dwelling places
4. dreaded (BDB 33)
5. feared (BDB 431)

6. justice (BDB 1048) and authority (lit. “dignity,” BDB 673) originate with themselves (cf. Hab. 1:11c)
7. their cavalry (cf. Isa. 5:26-30; Jer. 4:13; Hos. 13:7)
 - a. swift as leopards (also imagery of eagles)
 - b. eager as wolves
 - c. devour like eagles/vultures
8. they move forward collecting captives
9. they laugh at
 - a. kings
 - b. rulers
 - c. fortresses
10. besiege cities/forts
11. sweep through like the wind and pass on

1:6 “I am raising up the Chaldeans” This was also foretold by Isaiah (cf. Isa. 39:6) and Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 4:11-13). Chaldeans (lit. “kasdim,” see DSS) can be both a racial term and a title. See Special Topic: Chaldeans. In Dan. 2:2 it refers to a group of wise men but in this context it obviously refers to the national racial entity that made up the Neo-Babylonian Empire. God is going to use this very cruel nation as an instrument to judge His people. At this point and time no one dreamed that Assyria, the current dominant empire of the Fertile Crescent, could be defeated.

▣ **“Who march throughout the earth”** This is a hyperbolic statement referring to the ANE or Fertile Crescent. It means the “known world” of the seventh century B.C.

For “earth” see Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth (OT).

1:7 “dreaded” This ADJECTIVE (BDB 33) is used of

1. the fear of YHWH among Israel’s enemies – Exod. 15:16; 23:27
2. YHWH’s wrath against covenant disobedience – Deut. 32:25

▣ **“feared”** This VERBAL (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) means “fear” or “awe.” This is the common term for fear

1. of enemies – Deut. 1:21,29; 2:4; 3:2,22; 7:18,19; 20:1,3; 31:6; Jos. 11:6
2. peoples of the earth fear the people of God – Exod. 34:10; Deut. 6:22; 28:10 (cf. Jos. 4:24); Jos. 9:24; Ps. 66:3-4,5; Zeph. 2:11; Mal. 1:14
3. Israel is to fear/awe/respect YHWH – Deut. 4:10; 5:5; 6:2,13,24; 10:12,20; 13:11; 14:23; 17:13, 19; 19:20; 21:21; 25:18; 28:58; 31:12; Jos. 4:24
4. Israel is not to fear their enemies – Deut. 7:21

These two descriptive words were meant to reveal YHWH’s awesome greatness to His covenant people’s enemies, but because of Judah’s disobedience, they now reflect her dread and fear of the Babylonian invaders.

▣ **“Their justice and authority originate with themselves”** They are informed totally by human judgment (cf. Hab. 1:11c) and not related to YHWH. This is what shocked the prophet so badly. God did not answer his question concerning injustice but complicated matters by using a godless nation to punish faithless Judah.

1:8 The destruction of the Assyrian Empire and the dominance of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the Fertile Crescent was very, very rapid (see Nahum).

▣ **“swifter than leopards”** This is a metaphor for speed used in Dan. 2:6.

▣ **“wolves in the evening”** Wolves were vicious, night-time predators that parallel the speedy leopards (cf. Jer. 5:6).

The textual question is related to “in the evening.”

1. The phrase “wolves in the evening” is also found in Zeph. 3:3 and Jer. 5:6.
2. In Jer. 5:6 the NASB translates it as “of the desert.”

The same Hebrew consonants can be vowel pointed two ways.

1. in the evening – Peshitta, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, NJB
2. of the desert (or “of Arabia,” LXX) – JPSOA, REB, NET

The UBS Text Project, p. 351, gives option #1 a “C” rating (considerable doubt).

▣ **“Their horsemen came galloping”** This implies haughty pride (cf. Deut. 28:49ff).

1:9 “Their horde of faces moves forward” The Hebrew phrase is ambiguous but seems to imply:

1. their greed pushes them on
2. as the east wind destroys crops by its heat, so too, this powerful army (cf. NKJV, NJB, REB)

The word “eastward” (BDB 870) appears in the MT, but since the Babylonians approached Jerusalem from the west after descending along the coast, some change it to “forward” (NASB, NRSV, JPSOA). However, “from the east” may be an idiom of an enemy from Mesopotamia (i.e., Hos. 13:15), as “from the north” is a more literal image used often by Jeremiah (Jer. 4:11; 13:24; 18:17).

▣ **“They collect captives like sand”** Assyria exiled conquered people to maintain their control over national entities. Babylon continued this policy of fear, intimidation, and hopelessness.

1:10 “They mock at kings” This refers to their easy military conquest.

▣ **“heap up rubble”** This is either a description of destroyed cities or a reference to the siege ramps used to scale the walls of fortified cities. The second option is most probable.

1:11 This line of poetry can refer to:

1. imagery of a storm
2. cessation of prophecy
3. the invader leaves after its destruction and victory (i.e., possibly exile)

▣ **“But they will be held guilty”**

They whose strength is their god Assyria had this same proud heart (cf. Isa. 10:12-14). Neo-Babylon is responsible for her acts, even though directed by God’s will.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:12-17

¹²**Are You not from everlasting,
O LORD, my God, my Holy One?
We will not die.
You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge;
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.**

¹³**Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,
And You can not look on wickedness *with favor*.
Why do You look with favor
On those who deal treacherously?
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up
Those more righteous than they?**

¹⁴**Why have You made men like the fish of the sea,
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?**

¹⁵**The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook,
Drag them away with their net,
And gather them together in their fishing net.
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.**

¹⁶**Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net
And burn incense to their fishing net;
Because through these things their catch is large,
And their food is plentiful.**

¹⁷**Will they therefore empty their net
And continually slay nations without sparing?**

1:12 “Are You not from everlasting

O LORD...” The name YHWH refers to the covenant God of Israel as the ever-living One (cf. Exod. 3:14; Deut. 33:27). God is the only one who possesses life and He alone gives it. See Special Topic: Monotheism and Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (NT).

▣ **“my God, my Holy One”** Notice the personal element involved in the prophet’s commitment to the God of Israel. The term “Holy One” reflects the character of God, but because of the historical events, many Jews are beginning to question God’s power and justice. See Special Topic: The Holy One.

▣ **“We will not die”** This can be a question or an affirmation. It seems to be linked to the Covenant and Messianic promises to the nation of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:10; 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17). If they are destroyed, what will become of God’s promises? See Special Topic: YHWH’s Eternal Redemptive Plan.

There is a textual variant. Some relate it to

1. the covenant people (“we will not die,” תומב) – MT, LXX, NASB, NKJV
2. YHWH Himself (“You will not die,” תומת) – NRSV, TEV, NJB, JPSOA, REB, NET (from the “Tiqqun Soferim,” which make up 18 ancient scribal textual corrections)

The question is, “Does this phrase relate to ‘Are you not from everlasting’ of Hab. 1:12a or to ‘the continuance of the covenant people’”? Apparently a later Jewish scribe altered the text for option #1. The UBS Text Project, p. 353, gives option #1 a “B” rating (some doubt).

The following is the note from UBS *Handbook for Translators*, p. 82.

“The Masoretic Hebrew text next has two words which RSV translates as **We shall not die**. The second of these words is one of eighteen instances in the Old Testament which an ancient scribal tradition lists as places where the text had been deliberately altered by the scribes. The purpose of these alterations was to avoid any appearance of disrespect to God. In this case the original wording (only one letter different in Hebrew) is recorded as meaning “you do not die.” The very idea that God could die was held to be disrespectful, and hence the change was made to **We shall not die**.”

▣ **“O Rock”** This imagery speaks of God’s unchanging stability and protection (cf. Deut. 32:4,15,18,30,31; 2 Sam. 23:3; Ps. 18:2,31; 92:15; 95:1; Isa. 26:4; 30:29).

▣ **“has appointed them to judge**

..has established them to correct” YHWH is the instigator of Judah’s enemies. He Himself has sent the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 51:20-23), as He earlier sent Assyria (cf. Isa. 10:5-6). History is YHWH’s workshop! He is the first cause of all things. He uses evil for His purposes (cf. 2 Chr. 20:6; Eccl. 7:14; Isa. 14:24-27; 43:13; 45:7; 54:16; Jer. 18:11; Lam. 3:33-38; Amos 3:6).

1:13 “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil” This is Habakkuk’s main issue. Literally “to look with pleasure.”

Does God use evil to accomplish His purposes? The subject of God’s connection to evil is difficult. Genesis 3 seems to assert “evil” in initial creation (i.e., Garden of Eden). Was this God’s plan or a perversion of God’s plan? Is Satan an enemy or a servant in the OT (see A. B. Davidson, *OT Theology*, p. 300-306). For sure, God used Satan in the death of Jesus to accomplish His will for human redemption. In this context in Habakkuk, God is the One who sends Babylon and, for that matter, Assyria, to judge His people.

I feel more comfortable in asserting God’s use of evil for His purposes than God being involved in evil Himself (i.e., James 1:17; 1 John 1:5). A helpful book for me in this area is John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God*. There is a new book on this subject by John Noe, *The Creation of Evil: Casting Light Into the Purpose of Darkness*. This book came out in 2015. The author is a fellow member of the Evangelical Theological Society.

▣ **“swallowed up”** This is Hebrew imagery for destruction (cf. Ps. 35:25; Isa. 49:19; Lam. 2:16).

▣ **“Those more righteous than they”** Judah is wicked but not that wicked! Yet, because they know God, they are more wicked than those who have never known. God is willing for His own name to be maligned so that His people would turn back to Him.

For “righteous” see Special Topic: Righteousness.

1:14 The meaning of this verse is uncertain. It can mean

1. an affirmation of YHWH as creator
2. a question of YHWH treating humans like fish to be caught and killed (i.e., Judah by the Babylonians)
3. the Jewish Study Bible, p. 1228, suggests this is a reversal of Gen. 1:26,28
4. the Judeans are being treated like other animals who do not know God

1:15

NASB **“The Chaldeans”**

NKJV, NJB,

Peshitta **“they”**

NRSV **“The enemy”**

TEV **“The Babylonians”**

LXX, JPSOA **“He”**

REB, NIV **“The wicked”**

The MT implies “he” with the inflection of the VERB. The Chaldeans are mentioned specifically in Hab. 1:6.

For “Chaldeans” see Special Topic: Chaldeans.

▣ **“Drag them away with their net”** *Marduk*, the chief god of the Neo-Babylonians, is often pictured as dragging a net full of defeated enemies.

In Hab. 1:15 there are three methods of catching fish mentioned.

1. with a baited hook (BDB 335, lit. “mouth” or “lip”)
2. with a dragnet behind a boat (VERB, BDB 176, KB 204 and “net,” BDB 357 II, cf. Hab. 1:16,17)
3. with a hand cast net (BDB 485, cf. Hab. 1:16)

1:16 “they offer a sacrifice to their net

And burn incense to their fishing net” This refers to one of two things:

1. the worship of their military machine
2. the victory of their god in the symbol of dragging a fishing net full of conquered people

Just a personal note, I worry about any national entity that thinks their military power assures their security and longevity without taking into account the will/purpose of the one true, creator God!

1:17 This is the final question of discouragement of both the prophet and the people. The Dead Sea Scroll’s commentary on Habakkuk (see REB) has “drawing their sword” instead of “drawing their net.” Both are military imagery of defeat.

▣ **“without sparing”** This describes the Babylonian invaders. The same VERB (BDB 328, KB 328, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is used of YHWH in Lam. 2:2,17,21. Sin has consequences!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is Habakkuk different from the other prophets?
2. Whose sin does Hab. 1:2-4 describe? Is this a different group from 1:13?
3. Who are the Chaldeans of Hab. 1:6?
4. What is the theological thrust of Hab. 1:7?
5. Why is YHWH’s use of Babylon as an instrument of judgment so distressing to Habakkuk?
6. Explain in your own words the meaning of Hab. 1:14.

HABAKKUK 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows LXX versing)
God Answers the Prophet 2:1-3	The Prophet’s Second Question (1:12-2:1) 2:1	The Second Exile (1:22-2:5) 2:1-5	The Lord’s Answer to Habakkuk 2:1	Second Answer: The Upright Will Live Through Faithfulness 2:1

	The Just Live By Faith			
	2:2-3		2:2-4	2:2-3
2:4-5	2:4			2:4
	Woe to the Wicked		Doom on the Unrighteous	Prelude
	2:5	The Five Woes	2:5-6	2:5-6c
2:6-8	2:6-8	2:6-8		First Imprecation
				2:6d-7
			2:7-8	
				2:8
				Second Imprecation
2:9-11	2:9-11	2:9-11	2:9-11	2:9
				2:10
				2:11
				Third Imprecation
2:12-14	2:12-14	2:12-14	2:12-14	2:12
				2:13
				2:14
				Fourth Imprecation
2:15-17	2:15-17	2:15-17	2:15-17	2:15-16
				2:17
				Fifth Imprecation
2:18-20	2:18-20	2:18-19	2:18-20	2:19
				2:18
		2:20		2:20 (order changed)

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter has several especially significant theological affirmations.
 1. Hab. 2:4 (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)
 2. Hab 2:14 (cf. Isa. 11:9)
 3. Hab. 2:20 (cf. Zeph. 1:7)
- B. The rabbis (i.e., Maimonides) see Hab. 2:3 as Messianic.
- C. Paul uses Hab. 2:4 as a key OT quote in establishing the doctrine of “justification by grace through faith,” which was so central to the Protestant Reformation (esp. Luther).

In context Hab. 2:4 speaks of lifestyle faith amidst a difficult situation (i.e., Babylonian invasion and exile). The OT word for “faith” (BDB 53, see Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT) focuses on “faithfulness” of a covenant follower, not initial faith of a non-Jew. Paul expands the intent of Habakkuk into the wider theological implication of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36), which focuses on an internal faith relationship based on God’s mercy in Christ and not Mosaic covenant obedience (cf. Galatians 3).

This subject is difficult for me as a teacher of hermeneutics because my major interpretive principle is to seek the intent of the original inspired author (see Special Topic: Inspiration). However, an even more important theological pillar for me is the superiority of NT revelation. Paul often takes OT texts which originally applied to Israel (i.e., Hosea) and reapplies them to Gentiles! NT inspiration supercedes OT revelation. The OT must be interpreted in light of the NT and not vice versa (i.e., adventism, dispensationalism, Messianic rabbis). See Special Topic: Why Do OT Covenant Promises Seem so Different from NT Covenant Promises?

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-3

¹I will stand on my guard post
 And station myself on the rampart;
 And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me,
 And how I may reply when I am reproved.
²Then the LORD answered me and said,
 “Record the vision
 And inscribe it on tablets,
 That the one who reads it may run.
³For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
 It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
 Though it tarries, wait for it;
 For it will certainly come, it will not delay.”

2:1 There are three COHORTATIVES emphasizing Habakkuk’s sense of spiritual responsibility for his ministry.

1. I will stand on my guard post – BDB 763, KB 840, *Qal*
2. I will station myself on the rampart – BDB 426, KB 427, *Hithpael*
3. I will keep watch – BDB 859, KB 1044, *Piel* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense

Habakkuk is a watchman for God’s revelation. He waits patiently until God responds. This is literary imagery of the prophet’s sense of urgency. The prophet is confused about

1. God’s lack of response to the evil in Judean society (Hab. 1:2-4)
2. God’s use of evil to punish His covenant people (Hab. 1:5-11)



NASB, NKJV,

LXX “when I am reproved”

NRSV, TEV,

NJB, JPSOA,

REB “concerning my complaint”

Peshitta “because of my chastisement”

The NOUN (BDB 407, KB 1698) means “to rebuke” or “inflict punishment.” This does not fit the context (i.e., YHWH is not rebuking the prophet but Judah in chapter 1 and Babylon in chapter 2), so most English translations translate it as “complaint,” following the word’s use in Job 13:6; 23:4. If so, then “my complaint” is recorded in Hab. 1:12-17.

2:2-3 I think the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 512, has caught the theological significance of Hab. 2:2-3, which sets the stage for Hab. 2:4.

“Verses 2-3 thus provide a suggestive and compressed view of salvation history. Its future development is perfectly determined by God, and he allows man to glimpse this future as a basis for faith and hope (cf. Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:51-58). However, man never sees the entire pattern of salvation, so that events may seem delayed and disappointing from his perspective. For this reason man must lay hold of the future that God has revealed, waiting for it with an eager faith and hope that surpass the apparent obstacles to its realization (3:17-19; cf. Rom. 4:16-23; Heb. 6:11-12, 18-1; 10:32-11:1; 12:1-29).”

One of the best evidences for a uniquely inspired Bible is predictive prophecy. See the three lectures on “The Trustworthiness of the Bible” in the first paragraph of my website www.freebiblecommentary.org.

2:2 Habakkuk 2:2 starts out with two IMPERATIVES.

1. record the vision (see note at Nah. 1:1) – BDB 507, KB 503, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. inscribe *it* on tablets (clay, wood, stone, metal) – BDB 91, KB 106, *Piel* IMPERATIVE

YHWH wants His predictions documented (cf. Exod. 17:14; 24:4,12; 34:27-28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9,22, 24; Isa. 8:1; 30:8; Jer. 25:1; 30:2; 36:4,6,28,32) and published (i.e., “run,” BDB 930, KB 1207, *Qal* IMPERFECT, run so as to proclaim YHWH’s word). He is in control of history. His covenant promises blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-30). Judgment is surely coming (cf. Hab. 2:3). This is God’s answer to Habakkuk’s first question (Hab. 1:2) and second question (1:12-17). YHWH will act!

▣ **“That the one who reads it may run”** There are several possible meanings.

1. speedily obey the message (NIV footnote, LXX)
2. read and then proclaim the message as a herald (i.e., 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 18:19; Jer. 51:13; NEB, NIV)
3. message so plain that at a glance one can read and understand it as they run past (NRSV, REB, TEV, NJB, JPSOA, Peshitta)
4. the prophet quickly producing the message (cf. Jer. 23:21)

Number 3 seems best to me, although James M. Freeman *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 147, offers another suggestion based on 2 Sam. 18:26, that the watchman is calling out his word of an approaching runner, so a gatekeeper opens the city’s gate in order that the messenger may enter and report.

2:3 This is a series of statements about the certainty of God’s coming judgment on Judah.

1. the vision is yet for the appointed time
2. it pants toward the goal
3. it will not fail (lit. “lie”)
4. though it tarries, wait for it (BDB 314, KB 313, *Piel* IMPERATIVE)
5. it will certainly come (INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and IMPERFECT VERB of the same root, BDB 97, KB 112, for emphasis)
6. it will not delay

There seems to be a conflict between #4 and #6, but this is only literary variety. God's judgment on Babylon was planned and will be implemented. It is on its way! Judah sinned and was punished. Babylon sinned and will be punished (Cyrus, Isa. 44:28; 45:1-7).

These two acts of judgment seem to be mixed together.

1. Hab. 2:6-7 applies to the rich and powerful of Judah (cf. Hab. 1:2-4; 2:13-17, possibly 18-19)
2. Hab. 2:5,8, however, must apply to Babylon (cf. Hab. 1:5-11)
3. Hab. 2:9-20 could refer to either one. The only easy solution is to make Hab. 1:2-4 apply to Babylon also.

The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1229, mentions that Hab. 2:3 is a Messianic text in Jewish tradition (i.e., the twelfth "principle-of-faith" of Maimonides). Notice that Hab. 2:14 is an allusion to the Messianic reign of a Davidic king (cf. Isa. 11:9).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:4-5

⁴**"Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.
⁵Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,
So that he does not stay at home.
He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,
And he is like death, never satisfied.
He also gathers to himself all nations
And collects to himself all peoples."**

2:4

NASB, NKJV "Behold"

NRSV "Look"

TEV "and this is the message"

NJB "You see"

JPSOA "Lo"

This DEMONSTRATIVE PARTICLE (BDB 243) is often used to introduce a prophetic message. Here it is the message YHWH revealed to Habakkuk and he wrote it down (Hab. 2:2).

Habakkuk 2:4 contrasts two kinds of humans.

1. proud, self-seeking (i.e., the results of the fall)
2. obedient, believing and godly (i.e., a result of a personal relationship with YHWH, cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:14-26). Later this type of faithful followers is described by the "new covenant" of Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:22-36. It is this that Paul discusses in Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11 (also note Eph. 1:4; 2:8-10)!

▣ **"the proud one"** This term (BDB 779 I, KB 860, *Pual* PERFECT) means to be swollen (from Arabic root) and is used of hemorrhoids in Deut. 28:27; 1 Sam. 5:6,9,12.

The NEB and REB advocate another root (BDB 779 II), which means "reckless" or "heedless." The UBS Text Project, p. 356, says, "the exact meaning of this word is no longer known. The most probable meaning is 'faithless.'" If so there is a word play on "faithfulness" in this verse.

1. the unfaithful invader (Hab. 1:5-11) or faithless Judeans (Hab. 1:2-4)
2. the faithful follower of YHWH (i.e., "the righteous," cf. Hab. 1:4)

In either case the spiritual response of the faithful follower is the same, “the righteous will live by his faith/faithfulness.” In context, this refers to trust in God’s revelation though it be delayed, Hab. 2:3 (cf. Hab. 1:5).

▣ **“the righteous will live by faith”** This is a famous verse but difficult to translate. It is quoted three times in the NT (i.e., Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). How a person lives and responds to God’s revealed will in times of distress clearly reveals his/her covenant status (cf. Ezek. 33:10-16; James 2:14-26).

1. The Masoretic Text has “the righteous shall live by his faith/faithfulness.”
2. The Septuagint has “the righteous shall live on the basis of my (God’s) faithfulness.”
3. Paul, in Rom. 1:17, contrasts faith-based righteousness through Christ versus works-based righteousness through the Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 3: which quotes Lev. 18:5).

There may be a veiled rabbinical allusion to Gen. 15:6 because both Hab. 2:4 and Gen. 15:6 are the only OT texts that contain the same two key terms: “faith” and “righteousness.”

The OT “faith” had the primary metaphorical meaning of “trustworthiness,” “faithfulness,” or “loyalty to” (see NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 427-433). Saving faith is based on God’s faithfulness (cf. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 33:4; 89; 92:2; 96:13; 98:3; 100:5; 143:1; Lam. 3:21). However, human faithfulness (cf. Eph. 1:4; 2:8-10) is evidence that one has trusted in God’s promises and revelation.

It may be helpful to list how several modern commentators understand Paul’s understanding of the last part of the phrase.

1. Vaughan: “begins in faith and ends in faith”
2. Hodge: “by faith alone”
3. Barrett: “on the basis of nothing but faith”
4. Know: “faith first and last”
5. Stagg: “the upright out of faith shall live”

See the following Special Topics.

1. Special Topic: Righteousness
2. Special Topic: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the OT
3. Special Topic: Faith, Believe, and Trust (NT)

It is surprising that such an ambiguous verse was so crucial in Paul’s theology (i.e., justification by grace through faith), when in the context of Habakkuk, it refers to “faithfulness.”

2:5 “wine betrays the haughty man” Habakkuk 2:5 continues the description of the Chaldean military machine in its pride and greed. There are two theories that are related to the wine.

1. watch out for over-indulgence of wine
2. the military conquest has become an intoxicant to the Chaldeans

Number 2 fits this context best.

The UBS Text Project, p. 357, supports the reading of the NEB and REB (JPSOA) with “the boasting man, traitor” with a “C” rating (considerable doubt) instead of the more traditional MT (Targums, Vulgate) “the wine is treacherous.” The LXX and Peshitta do not have “wine” in their translation of this verse. The TEV and NJB have “wealth is treacherous,” following the Habakkuk commentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1Qp,Hab).

The imagery of “wine” reappears in Hab. 2:15-16. Contextually it is uncertain if Hab. 2:5 should

1. go with Hab. 2:4
2. go with Hab. 2:6-20
3. be a separate transitional strophe

I think #3 is best.

▣ **“the haughty man”** The ADJECTIVE “haughty” (BDB 397) occurs only here and Pro. 21:24.

▣ **“So that he does not stay at home”** This is possibly imagery for conquest.

There is some confusion on how to translate the VERB, which occurs only here.

1. NASB, NKJV “stay at home”
2. NRSV “do not endure”
3. TEV “restless”
4. NJB “ever on the move”
5. REB
(Arabic root) “still less will be his goal”
6. LXX “will complete nothing”

There have been several roots suggested. The MT form (BDB 627 I, KB 678, *Qal* IMPERFECT) occurs only here but the NOUN occurs often with the meaning “the abode of a shepherd” or “the abode of a flock.”

▣ **“He enlarges his appetite like Sheol”** This is more imagery for the Babylonian military machine (Hab. 2:5e,f). *Sheol* (i.e., the holding place of the dead (see Special Topic: *Sheol*) is described as a ravenous animal with its mouth open who is never satisfied (cf. Hab. 2:5d; Isa. 5:14). In the *Ba'al* myths of Ugarit, the god *Mot*, is also characterized in this imagery.

▣ **“He also gathers to himself all nations”** This must refer to Babylon (cf. Hab. 2:8,10).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:6-8

“Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,

Even mockery *and* insinuations against him

And say, ‘Woe to him who increases what is not his—

For how long—

And makes himself rich with loans?’

⁷Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,

And those who collect from you awaken?

Indeed, you will become plunder for them.

⁸Because you have looted many nations,

All the remainder of the peoples will loot you—

Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,

To the town and all its inhabitants.”

2:6-20 These verses contain a series of “woes” (BDB 222), spoken by “the righteous” of Hab. 1:4 and 2:4 against YHWH’s enemies (i.e., Babylon, or faithless Judah, see UBS *Handbook*, p. 95).

1. woe to him who increases what is not his (Hab. 2:6-8)
2. woe to him who gets evil gain for his house (Hab. 2:9-11)
3. woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed (Hab. 2:12-14)
4. woe to him who makes his neighbors drunk (Hab. 2:15-17)
5. woe to him who says to a *piece* of wood, “Awake” (Hab. 2:18-20; i.e., idolatry)

These “woes” describe the wicked person of Hab. 2:4a,b. They show the greedy, arrogant, more-for-me spirit of the fallen world (cf. Hab. 1:13-17).

There may be an ANE significance to five woes or curses (cf. Isa. 5:8,11,18,20,22). The Hebrew Bible must be interpreted in light of ANE culture and thought. This is why I have enjoyed the writings of John H. Walton and R. K Harrison so much!

2:6 “Will not all of these” This must refer to

1. “all nations,” Hab. 2:5e
2. “all peoples,” Hab. 2:5f

This would be the conquered people groups of the ANE who were victims of Assyria and Babylon’s aggression.

▣ **“a taunt-song”** This NOUN (BDB 605) is in parallel with two other descriptive NOUNS.

1. “taunt-song” – BDB 605, which basically means “proverb” or “parable,” but here and in Num. 23:7,18; 24:3,15,20,21,23; Pro. 1:6; Isa. 14:4; Micah 2:4 it denotes a prophetic saying
2. “mockery” – BDB 539, which means “a satire” or “mocking poems”; it is found only here and Pro. 1:6
3. “insinuation” – BDB 295, which means “an enigmatic statement” or “riddle” (cf. Num. 12:8b; Jdgs. 14:12; Pro. 1:6; Ezek. 17:2)

All three of these occur in Pro. 1:6, which denotes a clear message, not an enigma.

▣ **“him”** This refers to “the proud one” of Hab. 2:4; “the haughty man” of 2:5. A national entity is personified as one person (the King).

▣ **“For how long—”** Notice the NASB puts dashes on both sides of this phrase (also JPSOA). This is an independent statement referring to the “How long” of Hab. 1:2. How long will justice delay? How long will the wicked prevail?

▣ **“And makes himself rich with loans”** Because of Hab. 2:7-8, this must refer to conquered nations and peoples. But the meaning of “loans” (BDB 716, lit. “pledges”) is uncertain. The laws of pledges seems much more related to exploitation by wealthy, powerful Judeans (cf. Hab. 1:2-4).

2:7 The first two poetic lines are parallel. They describe the one who “makes himself rich with loans” (Hab. 2:6).

1. you creditors (lit. “those who bite”) – BDB 675, KB 729, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE; imagery for paying interest
2. those who collect from you (lit. “shake violently”) – BDB 266, KB 267, *Pilpel* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE; imagery for collecting interest

Notice these “creditors” will

1. rise up suddenly – BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. awaken – BDB 429, KB 431, *Qal* IMPERFECT

This relates to the predicted, but delayed, revelation of judgment on Babylon (cf. Hab. 2:3,7). God’s judgment is sure but it must come only in its “appointed time.” Faithful followers know this and remain faithful knowing God is faithful (see note at Hab. 2:4).

2:8 “land” This is *eretes* (BDB 75; see Special Topic: Land, Country, Earth (OT)). It is used in Hab. 2:8,14,17,20 in several senses.

1. Hab. 2:8,17 must refer to the ANE (cf. Hab. 3:7)
2. Hab. 2:14,20 refer to the planet (cf. Hab. 3:3,6,9,12)

The meaning of this root is especially contextually defined (i.e., like “forever,” *‘olam*).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:9-11

⁹“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house
To put his nest on high,

To be delivered from the hand of calamity!

¹⁰You have devised a shameful thing for your house

By cutting off many peoples;

So you are sinning against yourself.

¹¹Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,

And the rafter will answer it from the framework.”

2:9-11 This strophe uses figurative language to describe how the Babylonians tried to secure their kingdom by conquering and exiling the surrounding nations of the ANE with brutality but this proved to be their demise.

2:9 “to him who gets evil gain” This VERBAL (BDB 130, KB 147, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) and NOUN (same root), used here for emphasis, are from the weaving industry and mean “to cut off” (i.e., the threads of a rug or garment, cf. Isa. 38:12). It came to be used metaphorically of evil gain.

1. VERB – Pro. 1:19; Jer. 6:13; 8:10; Ezek. 22:12,27; Hab. 2:9

2. NOUN – Exod. 18:21; 1 Sam. 8:3; Ps. 119:36; Pro. 1:19; 28:16; Isa. 57:17; Jer. 6:13; 8:10; 22:17; Ezek. 22:13,27; 33:31; Micah 4:13; Hab. 2:9

▣ **“house”** This refers to the Babylonian kingdom (Hab. 2:10).

▣ **“put his nest on high”** This imagery is used of Edom in Jer. 49:16 and Obadiah v. 4.

2:10 “yourself” This is the Hebrew *nephesh* (BDB 659), which denotes the person. See full notes online at Ezek. 18:4.

▣ **“shameful thing”** See Special Topic: Shame.

2:11 This is imagery of Babylon as a “house” (Hab. 2:9-10). Now, parts of the “house” are personified (i.e., stone walls and wooden rafters) as witnessing in court that it was built by improper and vicious means (Hab. 2:12, cf. NET Bible).

The word translated “rafters” (BDB 496) appears only here. In context it must refer to some type of roof structure. However, James Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 326, offers a rabbinical option (Rashi) that this word denoted a “half brick” used with wood to build walls.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:12-14

¹²“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed

And founds a town with violence!

¹³Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts

That peoples toil for fire,

And nations grow weary for nothing?

¹⁴For the earth will be filled

With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD

As the waters cover the sea.”

2:12-14 Like Hab. 2:4, Hab. 2:14 is a powerful theological statement. Evil conquest will be temporary but YHWH and His purposes will fill the earth (cf. Isa. 11:9; Zech. 14:8,9). Evil people will come and go in

a fallen world but there is a kingdom beyond time that belongs to YHWH and His faithful ones (cf. John 14:2; Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

Other powerful images of God's universal domain are in 1 Kgs. 8:27; Isa. 66:1; Jer. 23:24! See Special Topic: Monotheism.

2:13 This wording and content is very similar to Jer. 22:13-23, which is addressed to the faithless Judean king, Jehoiakim. Some commentators believe Habakkuk addresses faithless Judah (Hab. 1:2-4), not Babylon. The message/prophecy is applicable to many settings. Wicked, godless, greedy people exploit others! The way to identify "the righteous" is their trust and trustworthiness in things about God and His word amidst hard times.

▣ **"the LORD of hosts"** See Special Topic: LORD of Hosts.

▣ **"That peoples toil for fire"** This is imagery of one's efforts being burned in judgment (i.e., 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Only the things of God will last (cf. Ps. 127:1)!

Notice Hab. 2:13b is parallel to 2:13c. This imagery (possibly a cultural proverb, NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 394) is similar to Jer. 51:58, which also predicts judgment on Babylon.

This imagery may refer to the Babylonians using slave labor to build homes and fortifications which will be destroyed by fire.

2:14 "the earth will be filled" This may be an allusion to Isa. 11:9 with worldwide significance. See Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **"knowledge"** See Special Topic: Know.

▣ **"glory"** See Special Topic: Glory (*kabod*, OT).

▣ **"LORD"** See Special Topic: Names for Deity, D.

▣ **"As the waters cover the sea"** This universal imagery is recurrent with variation of terminology.

1. "all the ends of the earth" – Ps. 2:8; 22:27; 98:3; Isa. 45:22; 48:20; 52:10; 62:11
2. "as the waters cover the sea" – here; Isa. 11:9
3. "from the rising to the setting of the sun" – Isa. 45:6; Mal. 1:11

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:15-17

- ¹⁵**"Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,
Who mix in your venom even to make *them* drunk
So as to look on their nakedness!**
- ¹⁶**You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.
Now you yourself drink and expose your *own* nakedness.
The cup in the LORD's right hand will come around to you,
And utter disgrace *will come* upon your glory.**
- ¹⁷**For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
And the devastation of *its* beasts by which you terrified them,
Because of human bloodshed and violence *done* to the land,
To the town and all its inhabitants."**

2:15 The imagery of Babylonian military expansion is characterized as making nations “drink,” which causes actions that expose them (i.e., fertility worship; see Special Topic: Fertility Worship of the Ancient Near East).

Notice in Hab. 2:16 these same actions are attributed to Babylon.

1. now you yourself drink – BDB 1059, KB 1667, *Qal* IMPERATIVE
2. now you yourself expose your own nakedness – BDB 790, KB 885, *Niphal* IMPERATIVE
 - a. show yourself uncircumcised (MT, הָעָרֵל; UBS Text Project, p. 360, gives this a “C” rating (considerable doubt)
 - b. stagger (BDB suggests a different root, הָרַעַל, NRSV, JPSOA)



NASB	“who mix in your venom”
NKJV	“pressing <i>him</i>”
NRSV, JPSOA	“pouring out your wrath”
NJB, NRSV footnote	“pouring out his poison”
REB	“pouring out God’s wrath”
LXX	“intoxicating him”

The first question is to whom does the PRONOUN refer?

1. Babylonians
2. God (Hab. 2:16)

The UBS Text Project, p. 359, gives #1 a “B” rating (some doubt).

The second question is the meaning of that which is “mixed” or “poured out.” The root מִחָה has several meanings.

1. heat – Pro. 15:18; 19:19; 29:22; Isa. 42:25; Hos. 7:5,6
2. venom – Deut. 32:24,33; Job 6:4; Ps. 58:4 (twice); 140:3
3. wrath poured out like fire – Jer. 7:20; 42:18; Ezek. 7:8; 9:8; Nah. 1:6; also note Isa. 51:17,22; Jer. 25:15

All of these are associated with the abuse of alcohol. See Special Topic: Alcohol – Alcoholism.

2:16-17 What Babylon did to others will happen to them (cf. Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). We reap what we sow both individually and nationally.

2:16

NASB	“expose your own nakedness”
NKJV	“be exposed as uncircumcised”
NRSV, TEV,	
REB, JPSOA,	
LXX, Peshitta	“stagger”
NJB	“show your foreskin”

The MT has “and be uncircumcised” but the Habakkuk Commentary in the DSS has “stagger”; both fit the context.

1. being exposed by defeat/exile (cf. Lam. 4:21)
2. result of drunkenness (cf. Hab. 2:15)

The word for “foreskin” (BDB 790) is similar to “stagger” (BDB 947; Isa. 51:17,22; Ps. 60:3) in sound.

▣ **“The cup in the LORD’s right hand”** This is imagery of judgment, drunkenness. See full note online at Ps. 11:6.

▣ **“right hand”** See Special Topic: Hand and Special Topic: Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

2:16d What a shocking contrast of words.

1. utter disgrace (BDB 887); this NOUN occurs only here but is parallel to Hab. 2:16a
2. glory – *kabod* (BDB 458 (twice, line a and d); see Special Topic: Glory (*kabod*, OT))

2:17 It is possible that the violence done to Lebanon is the cutting of much of its high priced timber to build

1. siege equipment
2. building projects of the invaders (i.e., Isa. 14:8 for Babylonians and Isa. 37:24 for Assyrians)

It is also possible that it refers to Babylon’s destruction and violence against

1. animals
2. villagers

This verse obliquely addresses the issue of God’s concern over the exploitation of nature for personal gain or pleasure. Humans are caretakers of the planet (cf. Gen. 1:26), not owners. We will give an account to God for how we treated His world!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:18-20

¹⁸“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,

Or an image, a teacher of falsehood?

For its maker trusts in his own handiwork

When he fashions speechless idols.

¹⁹Woe to him who says to a *piece* of wood, ‘Awake!’

To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’

And that is *your* teacher?

Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,

And there is no breath at all inside it.

²⁰But the LORD is in His holy temple.

Let all the earth be silent before Him.”

2:18-19 This is ridicule of idolatry (cf. Isa. 42:17,18-20; 44:9-11,12-20; Jer. 2:27-28; 10:8, 14). An idolater makes an image of stone, wood (carved, cf. Nah. 1:14), or metal (poured, Exod. 32:4) and personifies it but it cannot hear, speak, or move!

Habakkuk 2:18 has two IMPERATIVES which attempt to motivate the lifeless, breathless idol.

1. awake – BDB 884, KB 1098, *Hiphil* (same imagery but different word in 1 Kgs. 18:27)
2. arise – BDB 734, KB 802, *Qal*

2:18 The first line of this verse is addressed, not to the idolater, but to “the righteous” (cf. Hab. 1:4; 2:4). There is no hope of true revelation from a manmade image!

▣ **“idol”** This is the Hebrew word *‘elilim* (BDB 47), which is similar to the name for God, *‘Elohim* (BDB 43; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C).

The “idol” is a “weak,” “poor,” “worthless” thing, while Israel’s God is the Creator, Provider and Sustainer of all life on this planet (see note at Hab. 2:17b-c).

The idol is “dumb” (BDB 48) but YHWH

1. speaks to the prophet
2. answers his questions

3. sends Babylon
4. judges Babylon
5. speaks hope (Hab. 2:14,20)

What a contrast!

2:19c

NASB	“And that is <i>your</i> teacher?”
NKJV	“It shall teach!”
NRSV	“Can it teach?”
TEV	“Can an idol reveal anything to you?”
NJB	“(This is the prophecy!)”
JPSOA	“Can that give an oracle?”
Peshitta	“They are vain”

The MT does not have the question mark but it seems necessary. Idols cannot speak but YHWH can, through His prophet and predictive prophecy.

2:20 The Babylonians destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem but YHWH is in the temple of creation (see John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 As Ancient Cosmology*).

▣ **“Let all the earth be silent before Him”** There is no VERB in the MT. The INTERJECTION “hush” (BDB 245) is being translated as a JUSSIVE.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Is Habakkuk relating to Judean or Babylonian violence?
2. How does Hab. 2:2-3 relate to 2:4?
3. What two kinds of people are contrasted in Hab. 2:4?
4. How does the MT of Hab. 2:4 differ from the LXX used by Paul?
5. What does “live by faithfulness” mean in this context?
6. To whom do the five “woes” refer?
7. How do Hab. 2:14 and 2:20 fit into YHWH’s revelation to Habakkuk?
8. Why is Lebanon mentioned in Hab. 2:17?
9. Does Hab. 2:18-19 refer to Babylonian or Judean (cf. Ezekiel 8) idolatry?
10. If the Babylonians destroyed YHWH’s Temple in 586 B.C., to what Temple does Hab. 2:20 refer?

HABAKKUK 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB (follows LXX versing)
God's Deliverance of His People	The Prophet's Prayer	Habakkuk's Prayer	A Prayer of Habakkuk	Plea To Yahweh for Deliverance
3:1	3:1	3:1	3:1	3:1 Prayer
3:2	3:2	3:2-15	3:2-6	3:2 Theophany: Yahweh's Approach
3:3a-b	3:3a-b			3:3
3:3c-7	3:3c-5			3:4 3:5 3:6 3:7 Yahweh's Battle
3:8-15	3:8-9b 3:9c-13 3:14-15		3:7-15	3:8 3:9a-b 3:9c-10 3:11 3:12 3:13 3:14 3:15 Conclusion: Human Fear and Faith in God
3:16-19e	3:16 A Hymn of Faith 3:17-18 3:19a-c	3:16 3:17-19c	3:16a-b 3:16c 3:17-19	3:16a-b 3:16c-d 3:17 3:18 3:19a-c
3:19f	3:19d	3:19d		3:19d

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This is an anthem/psalm (see Special Topic: Hebrew Poetry) of YHWH's powerful salvation and deliverance in the past. It forms the core of the prophet's prayer for Him to do it again.
- B. There is much ambiguous imagery in the chapter that may relate to different divine acts of salvation.
 - 1. exodus from Egypt
 - a. plagues
 - b. splitting and closing the Red Sea
 - 2. miracles of the forty years of wilderness wanderings
 - 3. events related to the conquest of the eastern and western regions of the Jordan Rift Valley
- C. This became liturgy at some point.
 - 1. Shigionoth, Hab. 3:1
 - 2. Selah, Hab. 3:3,9,13
 - 3. concluding remarks, Hab. 3:19d
- D. The theological themes are
 - 1. YHWH as creator
 - 2. YHWH as deliverer
 - 3. YHWH as divine warrior
- E. The great themes of
 - 1. trusting God's word in times of distress
 - 2. faithful living despite troubleare repeated in Hab. 3:16-19 from Hab. 2:4. The key person in all Bible books is God! He is trustworthy in all situations. His word is trustworthy and will be fulfilled in due time.
- F. There are several ANE mythological (if you are uncomfortable with the word "myth," please see G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, chapter 13, "The Language of Myth") allusions using *Marduk* or *Ba'al* imagery for YHWH. See *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, pp. 793-794 and John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1

¹A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

3:1 "A prayer of Habakkuk" This seems to be an anthem/psalm of praise based on God's dealing with Israel during the exodus experience. Both King James and Martin Luther translate the VERB as PAST TENSE, however, the Septuagint uses the FUTURE and AORIST TENSES, while the Vulgate uses PERFECTS and FUTURE.

▣ **"the prophet"** See Special Topic: Prophecy (OT).

▣ **"Shigionoth"** This Hebrew term (BDB 993) means "to hear" or "to reel with drink." It is a musical term; the exact meaning is uncertain. The NASB says it is a "highly emotional poetic form" (see Intro. to Psalm

7). The Jewish Publication Society of America's translation (JPSOA) has "psalm of supplication," following an Akkadian root for lament.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:2

**²LORD, I have heard the report about You *and* I fear.
O LORD revive Your work in the midst of the years,
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.**

3:2 Habakkuk 3:2 must be seen against the exodus reference in Hab. 3:3. YHWH delivered His people from the Egyptians; now the prayer is that He will deliver them from all oppressors (here in the context of Habakkuk, the Babylonians).

Note the IMPERATIVE "revive/preserve your work" (BDB 310, KB 309, *Piel*). The psalmist is praying for God to do it again.

▣ **"LORD"** There are several titles used for Israel's Deity in this anthem/psalm.

1. LORD, Hab. 3:2 (twice), 8, 18 – this is YHWH, the covenant name for God; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, D
2. God, Hab. 3:3a – *Eloah* is the SINGULAR form of *Elohim* (BDB 43); see Special Topic above, letter A., cf. Deut. 32:15; Hab. 1:11; and often in Job
3. The Holy One, Hab. 3:3b – See Special Topic: The Holy One and Special Topic: Holy, cf. Hab. 1:12
4. "The God of my salvation," Hab. 3:18b – this is an ancient title for God (BDB 43, cf. Deut. 32:15; Ps. 18:46; 24:5; 25:5; 27:9; Isa. 17:10; Micah 7:7; related to *Elohim*; see Special Topic: Names for Deity, C. and Special Topic: Salvation (OT)
5. "The Lord God" – this is *Adon* (master, owner, Lord, husband; see Special Topic: Lord (*kurios*) plus YHWH, a common title for Israel's God

▣ **"fear"** This term (BDB 431, note LXX translation) denotes "awe" and "respect." See Special Topic: Fear (OT).

▣ **"make it known"** The MT has the *Hiphil* IMPERFECT (BDB 393, KB 390) but the LXX translated this as a *Niphal* instead, "You will be known in the midst of two living creatures," which makes "it" not YHWH's acts of deliverance but YHWH Himself! His works are a way to reveal His character.

▣ **"In wrath remember mercy"** The covenant people experienced problems because of their disobedience and faithlessness in YHWH (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). The NRSV makes this a prayer (*Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense). God's character is primarily merciful. See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel's God (OT).

There is a greater purpose for Israel! See Special Topic: YHWH's Eternal Redemptive Plan.

▣ **"mercy"** This VERBAL (BDB 933, KB 1216, *Piel*) is an INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE. It is used

1. in connection with covenant blessings (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27-28; esp. Deut. 13:18)
2. in connection to restoration from exile (cf. Deut. 30:3; Ps. 102:13; Jer. 31:20; here)
3. general statement of YHWH's character (cf. Ps. 103:13; 116:5; Isa. 30:18)

Thank God for His gracious, compassionate, merciful purposes, actions, and attitudes toward His faithful followers! Genesis 3 has made mercy absolutely central and crucial!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:3a-b

³God comes from Teman,

And the Holy One from Mount Paran.

[Selah.

3:3 “Teman. . .Mount Paran” This is a reference to God moving from His mountain home in Sinai and passing through the other mountain ranges on His way to help His people. Mount Teman means “south” (BDB 412) and is used for the nation of Edom. Mount Paran is also south between the nations of Edom and Mount Sinai.

Have you noticed how often mountains are mentioned in this psalm?

1. “Teman,” Hab. 3:3 – a city in Edom close to Mt. Paran
2. “Mt. Paran,” Hab. 3:3 – the imagery of this psalm is similar to Deut. 33:2; YHWH’s coming was like the rising of the sun (Hab. 3:4)
3. “the perpetual mountains were shattered,” Hab. 3:6
4. “the ancient hills collapsed,” Hab. 3:6 – numbers 3 and 4 are parallel and speak of a theophany, as does #5
5. “the mountain saw You and quaked,” Hab. 3:10
6. “walk in my high places,” Hab. 3:19 – this is imagery of victorious living (i.e., covenant blessings to faithful followers)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:13c-7

^{3c}His splendor covers the heavens,

And the earth is full of His praise.

⁴His radiance is like the sunlight;

He has rays *flashing* from His hand,

And there is the hiding of His power.

⁵Before Him goes pestilence,

And plague comes after Him.

⁶He stood and surveyed the earth;

He looked and startled the nations.

Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,

The ancient hills collapsed.

His ways are everlasting.

⁷I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,

The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

3:3c,d “splendor. . .praise” These may be parallel.

1. splendor – BDB 217 I, #2 denotes the light and glory that YHWH wears as king (Job 40:10; Ps. 93:1; 104:1)
2. praise – the NOUN, BDB 239 from the VERB BDB 237 II (i.e., praise), but the root may also denote “shine,” BDB 237 I, cf. Job 31:26; this would form a better parallel (*Word Commentary*, vol. 32, p. 114)

▣ **“Selah”** Notice this term is placed in the margin of Ps. 3:2,4,8. The root (BDB 699, KB 756) is not certain. Here are some of the theories.

1. from Persian root for “song”

2. from Hebrew סָלַל (BDB 699) “to lift up,” i.e., a higher pitch
3. from Hebrew תָּמִיד (BDB 663) meaning “always,” functioning like “amen”
4. from LXX denoting an interlude of instruments

With all these theories it is obvious that moderns do not know what it refers to in the Psalter or Habakkuk (Hab. 3:3,9,13). It is used over 70 times in the MT and over 90 times in the LXX.

▣ The second two poetic lines of Hab. 3:3 are parallel and denote YHWH as creator of “heaven” and “earth,” both of which reflect His glory; both of which praise Him (BDB 239).

This is a literary way of denoting a personal appearance of God (theophany, i.e., Exodus 3; 19; Deut. 33:3; Judges 5; Ps. 68:8-9; 74:12-17; 77:16-20).

3:4a This verse is difficult to understand. The JPSOA says “the Hebrew is uncertain.” If Hab. 3:3 refers to YHWH coming from the east like the rising sun, BDB 21, #2 (or “lightning,” in a storm, BDB 21, #5, cf. Hab. 3:11; Job 36:22; 37:3,11,15; Ezek. 1:4,13), then this is related imagery of YHWH as creator, and thereby, controller of physical creation, including the sun, which many ANE people groups worshiped as a god.

3:4b

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, NJB “rays”

TEV “light flashes”

LXX “horns”

The term (BDB 901) is literally “horns.” Only here is it translated “rays” because of the context. It denotes a light display in the heavens at YHWH’s approach (i.e., theophany). Remember, context, not a lexicon, determines meaning!

The same root is translated “shone” (VERB, BDB 902; KB 1144, *Qal* PERFECT) in Exod. 34:29,30, which speaks of light beaming from Moses’ face after meeting YHWH on Mt. Sinai.

3:4c The last line has a NOUN that occurs only here (BDB 285).

1. NASB – “is the hiding”
2. NKJV – “*was* hidden”
3. NRSV, NJB – “lay hidden”
4. JPSOA – “is enveloped”
5. REB – “is veiled”
6. LXX – “fixed”

The root is related to the VERB “to hide” or “to withdraw” (BDB 285). This hiddenness could refer to

1. night time
2. storm clouds

A parallel might be Ps. 18:12-13; same imagery but different vocabulary (also a judgment context).

Just in passing let me suggest one more option for interpreting this line of poetry. The “hiddenness” may be related to the notion that to see the holy God of Israel meant death (cf. Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 33:20; Num. 12:8; Jdgs. 6:22; 13:22; Isa. 6:5). If so, this “covering” was an act of mercy. The “*shekinah* cloud of glory” during the exodus and wandering period may have served the same function. The smoke that filled the Temple in Isaiah 6 would also function for this purpose.

3:5 In the OT God’s judgment for covenant disobedience is specifically spelled out (i.e., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; Jer. 14:12; 21:9; Ezek. 7:15).

1. pestilence
2. plague (BDB 958, lit. “fever” or “lightning bolt,” BDB 958, cf. Deut. 32:24)

3. sword (cf. Exod. 5:3)
4. wild animals (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 32:24)
5. famine

These are all the terrible physical consequences of the fall of Genesis 3. See Special Topic: The Fall. God uses natural evils for His own purposes.

1. to bring repentance
2. to punish disobedience
3. to secure salvation (Calvary; use of personal evil; see Special Topic: Personal Evil)

Satan is a servant (see A. B. Davidson, *OT Theology*, pp. 300-306).

In this text “pestilence” (BDB 184) and “plague” (BDB 958) are personified as servants, possibly an allusion to Canaanite gods who accompanied *Ba'al*. The point being, they serve YHWH not *Ba'al* and are directed (controlled) by YHWH (so too, the lights of the sky, Hab. 3:11; Gen. 1:16).

3:6

NASB	“surveyed”
NKJV, Peshitta	“measured”
NRSV	“shook”
TEV, REB,	
NET, JPSOA,	
LXX, Targums	“shakes”
NJB	“tremble”

The MT understands the root to be “measure” (מָדַד, BDB 551, KB 547, *Poel* IMPERFECT with *waw*), but many scholars, because of the context, assume “shake,” מָדַד, as related to מָדַד (BDB 556).

This could be imagery (cf. Jdgs. 5:4; 2 Sam. 22:8; Ps. 77:18) or an earthquake (cf. Exod. 19:18; Jdgs. 5:5; Ps. 68:7-8). Either way it was a way to demonstrate YHWH’s sovereign power and personal presence!

▣ **“ancient. . .everlasting”** The term *‘olam* (BDB 761, KB 798) is used twice. This term must be interpreted in light of its context, not a preset definition (this is true of all words). See Special Topic: Forever (*‘olam*).

The point of the imagery of these lines of poetry (Hab. 3:6c-e) is that the mountains of the earth look eternal (i.e., Ps. 90:2) but they are not; yet YHWH’s ways (BDB 237) are eternal because YHWH is eternal (cf. Ps. 90:2; 93:2; 102:27; Jer. 10:10). See Special Topic: Characteristics of Israel’s God (NT).

For parallel words to “ways” see Special Topic: Terms for God’s Revelation, VII.

▣ The NET Bible, p. 1654, #7, offers an alternate interpretation, “He travels on the ancient roads” (NRSV), linking this ambiguous line of poetry to Hab. 3:3 (i.e., YHWH accompanying the Israelites during the exodus, cf. Deut. 33:2) and better paralleling Hab. 3:7. However, this was not the understanding of the LXX or Peshitta and the traditional translation does parallel with Hab. 3:6c, so probably the MT is correct.

3:7 This alludes to Exod. 15:14-16. “Tents” is metaphorical of these two areas (or tribal groups).

The names “Cushan” (BDB 469) and “Midian” (BDB 193) refer to the same area (both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba). It is the region where Moses’ father-in-law lived (cf. Exodus 3).

The word “Cushan” occurs only here in the OT. It may refer to

1. an unknown nomadic desert people group
2. another name for Midian
3. a sub-group within Midian
4. a geographical location
5. an allusion to “Cush/Ethiopia”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:8-15

⁸Did the LORD rage against the rivers,
Or was Your anger against the rivers,
Or was Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,
On Your chariots of salvation?

⁹Your bow was made bare,
The rods of chastisement were sworn. [Selah.
You cleaved the earth with rivers.

¹⁰The mountains saw You *and* quaked;
The downpour of waters swept by.
The deep uttered forth its voice,
It lifted high its hands.

¹¹Sun *and* moon stood in their places;
They went away at the light of Your arrows,
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

¹²In indignation You marched through the earth;
In anger You trampled the nations.

¹³You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For the salvation of Your anointed.
You struck the head of the house of the evil
To lay him open from thigh to neck. [Selah.

¹⁴You pierced with his own spears
The head of his throngs.
They stormed in to scatter us;
Their exultation was like those
Who devour the oppressed in secret.

¹⁵You trampled on the sea with Your horses,
On the surge of many waters.

3:8-15 This is a poem about YHWH as Creator and Warrior for His people (cf. Hab. 3:13).

Notice how often water is mentioned. Water is the only thing in Genesis 1 that is not said to have been spoken into existence. YHWH's control of water is a powerful and recurrent OT theme (i.e., Ps. 77:16-20). See Special Topic: Waters.

It is possible the bodies of water were symbols of nations (cf. Ezek. 29:2; 32:2, i.e., Egypt's link to Leviathan, see Special Topic: Leviathan or of the cosmic chaos (cf. Ps. 74:12-17). Since in this context, the exodus is a recurrent theme, the imagery may well refer to it, a nation so linked to the Nile. It could refer to all the nations Israel encountered in the exodus (cf. Hab. 3:12).

3:8 "That You rode on Your horses" This is a chariot imagery of YHWH as warrior (i.e., Deut. 33:26; Ps. 68:17,33; 104:3; Isa. 19:1). Ezekiel's visions of chapters 1 and 10 are of YHWH's portable throne chariot.

In 2 Kings there are several texts on YHWH's chariots (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:11; 6:17; 7:6).

God used terminology and imagery of the people and culture to which He chose to reveal Himself. All Scripture has a historical context and a literary setting (book, literary unit, paragraph).

▣ **“salvation”** See Special Topic: Salvation (OT).

3:9 Notice the list of military weapons used by God.

1. bow, arrows (note Deut. 32:23,42)
2. rod (Hab. 3:9b in the MT is uncertain)
3. spear/shaft (Hab. 3:14a)

See Special Topic: The Problems and Limitations of Human Language.

Here they are personalized as giving allegiance (oaths, BDB 989) to YHWH to fulfill His will (i.e., see Jer. 47:6-7 for the same imagery used of YHWH's sword).

▣ **“Your bow was made bare”** “Bare” is literally “naked,” BDB 789). This describes how bows were stored in leather cases and had to be removed for use (see same imagery with the sword at Isa. 22:6).

Because of the extensive use of water imagery in this strophe, some have related “the bow” to Gen. 9:8-17 (rainbow as a sign of the covenant with Noah of no more universal, divine judgment by flood), but it is a different word for “bow.” The imagery here is military weapons.

3:10 The first two poetic lines refer to a powerful thunderstorm, not like the earthquake and eruption in Ps. 97:5 and Nah. 1:5. This imagery of storm runoff and lava eruption are combined in Micah 1:4.

▣ Note the personification of “the deep” (BDB 1062).

1. uttered forth its voice
2. lifted high its hands (possibly a reference to the waves, TEV, NJB)

The term is used in several senses in the OT.

1. subterranean waters (salt), cf. Gen. 7:11; 8:2; Job 28:4; 38:16; Ps. 33:7; 107:23-26; 135:6; Isa. 51:10; Amos 7:4
2. fresh water – usually in reference to crossing of the Red Sea, cf. Exod. 15:5,8; Ps. 77:17; 78:15; 106:9; Isa. 63:13
3. primeval waters – Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:6-7; Pro. 8:27, see Special Topic: Waters (water is never said to be spoken into existence in Genesis 1)
4. *Sheol* – Ps. 71:20 (see Special Topic: *Sheol*)

3:11 In the ANE the night lights were worshiped. One theological purpose of Genesis 1 is to show YHWH as creator and controller of the night and day lights, See Special Topic: Moon Worship.

This verse may be an allusion to

1. imagery of these lights standing still to witness YHWH's theophany
2. Gen. 1:3,14, God's light preceded the sun and moon
3. the storm clouds covering the lights of the sky, but providing its own light (i.e., lightning, cf. Ps. 144:6; Zech. 9:14)
4. Joshua 10:12-13, involving conquest narratives of YHWH's control of the sun and moon

▣ **“Your gleaming spear”** Gleaming (BDB 140) is literally “lightning.” This is the language of theophany, see Ps. 18:14; 144:6.

3:12 “trampled” This is literally “thresh” (BDB 190, KB 218, *Qal* IMPERFECT). This agricultural imagery of preparing grain for use is recurrent.

1. military defeat

- a. Midian – Jdgs. 8:7
- b. Israel – 2 Kgs. 13:7; Jer. 50:11; Isa. 21:10
- c. Moab – Isa. 25:10
- d. Gilead – Amos 1:3
2. military victory – Isa. 41:15; Micah 4:13
3. harsh treatment – Amos 1:3
4. YHWH judging the nations
 - a. Israel – Isa. 28:23-29
 - b. Babylon – Jer. 51:33; Hab. 3:12

3:13 This verse speaks of the leaders of God’s people and their adversaries.

1. Your anointed – this refers to
 - a. the covenant people’s King (cf. Ps. 89:38,51; see Special Topic: Anointing in the Bible and Special Topic: Messiah)
 - b. YHWH’s instrument of judgment on Babylon, Cyrus II called YHWH’s anointed in Isa. 45:1 (cf. Isa. 44:28; these are very specific historical prophecies)
 - c. the covenant people themselves (because of parallelism of Hab. 3:13a-b) who were anointed in the acceptance ceremony by Moses in Exod. 24:6-8
2. the head of the house of evil/wicked – this is the leader of the invader (Hab. 3:14c) and/or oppressor (Hab. 3:14e); YHWH will deal victoriously with Israel’s enemies by complete and total destruction (cf. Hab. 3:14-15)



NASB	“from thigh to neck”
NKJV, Peshitta	“from foundation to neck”
NRSV	“from foundation to roof”
TEV	“completely destroyed his followers”
NJB	“the foundation to rock”
JPSOA	“foundation to top”
REB	“foundation to bedrock”
NET	“the lower body to the neck”
LXX	“unto the depth of the sea”
NJB	“stripped from head to foot”

The MT is uncertain. NASB is literal but several translations see the imagery as

1. top to bottom
2. vicious stroke from a sword
3. symbolic stripping of prisoners

The source of the LXX is uncertain but related to Hab. 3:8.

3:14 This verse is uncertain. There have been many attempts to translate the lines of poetry but all seem strained. Obviously YHWH is defeating the proud, vicious invading army. To which invader or time period this imagery refers is again uncertain. The whole strophe

1. points backwards to all of YHWH’s powerful acts of deliverance on the part of His faithful people
2. looks forward to His defeat of all future invaders, even those sent by Him for punishment and to cause His people to repent and turn back to Him

3:15 This verse seems to allude to the splitting of the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14-15), but there the chariots were Pharaoh's. This is the only place where the horses are called YHWH's horses. YHWH is the "first cause," not pagan powers. They are used by Him but will also be judged by Him.

1. Assyria – Isa. 10:5-19
2. Babylon – Hab. 1:5-11; 2:4-20
3. Persia – Isa. 44:28; 45:1-13



NASB	"on the surge of many waters"
NKJV, Peshitta	"through heap of great waters"
NRSV	"churning the mighty waters"
TEV, REB	"the mighty waters foamed"
NJB	"through the surging abyss"
JPSOA	"stirring the mighty waters"
LXX	"the violent waters of the deep were stirred up"

The NOUN "surge" (BDB 330 II, lit. "heap") occurs only here. The MT points the root as if it were a *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE (BDB 330 I, KB 330). If "foaming" see

1. Ps. 46:3, for foaming of the sea
2. Ps. 75:9, for foaming of the wine
3. Lam. 1:20, for foaming of the stomach

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:16-19e

- ¹⁶I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise *who* will invade us.**
- ¹⁷Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,**
- ¹⁸Yet I will exult in the LORD
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.**
- ¹⁹The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*,
And makes me walk on my high places.**

For the choir director, on my stringed instruments."

3:16-19 This closing strophe describes the faithful followers as they wait and trust in YHWH's promises and provisions. Things may be very bad (Hab. 3:16-17) but the righteous will live by his/her faithfulness to YHWH (i.e., Hab. 2:4). Here, this trust is expressed by

1. “I must wait quietly for the day of distress,” Hab. 3:16 – BDB 628, KB 679, *Qal* IMPERFECT
2. “I will exult in the LORD,” Hab. 3:18 – BDB 759, KB 831, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
3. “I will rejoice in the God of my salvation,” Hab. 3:18 – BDB 162, KB 189, *Qal* COHORTATIVE
4. “The Lord GOD is my strength,” Hab. 3:19 – He provides sure footing to His followers (i.e., hind’s feet. . .high places, cf. Ps. 18:33)

3:16 “I heard” This connects back to Hab. 3:2, where the message caused “fear.” God’s future message of judgment also caused Daniel physical discomfort (cf. Dan. 8:17; 9:21; 10:8).

▣ **“inward parts”** This (BDB 105) refers to

1. inward self – Pro. 18:8; 20:27,30
2. seat of emotions – Job 32:18-19
3. seat of the intellect – Job 15:2,35; Pro. 22:17-18

▣ **“Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress”** This refers to YHWH’s promise to defeat the invading Chaldeans (Hab. 1:5-11; 3:16-17). These wicked pagans (Hab. 1:13-17) will be judged sometime in the future (Hab. 2:2-3,5).

This verse reflects the patient, continuous faithfulness of Hab. 2:4. YHWH will act in His own time (cf. Hab. 2:3). He will act against His covenant people’s enemies as He had done in the past. Who can resist Him? In this case He sends Cyrus (cf. Isa. 44:28; 45:1) to crush Babylon in 539 B.C.

3:17 Notice the litany of possible problems related to covenant disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:3-5,10; Deut. 28:2-14).

1. fruit trees do not flower
2. no fruit on grapevines
3. no olives on trees
4. no crop in the field
5. the flocks diminish and disappear

“Yet,” (Hab. 3:18, BDB 58) the prophet will trust in YHWH and His promises (in Hab. 2:2-3,4)! This is a literary expansion of Hab. 2:4!

3:19 “The Lord GOD is my strength” This is an allusion to

1. worship, cf. Isa. 45:23-24
2. battle, cf. 1 Samuel 22 repeated in Ps. 18:30-42, esp. vv. 32,39
3. a life of faithfulness, cf. Hab. 2:4

▣ **“makes me walk on my high places”** This is an allusion to

1. victories during the exodus, cf. Deut. 32:13; 33:29
2. YHWH Himself, cf. Amos 4:13; Micah 1:3
3. the victory of faith in YHWH’s faithfulness, cf. Hab. 2:2-3,4 (also note Ps. 18:33-36)

▣ **“For the choir director, on my stringed instruments”** This is a common phrase in the Psalter.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is this lament related to Habakkuk 1-2?
2. To what “work” does Hab. 3:2 refer?
3. How do you explain YHWH coming from the south but Mt. Sinai/Horeb is not mentioned (Hab. 3:3)?
4. Explain in your own words what Hab. 3:4-7 is expressing.
5. Define “theophany.” How does Hab. 3:8-15 relate?
6. Explain the concept of YHWH as a “divine warrior.”
7. Who is “Your anointed” in Hab. 3:13?
8. How is Hab. 3:16-19 related to Hab. 2:2-3,4?