

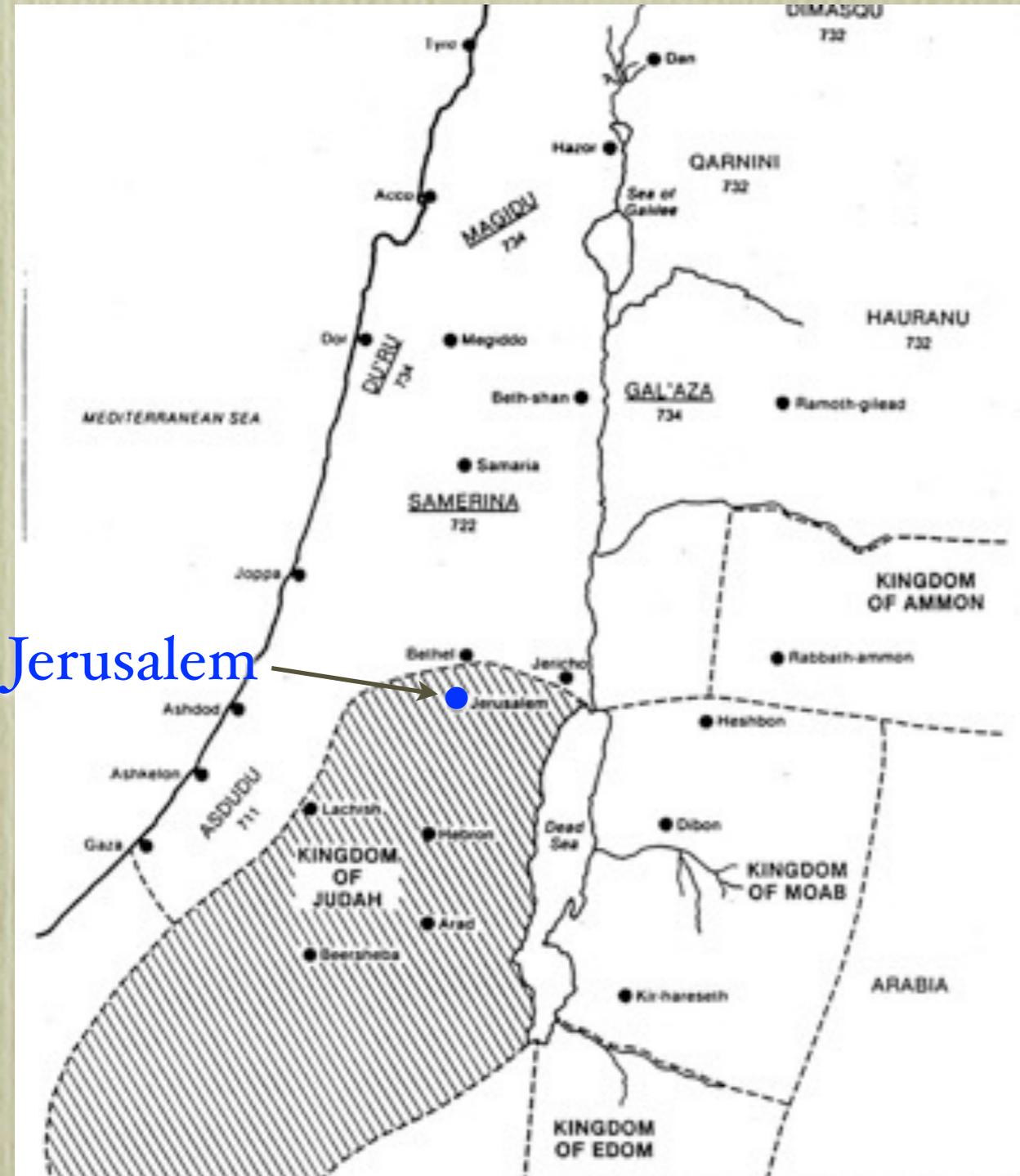
King Josiah (640-609)

1. The prophet Zephaniah 628-620



Zephaniah 1:1

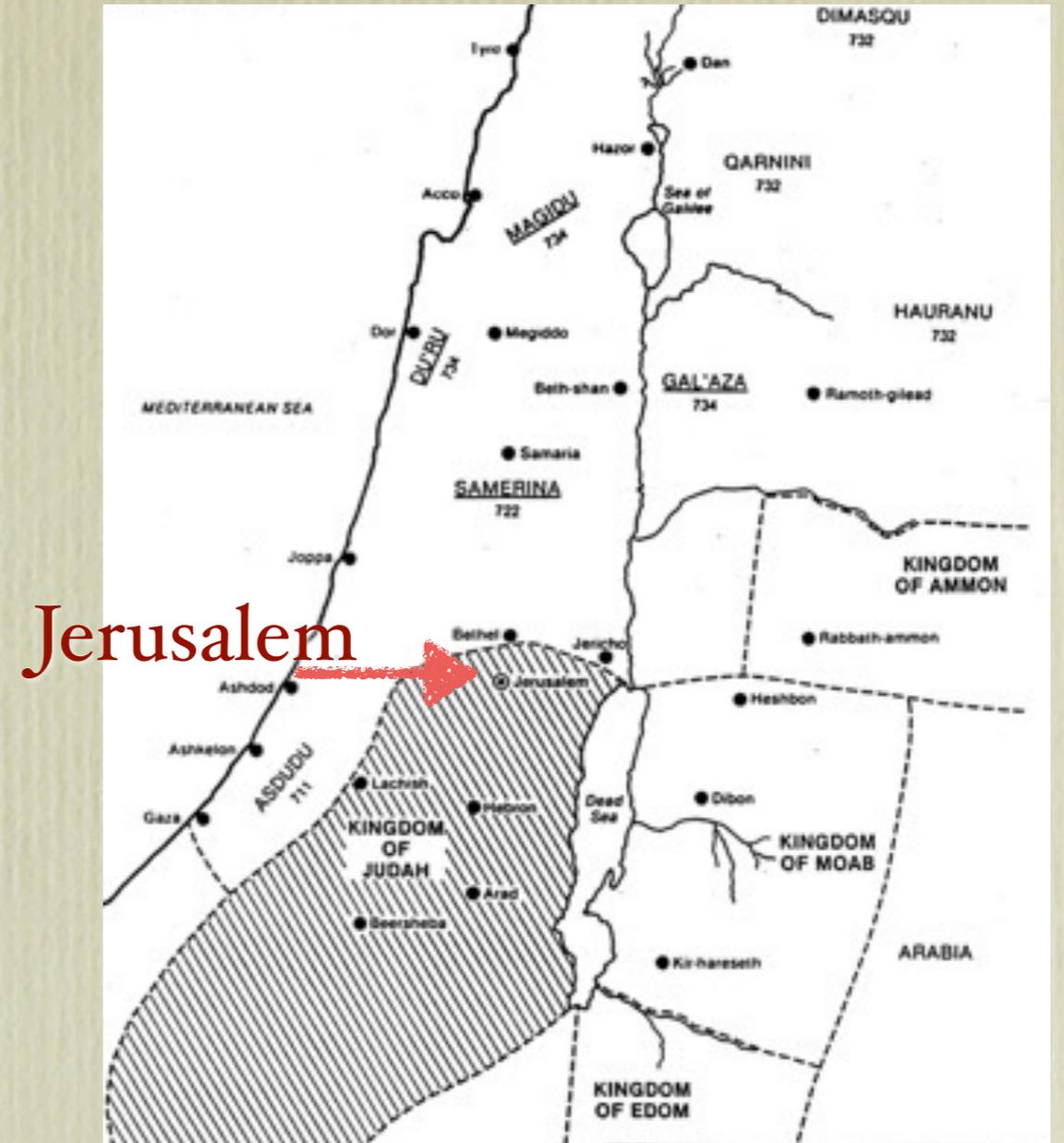
The word of YHWH that came to Zephaniah (Yah protects) son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah.



- 640 King Josiah (8 years old)
- 628 death of Ashurbanipal
Josiah determined to re-establish the kingdom of David.
- 622 Deuteronomistic Reform

Supported by Zephaniah 628-620

Zephaniah urges his contemporaries to turn to YHWH before they are forced to face God's punishment. He declares that the Day of YHWH is imminent. Like Amos, he knows that YHWH is just. Judah would not be the only nation to face judgment. Amos spoke of the crimes of Israel's neighbours, Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab, and of the punishment they were to endure (see Amos 1:3 - 2:3). Similarly, we hear Zephaniah speaking out against Philistia, Moab, and Ammon (2:5-II).



Though he speaks out against the people's sin, and is firm in insisting on the need for repentance, that is not his main focus. True prophet that he is, his focus is always on YHWH, whose fidelity transcends human sin. Amos's scroll ends on this note (see Amos 9:11-15), as does Zephaniah's (see 3:14-20).

After a century of subjection to Assyria, at last there was some hope of liberation. Assyria's power was declining, no other power was yet threatening to take its place, and Judah had a king, Josiah, who listened to the forces who were pushing for religious reform. Most of Zephaniah's oracles speak of God's judgment on the sins that he witnessed. The whole of the first chapter is devoted to God's threat of punishment of Judah. Judah's enemies, too, will be punished by God (see 2:4-6, 8-15). If the people were ever to enjoy the presence of YHWH in their midst and the blessing consequent upon such a communion, they would have to change their ways, and drastically (see 2:3). Like other prophets he explained God's punishment as an instrument in bringing about the purifying of the nation, and he bemoans the people's failure to repent (3:2, 7).

As a true prophet his focus is on YHWH, and therefore he speaks of a remnant (3:12-13) and of restoration (2:7; 3:9). He concludes with a remarkable statement of the passionate exuberance of God's longing for intimate communion with his people, and the sheer delight God will have when this intimacy is restored (3:14-24).

Zephaniah 1:2-3

I will utterly harvest (= ‘strip bare’) [’āsap - ’āsîp = ‘Ingathering’, ‘Booths’] everything from the face of the earth, says YHWH.

I will harvest humans and animals; I will harvest the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, and those who cause the wicked to stumble.

I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says YHWH.

Genesis 6:7

YHWH said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created – people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Genesis 7:4

In seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”

Zephaniah 1:4-6 - compare Genesis 6:7; 7:4; 8:8

I will stretch out my hand against Judah,
and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;
and I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal
and the name of the idolatrous priests;
those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens;
those who bow down and swear to YHWH, but also swear by their king;
those who have turned back from following YHWH,
who have not sought YHWH or inquired of him.

Zephaniah 1:7

Be silent (Hebrew שָׁמַט , has!) before the Lord YHWH!

For the day of YHWH is at hand.

Amos 5:18-20

Why do you want the day of YHWH? It is darkness, not light;
as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.

Is not the day of YHWH darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

Zephaniah 1:8-11

On the day of YHWH's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who dress themselves in foreign attire.

On that day I will punish all who cross the threshold (priests), who fill the house of their lord with violence and fraud.

On that day, says YHWH, a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate (in the outer northern wall), a wail from the Second Quarter (the western hill), a loud tumult from the hills. The inhabitants of the Mortar (commercial centre) wail, for all the traders have perished; all who weigh out silver are cut off.

Zephaniah 1:12-13

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
“YHWH will not do good, nor will he do harm.”

Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.

Zephaniah 1:14-18

The great day of YHWH is near, near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of YHWH is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there.
That day will be a day of wrath, ['dies irae, dies illa']
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.
I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the
blind; because they have sinned against YHWH, their blood shall be
poured out like dust, and their innards like dung. Neither their silver
nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of YHWH's wrath;
in the fire of his passion all the land will be consumed; for a full, a
terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the land.

Zephaniah 2:1-3

Gather together, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree comes into effect, and the day comes and goes like the drifting chaff, before there comes upon you the fierce anger of YHWH, before there comes upon you the day of YHWH's wrath.

Seek YHWH, all you oppressed (עֲנָוִים , 'anawim) of the land,
who carry out his commands;
seek righteousness, seek humility (עֲנָוָה , anawah) - reliance on God)
perhaps you may be hidden on the day of YHWH's wrath.

Zephaniah 2:4-5

Oracle against Philistia

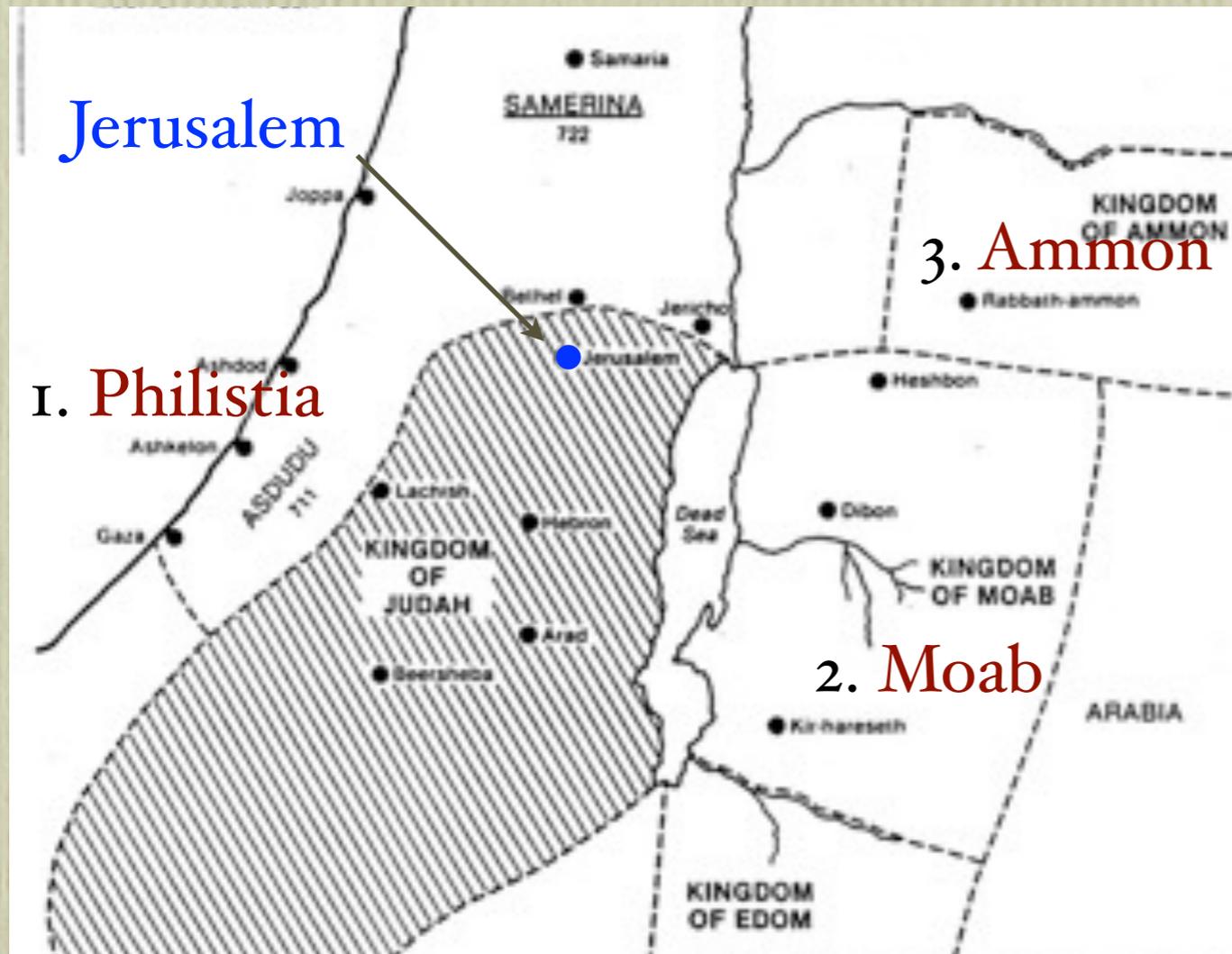


For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate; Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. Woe! O you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Kerethites! The word of YHWH is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.

Zephaniah 2:6-7



The seacoast will become pasture, wells for shepherds and folds for flocks. The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall pasture, and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For YHWH their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes.



I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites, how they have taunted my people and made inroads into their territory. As I live, says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel, Moab shall become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever.

The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them. This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they scoffed and boasted against the people of YHWH of hosts.

Zephaniah 2:11

YHWH will bring down all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the coasts and islands of the nations.

The focus widens. Zephaniah zooms out from Philistia, Moab and Ammon, to ‘all the gods of the earth’. Ultimately all the gods will bow down in worship of YHWH.

This will be seen by the defeat of all Israel’s enemies. Jerusalem will be restored as the centre of the earth, the holy place from which YHWH’s glory will radiate out to ‘all the coasts and islands of the nations’.

Zephaniah 2:12 - Oracle against Cush

You also, O Cush, are slain by my sword.

Zephaniah illustrates his point about the eventual submission of all the earth to YHWH (and therefore to faithful Israel) by referring to the people of 'Cush', commonly identified with Ethiopia, but generally referring to the scarcely known lands to the south of Egypt.



From 747 to 664, the pharaohs of Egypt were from Cush. This ended with the destruction of Thebes in 663 by the Assyrians, supported by Psamtek I, who became pharaoh (663-610) and remained an ally of Assyria. It was the Egyptian army under Psamtek that was moving against Philistia. [Zephaniah \(628-620\)](#) seems to be referring to the defeat of the Cushite dynasty in 664 as another example of YHWH's action in history. He sees the strengthening of Egypt as a sign of the weakening of Assyria.



Zephaniah 2:13-15 - Oracle against Assyria

He will extend his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and he will make Nineveh a desolation, an arid wasteland like the desert. Herds shall lie down in it, every wild animal; pelican and porcupine will lodge on its capitals; the owl shall hoot at the window, the raven croak on the threshold; for cedar will be stripped. Is this the exultant city that lived secure, that said to itself, “I am, and there is no one else”? What a desolation it has become, a lair for wild animals! Everyone who passes by it hisses and shakes the fist.

Zephaniah (628-620) read the signs well, for the Assyrian Empire was crushed with the destruction of its ancient capital, Asshur, in 614 by the combined forces of Babylon and the Medes. The destruction of Nineveh followed in 612.

Zephaniah 3:1-4

Woe, O rebellious, defiled, oppressing city (Jerusalem)!

She has listened to no voice; she has accepted no instruction.

She has not trusted in YHWH. She has not drawn near to her God.

The **officials** in her midst are roaring lions.

Her **judges** are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning.

Her **prophets** are reckless, faithless.

Her **priests** profane what is sacred, they do violence to the Torah.

Note: There is no criticism of the king (Josiah)

Zephaniah 3:5-8

YHWH in her midst is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he renders his judgment, each dawn without fail. He knows no wrong, no shame. I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without people, without inhabitants. I said, “Surely the city will fear me, and accept correction; she will not lose sight of all that I have brought upon her.”

But they were the more eager to corrupt everything they did. Therefore wait for me, says YHWH, for the day when I arise for prey. For my decision is to harvest nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my passion all the earth will be consumed.

Zephaniah 3:9-10

At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech,
that all of them may call on the name of YHWH
and serve him with one accord.

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliant, my scattered ones,
shall bring my cereal offering.

Zephaniah envisages the time when the nations will experience a conversion to YHWH (see 2:11) and come, from the ends of the earth, to offer sacrifice to YHWH in Jerusalem. The picture of people from the ends of the earth, ‘beyond the rivers of Cush’, bringing cereal offerings to YHWH points to Zephaniah’s ministry being before Judah’s relations with Egypt soured later in Josiah’s reign.

Zephaniah 3:11-13

On that day you will not be put to shame
because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst your proud exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.
I will leave in your midst a people humble ('ani) and lowly.
They will seek refuge in the name of YHWH.
The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.
Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.

Since the temple and the feast of Sukkôt is the likely context for Zephaniah's oracles, it is not surprising that the qualities of the 'remnant of Israel' described in verse 13 are the qualities required of a person who wishes to enter the temple (see Psalm 15:1-3 and Psalm 24:3-4).

Zephaniah 3:14-17 - renewed marriage relationship

Sing aloud, O Daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O Daughter Jerusalem!

YHWH has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, YHWH, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

YHWH, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;
he will dance over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival.

Zephaniah 3:18-20

Punishment - Repentance - Restoration

Those who have suffered when I harvested you [see 1:2]
were a burden upon her, a reproach.

I am dealing with all who oppress you at that time.

And I will save the lame and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you;

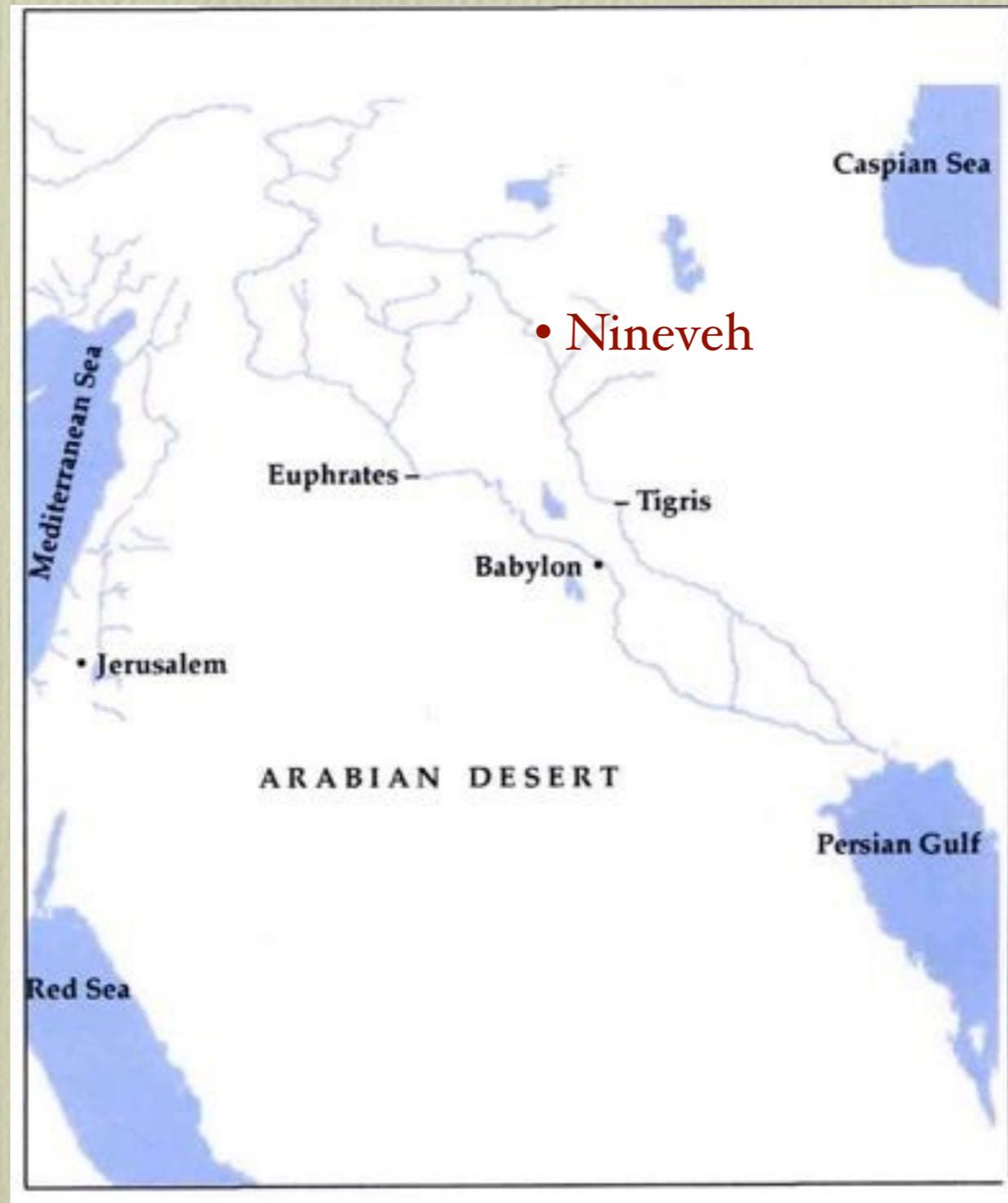
for I will make you renowned and praised

among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says YHWH.

2. Nahum 620-612

during reign of Josiah (640-609)



Judah had felt the oppressive power of Assyria since Assyria's westward expansion under Tiglath-pileser III in 734. His successor, Shalmaneser, conquered the northern kingdom, Israel. In 721 he was replaced by Sargon II, whose son, Sennacherib devastated Judah in 701. Sennacherib chose to make Nineveh his capital.

Nahum is delighting in the imminent fall of Nineveh, the capital of the Empire that had destroyed Israel, annexed the land to the east of the Jordan, controlled Philistia, and for over a century had kept Judah in subjection, even insisted on worship of the Assyrian gods in the temple of Jerusalem.

Assyria's decline was evident by 627 when Ashurbanipal died.

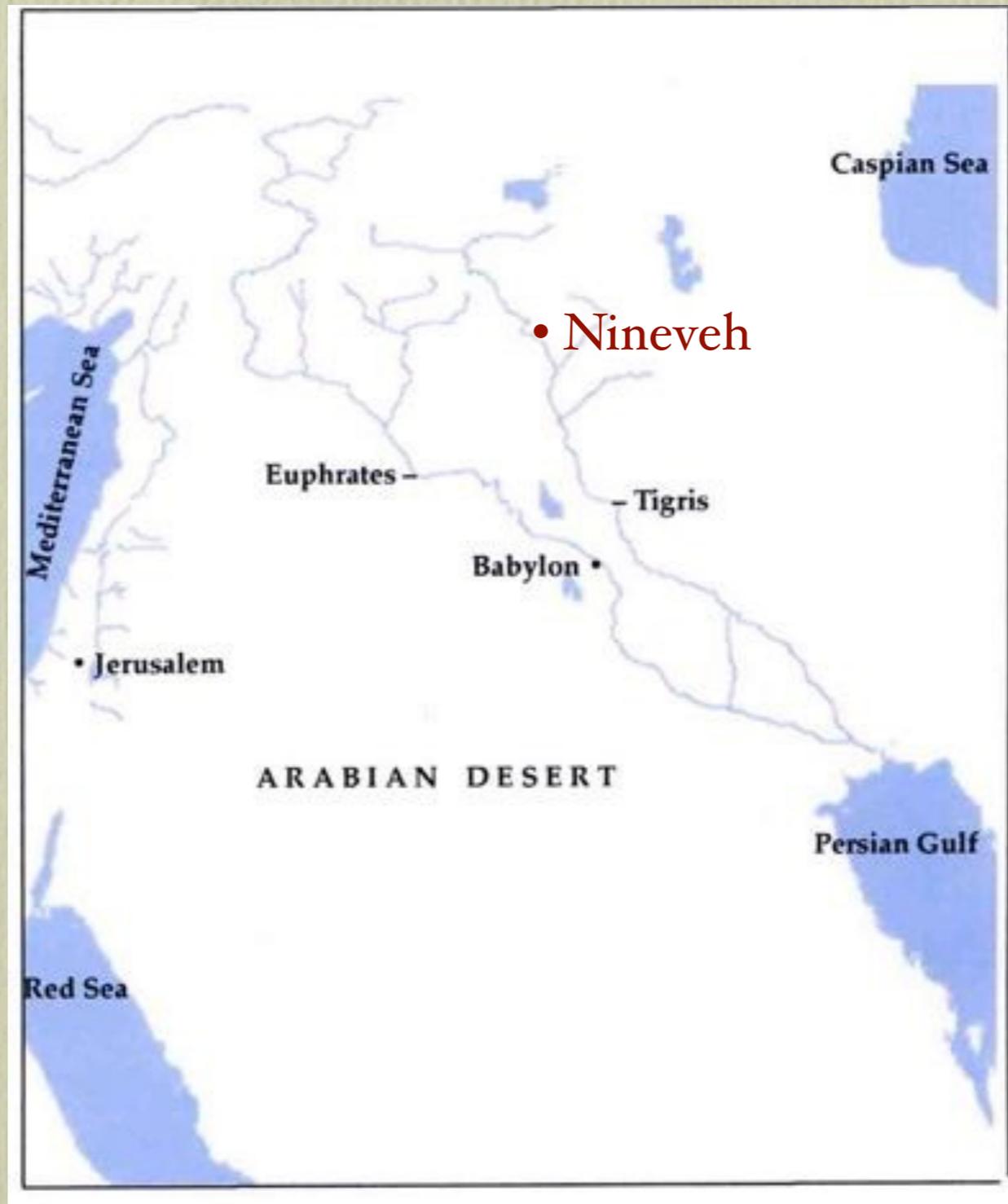
In 614 Asshur, the religious capital, fell.

In 612 Nineveh was captured by the Medes, with Babylon's backing.

Nahum 1:1

An oracle concerning Nineveh.

The book of the vision of Nahum [comfort] of Elkosh.



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Assyria's decline was evident by 627 when Ashurbanipal died.

In 614 Asshur, the religious capital, fell.

In 612 Nineveh was captured by the Medes, with Babylon's backing.

Nahum 1:2-5

- [א] A jealous and avenging God is YHWH, YHWH is avenging and wrathful; YHWH takes vengeance of his adversaries and lays up anger for his foes.
YHWH is slow to anger but great in power, and YHWH will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.
- [ב] His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.
- [ג] He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers.
Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades.
- [ד] The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt away.
- [ה] The earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it.

Nahum 1:6-8

[ו] Who can withstand his indignation?

Who can endure the heat of his anger?

[ז] His wrath is poured out like fire;

the rocks are shattered before him.

[ח] YHWH is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble;

[ט] he **knows** those who take refuge in him,

but with an overflowing flood

[י] he will make a full end of his adversaries,

and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Nahum 1:9-11

⁹Why do you plot against YHWH? He is about to bring about an complete end, for he will not take vengeance twice against his foes.

¹⁰Though they be like thorns tangled and soaking wet, they are consumed like dry straw. ¹¹From you one has gone out who plots evil against YHWH, who counsels wickedness.

Verse 9 declares the folly of trying to overcome or avoid YHWH's will. The words 'no adversary will rise up twice' is an assurance that Assyria will not rise again to oppress Judah.

The Hebrew of verse 10 is obscure. The meaning seems to be that even though the enemy is dangerous (like tangled thorns) and hard to burn (when wet from flooding), they cannot avoid YHWH's anger. God will consume them as easily as dry straw.

Nahum 1:12-15

Thus says YHWH, “Though they are at full strength, and there are many of them, even so they will be cut off and pass away.

Though I have afflicted **you** [Judah], I will afflict you no more.

And now I will break off his yoke from you
and snap the bonds that bind you.”

YHWH has commanded concerning **you** [the king of Nineveh]:

“Your name shall be sown no longer; from the house of your gods
I will cut off the carved image and the cast image.

I will make your grave a place of insult and reproach.”

Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings,
who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah,
fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you;
they are utterly cut off.

Nahum 2:1-6

A scatterer has come up against **you** [Nineveh]. Guard the ramparts; watch the road; gird your loins; collect all your strength. For YHWH is restoring the pride of Jacob, as well as the pride of Israel, though ravagers have ravaged them and ruined their branches. The shields of his warriors are red; his soldiers are clothed in crimson. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day when he musters them; the chargers prance. The chariots race madly through the fields, they rush to and fro through the open spaces; their appearance is like torches, they dart like lightning. He calls his officers; they stumble as they come forward; they hasten to the wall, and the defensive shield is set up. The river [Tigris] gates are opened, the palace trembles.

Nahum 2:7-10

It is decreed that she be exiled,
her maidens led away, moaning like doves and beating their breasts.
Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away.
“Halt! Halt!”— but no one turns back.
“Plunder the silver, plunder the gold! There is no end of treasure!
An abundance of every precious thing!”
Devastation, desolation, and destruction!
Hearts faint and knees tremble, all loins quake, all faces grow pale!

Nahum 2:11-13

What became of the lions' den, the cave of the young lions,
where the lion goes, and the lion's cubs, with no one to disturb them?
The lion has torn enough for his whelps
and strangled prey for his lionesses;
he has filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh.
See, I am against you, says YHWH of hosts,
and I will burn your chariots in smoke,
and the sword shall devour your young lions;
I will cut off your prey from the earth,
and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more.

Nahum 3:1-7

Woe! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty – no end to the plunder! The crack of whip and rumble of wheel, galloping horse and jolting chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end – they stumble over the corpses!

Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery.

I am against you, says YHWH of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle.

Then all who see you will shrink from you and say,

“Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?”

Where shall I seek comforters for you?

Nahum 3:8-II

Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile,
with water around her, her rampart a sea, water her wall?
Cush was her strength [25th dynasty was from Cush],
Egypt too, and that without limit;
Put and the Libyans were her helpers.
Yet she became an exile, she went into captivity;
even her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of every street;
lots were cast for her nobles, all her dignitaries were bound in fetters.

- In 663 Ashurbanipal sacked Thebes, which never recovered.

Now Nineveh will suffer the same fate

You also will be drunken, you will go into hiding;
you will seek a refuge from the enemy.

Nahum 3:12-17

All your fortresses are like fig trees with first-ripe figs – if shaken they fall into the mouth of the eater.

Look at your troops: they are women in your midst.

The gates of your land are wide open to your foes; fire has devoured the bars of your gates

Draw water for the siege, strengthen your forts;

trample the clay, tread the mortar, take hold of the brick mould!

There the fire will devour you, the sword will cut you off.

It will devour you like the locust.

Multiply yourselves like the locust, multiply like the grasshopper!

You increased your merchants more than the stars of the heavens.

The locust sheds its skin and flies away.

Your guards are like grasshoppers, your scribes like swarms of locusts settling on the fences on a cold day – when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they have gone.

Nahum 3:18-19

Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber.
Your people are scattered on the mountains
with no one to gather them.
There is no assuaging your hurt, your wound is mortal.
All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you.
For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?