

Torat Imecha NACH YOMI B'IYUN



Sefer Nachum: Dr. Emmy Leah Zitter

The main focus of this short *sefer* is Hashem's vengeance on Ashur (Assyria). The Malbim takes a historical approach, seeing in the first two chapters the story of the legendary Assyrian king Sardanapalus, who killed himself and his entire court years before the final fall of Ashur. That later, final vengeance, says the Malbim, is predicted by Nachum in the third chapter. A more general approach sees in the *sefer* a description of Ashur's downfall generally. The book, which never rebukes the Jews for their sins, reflects Hashem's unconditional love and comfort for His people. It can also be seen as a song of praise to Hashem for destroying our implacable enemy, praise that the righteous King Chizkiyahu neglected when Hashem saved Yerushalayim from Sancherev.

Yet another approach underlines Hashem's love for His people—and specifically for Yerushalayim. In the Midrash *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*, we read about why Hashem took such vengeance on Ashur. Here's a selection from the Midrash:

אתה אומר על סנחרב מלך אשור שנתקנא ונתנקם בהם בישראל והקב"ה היה מתקנא ומתנקם במחנהו בקנאה ובנקמה ובעלילה ובגאווה... ומה היתה מחשבה של סנחרב? שהיה בדעתו של סנחרב הרשע להתנקם בישראל ואמר להן לחיילותיו צאו והביאו לי כל אחד ואחד מכם מלא כף עפר מעפר של ירושלים ונעקור שמה מן העולם שנא' (נחום א) "ממך יצא חושב על ה' רעה יועץ בליעל". וכי על הקב"ה היה יועץ אלא ללמדך שכל היועץ רעה על ישראל כאלו יועץ רעה כלפי מעלה לכך נאמר ממך יצא חושב על ה' וגו'. הקב"ה הוא בוחן לבות וכליות והיה אומר על סנחרב שוטה שבעולם וכי אני מאבד בני מן העולם צאני צאן נחלתי אני מאבד ומה תחשבון על ה' וגו' (נחום א) לכך נאמר אל קנא ונוקם ה' וגו'.

"You are saying about Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, who became jealous and sought to take revenge on Israel, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, was jealous and took revenge on His camp with jealousy, vengeance, slander, and pride... And what was the thought of Sennacherib? It was the intention of that wicked Sennacherib to take revenge on Israel. He said to his soldiers, 'Go and bring me a handful of dust from Jerusalem's soil, and I will eradicate it from the world,' as it is written (Nahum 1): 'From you, one who plots evil against the Lord, a wicked counselor.' And was it the Lord who had a counselor? Rather, this teaches us that anyone who counsels evil against Israel is as if he is counseling evil against the Almighty. Therefore, it is said, 'From you, one who plots evil against the Lord...' The Holy One, Blessed be He, examines hearts and kidneys, and He would say of Sennacherib, 'Fool of the world! Am I to destroy My children from the world? My sheep, My inheritance, am I to destroy them? What do you think of the Lord...?' (Nahum 1). Therefore, it is said, 'A jealous and avenging Lord...'"

In summary, Hashem took revenge on Ashur because the evil Sancherev told his soldiers, each and every one of you take one handful of dirt from the dirt of Yerushalayim and we will uproot the name Yerushalayim from the earth. The Midrash goes on to cite Sefer Nachum, chapter 1, *pasuk* 11, in which the prophet accuses Ashur of plotting evil against Hashem, concluding that to plan evil against Israel is as if to plan evil against G-d, so-to-speak. Hashem who knows all calls Ashur a fool—do you really think I will allow My people, My sheep, My inheritance, to be destroyed?

Question:

During our learning of Torat Imecha Nach Yomi, we began by pointing out that this short *sefer* was rarely read or studied and wasn't a part of any *haftarah*. But we know that prophecies that were written down were meant "*l'dorot*," for future generations, and therefore the *sefer* deserves attention.

How can we relate this *sefer* about the downfall of a nation more than 2,600 years ago to our lives today? Do any of the approaches summarized above teach us lessons for today?

Postscript:

I chose to study *Sefer Nachum* for a number of reasons: first and foremost, Nachum was the name of my father, *a'h*.

My father was a quiet man, a man of peace, loved by all who knew him. Growing up, I only recall seeing him angry once. My sister and I had a stamp collection, and he saw that we had a stamp from Nazi Germany with a picture of Hitler, *yimach shmo v'zichrono*, on it. He made us rip it into tiny pieces and flush it down the toilet. We'd never seen our gentle father so upset.

My father came to the US before the Holocaust, but his whole family was wiped out in Europe by the Nazis—the Assyrians of his day. When I read *Sefer Nachum* and think about my father, I understand better Hashem's ferocious response to those who would destroy our people, His nation. My memories of my father, who loved his family and his fellow Jews unconditionally, also deepens my appreciation for the *nechama*—comfort—that comes from knowing Hashem's unending, unconditional love for us, His people.