

## Scattering And Gathering: Images Of History And Prophecy (Part Two)

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### Part Two: The Fugitives of Jacob's Trouble

*“The time is coming when the Lord will shake the land between the Euphrates River and the border of Egypt, and one by one He will bring all of His people together.”*

—Isaiah 27:12, *Contemporary English Version*

Jesus Christ described the tribulation to come as a time “such as has not been from the beginning of the world” (Matthew 24:21, *English Standard Version* [ESV] throughout unless otherwise noted). It follows, then, that the scriptural types of that period, the period of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), will be in some important ways *different* from the affliction soon to befall the nations of modern Israel. For example, the burning of the Temple and “the great homes” by the Babylonians, their tearing down of Jerusalem's walls, will be unlike the distress modern-day Israel will soon experience. The types are similar, yet different in some ways.

This similar-but-different aspect is certainly true of the various scatterings of Israel. The Assyrian-instigated deportation of the House of Israel will resemble the imminent scattering of modern-day Israel at the hand of the Beast power; even so, it will be different. The Babylonian-led deportation of the House of Judah and the exiling of the Judeans by the Romans are like the scattering to come, yet different.

What characteristic of the impending scattering will set it apart from its predecessors, make it so unique that Christ labeled it as unlike any other time of exile in history? The images evoked by various Hebrew verbs that mean “scatter” suggest that the answer lies in something other than the intensity or the length of the distress. A study of five Hebrew verbs meaning “scatter” will allow us to identify this unique—and horrifying—trait of the scattering that is just around the corner.

### Breaking Rocks and Smashing Pottery

The verb most commonly rendered “scatter” in the Old Testament is *puwts*.<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 28:64: “And the LORD will *scatter* you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other” (emphasis ours throughout).<sup>2</sup>

While *puwts* can mean “disperse” or “scatter” in a non-violent sense (see I Samuel 14:34), it can also refer to a violent dashing to pieces, as in Jeremiah 23:29: “Is not My word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks [*puwts*] the rock in pieces?” Here, God likens His Word to a sledgehammer capable of crushing rocks. After a few blows, many types of rocks, once perhaps monolithic monuments, can become highly fragmented. Quarry-grade rock crushing equipment is capable of virtually disintegrating even igneous rock, like granite. *Puwts* can refer to a severe fracturing.<sup>3</sup>

The prophet Daniel's use of *naphats*,<sup>4</sup> another verb for "scatter," is instructive. In Daniel 12:7, the angel dressed in linen refers to a time when the "power of God's people has been crushed [King James Version (KJV): *scatter*]" (*The Living Bible*). Other translators modify *naphats* with the adverb "completely," as "completely shattered."<sup>5</sup> In other places, the translators of the KJV render *naphats* as "scatter," "break in pieces,"<sup>6</sup> and "dash in pieces." *Naphats*' first use, in Genesis 9, speaks of widespread dispersion, a usage it shares with *puwts*: "These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth" (Genesis 9:19, *New International Version*).

The second psalm contains a poetic use of *naphats* that fuses this notion of widespread geographic dispersion with two other elements: disintegration and violence.<sup>7</sup>

Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware. (Psalm 2:8-9, *New American Standard Bible* [NASB])

Break a vase with a hammer, and you will have some idea of the fragmentation connoted by *naphats*.

### **Sifting Grain and Pursuing Lions**

*Nuwa*,<sup>8</sup> the verb translated as "sift" and "sifted" in Amos 9:9, is even stronger:

For behold, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations and cause it to move to and fro as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least kernel fall upon the earth and be lost [from My sight]. (*The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition* [AMPC])

The first use of *nuwa*, in Genesis 4:12, refers to Cain, the translators rendering it with the noun "fugitive": "When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."<sup>9</sup> This is an important use of *nuwa*, evoking an image of a wanderer, a person alone, on the run, pursued, never secure. This is an image of more than fragmentation, but of isolation and alienation.

Another passage that models this use of *nuwa* is Psalm 109:10, where David sings of the sons of the wicked: "Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes" (*NASB*). *Nuwa* appears here as "wander about and beg." In context, the children of the wicked are dispossessed of their forefathers' homes, begging for food far away in foreign territory. The image of the forlorn and fatigued fugitive is not far from David's description of the fate of the sons of the wicked.

*Pazar* is yet another Hebrew verb translated "scatter."<sup>10</sup> The imagery behind the use of this word in Jeremiah 50:17 is surely germane:

The LORD says, "The people of Israel are like sheep, chased and scattered by lions. First, they were attacked by the emperor of Assyria, and then King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia gnawed on their bones. (*Good News Translation* [GNT])

God depicts Israel like a flock of sheep totally broken up as predators chase its individual members in every direction, evoking still another image of the fugitive. Each individual is alone, separated, pursued, and endangered. The sheep are still there, but the flock is gone. Thus, the individual animals become easy prey.

This passage illustrates the degree of fragmentation yet to take place in Israel. Importantly, its audience is *modern* Israelites, not ancient ones, as verses 4-5 indicate. Here, Jeremiah establishes the timeframe of his comments as the regathering of Israel at the end of the Day of the Lord:

In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, "Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten."

None of that happened in the days of the Assyrians, Babylonians, or Romans.

### **The Fugitive and End of Chunky Scattering**

*Zarah*<sup>11</sup> is another of the many Hebrew verbs carrying the general meaning of "scatter." It carries much the same undertones as *nuwa* ("sift"), as it can mean "to winnow" or "to spread widely."<sup>12</sup> Its first use, Exodus 32:20, stresses the high granularity of what is scattered: Moses "ground to power" (that is, pulverized) the Golden Calf and scattered the dust on the water for the Israelites to drink. This is a clear image of pulverization.

Note how the prophet Ezekiel uses *zarah* in Ezekiel 5:12:

One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. (NASB)<sup>13</sup>

He predicts a time of extensive dying, as well as the scattering of a third of the Israelites "to every wind," that is, north, south, east, and west, a widespread scattering.<sup>14</sup> Finally, he sees the violent pursuit of those so dispersed, another image of fugitive folk.

Ezekiel 1:1 gives the lie to the argument that the thrust of the prophet's comments is historical, writing about the recent exiling of the Jews at the hands of the Babylonians. There, we learn that he was a captive, a deportee, living "among the exiles by the Chebar canal."<sup>15</sup> He was undoubtedly in some sort of Babylonian concentration camp where captives were held while being screened for work assignments. The Babylonians had not then—and did not later—disperse their captives to all winds. Ezekiel was not isolated. Nor were his captors seeking to kill him.

Historically, none of the various scatterings of God's people were accompanied by genocide. Though removed from the Promised Land, they ordinarily remained "chunked," that is, in relatively large groups. (There were certainly exceptions, of course.)

» All of the children of Israel—all seventy of them—migrated *en masse* to Egypt during the time of Jacob (Genesis 26:1-27).

- » More than two million of their descendants migrated as a group out of Egypt some 215 years later “with a high hand” (Exodus 12:37; 14:8). The Egyptian Pharaoh briefly, though not effectively, pursued them.
- » The Assyrians deported virtually all the folk of the house of Israel to the same general area, from where they later migrated (II Kings 17:18b).
- » In the three principal deportations of Judah by the Babylonians, “none remained, except the poorest people of the land” (II Kings 24:14).

While some families were certainly torn apart because of these typical scatterings, and although there were at times high death rates, the surviving deportees did not typically become permanently isolated from kith and kin. This “chunky scattering” is characteristic of the historical exiles and describes to this day the scattered Israelites.

How are they “scattered” today? In big chunks, in enclaves the size of the State of Israel, the metropolis of New York City, or on another level, Australia. Undeniably, God did broadcast Israel in many directions, far from Jerusalem. But, *as a rule*, He did so in good-sized chunks.<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel’s prophecy of scattering “to every wind” (verse 12), fleeing a pursuing sword, awaits fulfilment.

### **Granular Regathering: The Result of a Granular Scattering**

As one might expect, some of the scriptures dealing with Israel’s prophesied *regathering* support the notion that her final scattering will entail a high degree of fragmentation. For example, Isaiah 27:12 describes God gathering (or gleaning) His people *individually*, one by one. It is no leap of logic to understand that He gathers them one by one because He had earlier scattered them one by one: “At that time the Lord will begin gathering his people one by one from the Euphrates River to the brook of Egypt. He will separate them from others as grain is separated from chaff” (*New Century Version*).

As a second example, Jeremiah alludes to God’s finding people in isolated situations as He works to return them to Zion: “Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion” (Jeremiah 3:14). In context, this passage refers to God’s picking individuals out to return them to Zion.<sup>17</sup>

### **God’s Church as Bellwether**

If we look carefully, what we see in the scriptural images describing the scattering to come is this: powder, not chunks. That is, the future scattering is gross fragmentation and high levels of granularity: pulverization, atomization, isolation. In the final scattering, we are looking at images of grains of wheat, lone fugitives, wandering vagabonds, fragments of pottery, and crushed rock—people not only having lost their homes, not only widely dispersed, but also on the run, alone, or at least almost so. The degree of fragmentation in Israel’s final scattering, the one hovering over her today, will be far more significant than in the typical scatterings of her history. The chunks will be much smaller. The Israelites will be spread very thin.

If we look for this extreme level of fragmentation in Israel’s historical scattering, we will find it only as an exception. For example, the Nazis penned the Jews of the holocaust in concentration camps. Atomization was the exception, not the rule. We do not see widespread pulverization in history; it awaits the time of Jacob’s Trouble, *a time without precedent*. This level of pulverization, an intense

level of fragmentation, may well be the *new* thing on the earth, the *unique and definitive* characteristic of the future scattering.<sup>18</sup>

A new thing, yet, for all that, a thing existing right now in silhouette. For we in God's true church are today witnessing—indeed, undergoing—this horrific atomization. In the closing years of the twentieth century, God pulverized the church of God. Like God's folk captive in Babylon twenty-two centuries ago, remembering Zion's heady days, we too remember what we fondly call "the old church," with its congregations of more than 200 people, often 300 or 400. We recall the exhilaration of choosing from a plethora of feast sites, many of which had more than 3,000 attendees. Those days are gone. Our children today cannot even conceive of the church we knew then.

Today, congregations are small, many of only a handful of people. Feast sites of even 2,000 people are few and far between. If it were not for technology, communication would be exceedingly difficult. Yes, God has indeed pulverized His church.

This situation is only deteriorating; we in the church face continued and worsening isolation. What church members are now suffering, the people of national Israel will eventually experience on a vastly magnified scale. National Israel can look forward to suffering the pulverization, the pounding, of her secular civilization, as survivors of war, famine, and disease are forced into highly isolated situations, alienated from kinfolk, hated by everyone, fugitives, vagabonds, starving, sick, and apparently abandoned. If the ghetto or the concentration camp is the emblem of Israel's typical scatterings, the isolation chamber will be the emblem of her impending one.

It will be truly amazing to behold how God brings unifying order out of this soon-to-come *tohu* and *bohu*, collecting each scattered and lonely grain, "one by one and one to another,"<sup>19</sup> restoring each grain to His fold. No wonder those participating in that restoration will no longer speak of the first exodus, the second being so much more astonishing!<sup>20</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Puwts* is *Strong's Concordance* #6327 and appears 67 times in the Old Testament. The translators of the KJV render it "scatter" (48x), "scatter abroad" (6x), "disperse" (3x), "spread abroad," "cast abroad" (2x each), "drive," "break to pieces," "shake to pieces," "dash to pieces, and "retired" (1x each). Its first use is in Genesis 10:18. It is also the word rendered "scatter" or "disperse" in Genesis 11:9, referring to God's scattering about the earth of the people building Babel.

<sup>2</sup> Another example is at Ezekiel 20:23. There, two verbs meaning "scatter" appear in close proximity: *Puwts* (rendered "scatter" in the ESV) and *zarah* (rendered "dispersed" in the same version). Regarding *zarah*, see xiii, below, for details.

<sup>3</sup> As another example, see Job's comments in Job 16:12.

<sup>4</sup> The verb *naphats* (*Strong's* #5310) appears 22 times in the Old Testament. The KJV translators render it "break in pieces" (9x), "scatter," "break" (3x each), "dash" (2x), "discharged," "dispersed," "overspread," "dash in pieces," and "sunder" (each 1x). Often, *naphats* carries a strong notion of pulverization, as in Isaiah 27:9b (*International*

*Standard Version*): “. . . when he [Israel] makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalkstones.”

<sup>5</sup> Examples include the *New King James Version*, the *Names of God Bible*, and the *God’s WORD Translation* (GWT).

<sup>6</sup> Examples include the *World English Bible* and the *American Standard Version*.

<sup>7</sup> Another well-known place this verb appears is the incident where Gideon’s men broke the pitchers in their attack on the Midianites (Judges 7:19).

<sup>8</sup> *Nuwa* (*Strong’s* #5128) appears 42 times in the Old Testament. The KJV translators render it “shake,” “move,” “wander” (each 6x), “promoted” (3x), “fugitive” (2x), “sift,” “stagger,” and “wag” (each 1x), with 13 miscellaneous translations.

<sup>9</sup> The noun “wanderer” is related to the Hebrew verb, *nud* (*Strong’s* #5110), which appears 24 times in the Old Testament. The KJV translators render it “bemoan” (7x), “remove” (5x), “vagabond” (2x), “flee,” “get,” “mourn,” “move,” “pity,” “shaken,” “skippedst,” “sorry,” “wag,” and “wandering” (each 1x).

<sup>10</sup> *Pazar* (*Strong’s* #6340) appears ten times in the Old Testament, where the KJV translators render it “scattered” (9x) and “dispersed” (1x). In its first use in Esther 3:8, the Agagite Haman, talking to the Persian king, describes the Jews as “scattered.”

<sup>11</sup> *Zarah* is *Strong’s* #2219. It appears 39 times in the Old Testament. The KJV translators render it “scatter” (19x), “disperse” (8x), “fan” (4x), “spread,” “winnowed” (2x each), “cast away,” “scatter away,” “compass,” and “strawed” (1x each).

<sup>12</sup> The New Testament equivalent of *nuwa* seems to be *diaskorpizô* (*Strong’s* #1287), meaning “to scatter,” “to disperse,” and “to winnow.” This verb appears nine times in the New Testament, where its first use is in Matthew 25:24. The KJV translators render it as “straw,” “scatter abroad,” “scatter,” “waste” (2x each), and “disperse” (1x).

Another Greek verb often translated “scatter” is *skorpizô* (*Strong’s* #4650, obviously related to *diaskorpizo*). It appears five times in the New Testament; its first use is at Matthew 12:30. “Whoever is not with Me is against me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.” The KJV translators render *skorpizô* as “scatter” (2x), “scattered abroad,” and “disperse abroad” (1x each).

Finally, the use of *skorpizo* in John 16:32, is noteworthy. There, Christ refers to the scattering of His disciples, “each one looking out for himself” (*Complete Jewish Bible*), or “Each of you will go your own way and leave me all alone” (GWT). *The Voice* conveys the concept of total fragmentation, to the point of isolation: “Be aware that a time is coming when you will be scattered like seeds. You will return to your own way, and I will be left alone.”

<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the second use of *zarah* in the Old Testament (Leviticus 26:33) reflects the Ezekiel 5 passage: “And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you . . . .”

<sup>14</sup> In this passage, the Hebrew noun for “wind” is *ruwach* (*Strong’s* #7307). This word, often rendered “spirit” in the Old Testament, appears 378 times, first in Genesis 1:2, where the KJV translators render it “Spirit”: “and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” They render *ruwach* as “spirit” (232x), “wind” (92x), “breath” (27x), “side” (6x), “mind” (5x), “blast” (4x), “vain” (2x), “air,” “anger,” “cool,” and “courage” (1x each), with six miscellaneous translations.

“Every” in Ezekiel 5:12 (*NASB*, often “all” in other versions) is *kol* (*Strong’s* #3605), meaning “all,” “every,” “the whole.” Its first use is as Genesis 1:21: “. . . and every living creature that moves.” *Ruwach* modified by *kol* occurs only four times in the Old Testament, once in Jeremiah and three times in Ezekiel.

<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew noun *tavek* (*Strong’s* #8432, appearing 415 times in the Old Testament) is the word generally translated “among,” “in the midst of,” or “with.” The KJV translators render it “midst” (209x), “among” (140x), “within” (20x), “middle” (7x), “in” (6x), “between” (3x), “through,” and “into” (2x each), with 23 miscellaneous translations. It first appears in Genesis 1:6: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.”

<sup>16</sup> A good example is the scattering of Israel into the North American continent. Notable cases aside, of course, migrants came to these coasts with their families, not as individuals.

<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, God plays on the verb *pazar* (“to scatter”) in verse 13, referring to the idolatry of apostate Israel. For more information about *pazar*, see note x. The verb in the clause “I will take you” of Jeremiah 3:14 is *laqach* (“fetch”), discussed in Part One of this series.

<sup>18</sup> None of this is to deny that the Time of Jacob’s Trouble will be one of vast economic duress and financial displacement. Notice Deuteronomy 28:68:

The LORD will send you back to Egypt in ships, even though he said that you would never have to go there again. There you will try to sell yourselves to your enemies as slaves, but no one will want to buy you. (GNT)

The scattering to come will involve geographical spread, as it always has, but more than that, employers will be unable (or willing) to provide work for migrant Israelites.

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 27:12 (AMPC).

<sup>20</sup> See Jeremiah 16:14-15; 23:7-8.