

משל מים or אם שלמים in Nah. 1.12: A study of the ancient translations

Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

1–16

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DOI: 10.1177/03090892251377085

journals.sagepub.com/home/jot**Philip Suciadi Chia** 

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Abstract

Is the phrase משל מים or אם שלמים found in Nah. 1.12? The textual tradition is divided. The Septuagint (LXX) and the Peshitta support the reading משל מים in Nah. 1.12, whereas the Masoretic text, the Targum, and the Vulgate preserve אם שלמים ('though they are at full strength' or 'though they are complete'). This disagreement prompts significant inquiries regarding the verse's initial phrasing, its interpretation, and the origins of the differing readings that arose during the transmission process. This article utilizes textual criticism as its main approach—analyzing manuscript evidence, assessing the likelihood of transcription and translation variations, and considering contextual and linguistic elements—to identify the most probable original text and to explore the potential explanations for the discrepancies among these ancient sources.

Keywords

Ancient texts, Nahum, Old Testament, textual criticism, אם שלמים, משל מים

Introduction

Ancient translations of Nah. 1.12 suggest two primary interpretations: אם שלמים and משל מים. The Greek Septuagint (Rahlfs, 2006) translates the latter as *κατάρχων ὑδάτων*, meaning 'the one who rules over waters (NETS)'. Similarly, the Syriac Peshitta (the Leiden Peshitta Edition, 2012) renders it as *'al rīšē mayyā*, which may be translated as 'on (against) the rulers of waters'. Thus, both the LXX and the Peshitta adopt the reading משל מים rather than אם שלמים in this verse.

Three ancient texts, on the other hand, appear to translate phrase אם שלמים in their translations. The Aramaic Targum, for instance, renders it as אם יהון שלמין, meaning 'as though they are perfect'. The Latin Vulgate (Fischer and Weber, 1994) offers the translation *si perfecti fuerint*, 'if they were perfect'. The Masoretic text (Elliger et al., 1997)

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clearly preserves the reading אִם-שְׁלָמִים. Using textual criticism, this study seeks to make sense of how these various texts and interpretations emerged.

Methodology

Textual criticism is often characterized as a seamless integration of artistic expression and scientific investigation. It is classified as a science due to its dependence on data analysis, the examination of genealogical relationships among manuscripts, and a thorough understanding of scribal techniques. However, it is also viewed as an art form, as it requires a keen sense of judgment and critical assessment throughout the process (Boltzman and Tuly, 2016: 138). The primary goal of textual criticism is to reconstruct the most accurate and authentic version of the biblical texts as they were originally written. This endeavor involves comparing and analyzing multiple manuscripts, versions, and textual evidence to identify errors, discrepancies, and alterations that have occurred over time (Barthélemy, 2012: 92).

There are three distinct approaches to textual criticism: rigorous eclecticism, reasoned eclecticism, and the majority text approach.¹ This article adopts reasoned eclecticism, as it considers both external and internal evidence. The evaluation of external evidence includes a detailed analysis of the manuscripts' age, reliability, and geographical distribution. Generally, older manuscripts are regarded as more authoritative. In contrast, internal evidence involves transcriptional probability, which assesses the likelihood of what a scribe would have written or copied, as well as intrinsic probability, which contemplates what the original author might have produced, considering factors such as context, stylistic preferences, and theological considerations. This internal analysis often follows principles such as *lectio difficilior*, *lectio brevior*, and harmonization (cf. Chia, 2025: 5–16).

BHS, BHQ, and the evaluations

BHS's apparatus contains the reading of both the LXX and the Peshitta. It incorporates the LXX's phrase *κατὰρχων ὑδάτων πολλῶν*, which is derived from רבים מים משל. In the case of the Peshitta, *BHS* notes that it is based on the Hebrew text מים משלי אל רבים (Elliger et al., 1997: 1045). One criticism directed at the *BHS* apparatus is its failure to include a fuller range of ancient texts, such as those from the Targum and the Vulgate.

1. Rigorous eclecticism emphasizes the importance of internal evidence—such as linguistic, stylistic, and contextual elements—over external manuscript validation. Advocates contend that scribal practices, theological biases, and inadvertent mistakes frequently distort the text, rendering internal scrutiny more dependable than the age or number of manuscripts. In contrast, reasoned eclecticism, also known as ‘balanced eclecticism’, integrates both internal and external evidence, carefully considering manuscript support alongside intrinsic characteristics. This approach is the prevalent methodology in contemporary critical editions. The majority text perspective posits that the reading most commonly found in ancient manuscripts is the closest to the original text, based on the premise that the majority of preserved manuscripts indicate a consistent transmission history.

Instead of explaining the MT's reading, *BHS*'s apparatus suggests an emendation to the text: רבים (*inundationes, imbres*) אִם שְׁלָמִים (Elliger et al., 1997: 1045).

In *BHQ*'s commentary, Gelston provides an insight regarding the Peshitta's translation. According to Gelston (2010: 110), the Peshitta's translation aligns with the LXX, resulting in the initial word being split into two separate words: κατ' and ἄρχων. However, Gelston too does not discuss other translations from ancient texts in his notes (Gelston 2010: 26).

Thus, the present study aims to enhance our understanding of Nah. 1.2 by integrating readings from Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll (8Hev XII gr = Rahlfs 943), the Targum, Murabba'at 88 (Mur 88), the Hexapla, 4QXII^a, 4QpNah, and the Vulgate. More specifically, this article endeavors to ascertain the original reading of Nah. 1.2 by employing textual criticism.

The origin of the textual problem

The textual variants in Nah. 1.12 can be attributed to two primary factors. The first is the division of words. The ancient manuscripts lack both vowel markings and clear word separations (Tov, 2015: 27–30; Cross, 1995: 121–23; VanderKam and Flint, 2002: 137–38). These characteristics allow אִם שְׁלָמִים to be divided in two distinct ways: either אִם שְׁלָמִים or מִשְׁל מִים. The second consideration is the omission of the letter א for מִשְׁל מִים. In other words, if the ancient translators divide אִם שְׁלָמִים as אִם שְׁלָמִים, that suggests the translation 'though [they are] complete' (cf. the Masoretic text, Mur 88, the Targum, and the Vulgate). On the other hand, if the ancient translators divide אִם שְׁלָמִים as מִשְׁל מִים and omit the letter א, then this suggests the gloss 'the rulers over waters' (cf. the LXX and the Peshitta).

External evidence

Assessing the external evidence involves evaluating the age, reliability, and geographical distribution of the manuscripts. Generally, older manuscripts are regarded as having more authority. Table 1 displays the ancient translations along with their respective texts and translations, their presumed *vorlage*, and their dates.

Table 1. Ancient Texts

Source	Text	Translation	Underlying Text or (<i>Vorlage</i>)	Dates
Masoretic Text	אִם שְׁלָמִים	though (they are) complete	אִם שְׁלָמִים	Aleppo Codex: Around 930 CE Leningrad Codex: Around 1008–1010 CE

(Continued)

Table I. (Continued)

Septuagint	κατάρχων ὑδάτων	the one who rules over waters	משל מים	Around 2 nd Century BCE
Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll (8Hev XII gr = Rahlfs 943)	(lacunae)	(no translation)	(unknown)	Around Late 1st century BCE or early 1st century CE Around 50 BCE – 50 CE
Peshitta	‘al rīšē mayyā	On the rulers of waters	משל מים	Around 2 nd Century CE
Vulgate	si perfecti fuerint	Though they were perfect	אם שלמים	Around Late 4 th Century CE
Targum	אם יהון שלמין	Though they are perfect	אם שלמים	Around 13 th –14 th Century CE
Hexapla	(no available information)	(no translation)	(unknown)	Around 230–245 CE
Murabba’at 88 (Mur 88)	של מן ים	Perfect	אם שלמים or משל מים ²	Around 132–135 CE
4QXII ^g	(lacunae)	(no translation)	(unknown)	Around the last third of the first century BCE (Late Hasmonean or Early Herodian period)
4QpNah	(no available information)	(no translation)	(unknown)	Around 1st century BCE

The table presented above indicates that אם שלמים is not referenced in Origen’s Hexapla (Field, 1875: 1001), 4QpNah, and Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll (8Hev XII gr = Rahlfs 943) since it is so fragmentary (Tov, Kraft, and Parsons, 1990: 44–45). Conversely, Mur 88, known as MurXII or the Wadi Murabba’at Minor Prophets Scroll, is thought to have readings that closely align with the Masoretic text.³ Concerning 4QXII^g, the

2. Due to the fragmented nature of Mur 88 in Nah. 1.12, the Hebrew word של מן ים found in Mur 88 may correspond to either *vorlage*: אם שלמים or משל מים. (Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, 1961: 181).

3. This manuscript is dated to the early 2nd century CE, specifically around 132–135 CE. Key fragments of this manuscript, which include the complete text of the Twelve Minor Prophets, were discovered in a rock crevice located a short distance upstream from the larger refuge caves of Wadi Murabba’at. The presence of human bones and clothing found in the same location indicates a burial, likely that of a man laid to rest with a biblical scroll. Discovered during the rainy season, the scroll appeared as a large, flattened bundle with an irregular

condition of the book of Nahum is notably deteriorated, which greatly impedes effective study of the text.⁴ Consequently, even when examining the original manuscript in a museum, the usual corrections that would assist in verifying interpretations based on photographs are not available (Ulrich, 1997: 270–71). As a result, Nah. 1.12 is absent from 4QXII^e, which is highly fragmented and includes only Nah. 1.7–9; 2.9–11; and 3.1–17 (Ulrich, 1997: 272, 315, 321).

External evidence excludes both the Hexapla and 4QXII^e due to the absence of Nah. 1.12. On the other hand, external evidence reveals that both the LXX and the Peshitta used the same *vorlage* for their translations. Despite employing the same *vorlage*, their translations exhibit minor variations. The LXX, for instance, translates אַם־שְׁלָמִים as *κατάρχων ὑδάτων*, utilizing a participle present active nominative singular from *κατάρχω*. The Peshitta, on the other hand, adds the preposition ܐܢܝܢܐ. The textual variation found in the Peshitta may arise from one of two potential sources. The first possibility suggests that the Peshitta's translation is based on מִים אִם מִשֵּׁל. While it is conceivable that the Peshitta interprets the letter mem as appearing twice, this would be unique among ancient translations. The second possibility is that the Peshitta followed the LXX, which

shape. The skin of the scroll had deteriorated significantly due to moisture, resulting in a soft, gelatinous texture akin to a sponge, with only a few areas of intact material remaining. Insects had damaged a considerable portion of both the inscribed surface and the reverse side. Furthermore, the entire scroll was heavily covered in dust and fine gravel. The careful handling by the Ta'amreh, who transported the manuscript from Wadi Murabba'at to Bethlehem, along with Kando's subsequent transfer to the Palestine Museum, played a crucial role in its preservation. The treatment it received at the Museum, while not highly technical, was conducted with great attention to detail, ensuring that the scroll was largely safeguarded for academic study. A thorough cleaning or systematic dusting of the inscribed surface was avoided, as removing the grains of sand that were firmly adhered to the fragile material posed a risk of further damaging the letters and reducing the manuscript's legibility. Additionally, the significant shrinkage of the skin due to decomposition and the periodic drying of the organic material made it impossible to flatten the inscribed surface as intended. Consequently, the lines of writing are sometimes challenging to discern in photographs (Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, 1961: 181). The text of Mur 88 largely adheres to the structure of the Received Text (Textus Receptus) as it is divided into *haftarot*, with exceptions noted in column VII 1 (Amos 7.34), column VIII 18 (Amos 9.6–7), and column XXIII 7 (Hag. 2.13–14) (Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, 1961: 182). Composed several decades after the Received Text was established, Mur 88 presents several variations when compared to the MT. Many of these differences—such as instances of plene versus defective spellings, or *qere* versus *ktiv*—are likely the result of occasional oversights by the scribe, who was otherwise quite meticulous. Additionally, some grammatical adjustments may stem from unintentional errors (Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, 1961: 183).

4. First, numerous fragments have several layers of the scroll stuck together. Due to the degradation, letters that appear adjacent may not actually form a single word; they could originate from different layers or sections of the scroll prior to its deterioration. Second, in certain fragments, the ink from one layer has created a mirror-image impression on the reverse side of the layer above, adding to the difficulty of interpretation. Lastly, much of the text has faded to the point where it is illegible to the naked eye.

contains the phrase *κατάρχων ὑδάτων*. Given that ancient Greek manuscripts do not include accentuation or clear word divisions, it is plausible that the Peshitta misread the single Greek term *κατάρχων* as two separate words: *κατ'* and *ἄρχων* (cf. Barthélemy 1992: 796; Gelston 2010: 110). Consequently, Peshitta's translation differs slightly from that of the LXX (cf. Grütter, 2016).

Two Masoretic texts (the Aleppo codex and the Leningrad codex), the Vulgate, and the Targum display or presuppose: *אם שלמים*. The Vulgate and the Targum, however, add 'they (were) are' in their translations to enhance the flow of the text.

External evidence supports the reading *אם שלמים* as the original text, as it is confirmed by the earliest known source: the LXX, which dates to around the 2nd century BCE.

Internal evidence

As noted above, internal evidence is typically adjudicated by principles such as *lectio difficilior*, *lectio brevior*, and harmonization (cf. Chia, 2025: 5–16). *Lectio difficilior* suggests that when confronted with multiple versions of a text, the one that is more complex or obscure is likely the original. This idea assumes that scribes typically simplified or clarified challenging passages rather than complicating them. As a result, the more difficult reading is often considered more authentic, as it is less likely that a scribe would have made a simple reading more difficult (Tov, 2015: 307–10). *Lectio brevior*, 'the shorter reading', asserts that when presented with different versions of a text, the more succinct reading is often the original because scribes tended to enhance texts by adding material for clarity, consistency, or explanation, rather than omitting it. Therefore, shorter readings are frequently viewed as more authentic and less likely to have been produced by scribes secondarily (Tov, 2015: 307–10). Harmonization in textual criticism refers to the modification of a text to ensure its consistency with another related passage or to resolve perceived discrepancies. This phenomenon commonly occurs in works that feature multiple versions or parallel accounts, such as the Gospels in the New Testament or similar narratives in the Hebrew Bible. The harmonization process may involve changing specific words, phrases, or even entire sections to align them with another text that the scribe considers authoritative or more familiar (Tov, 2015: 307–10).

Lectio difficilior

With respect to Nah. 1.12, the LXX's translation offers an easier reading for two reasons. First, the LXX employs the participle of *κατάρχων ὑδάτων* to elucidate the subject, which is directly associated with YHWH because this participle matches the number, gender, and case of *κύριος*. Second, the translation of LXX omits the first *וּכְן* in the clause. The Hebrew term *וּכְן* poses challenges, as it complicates the syntax of the line, making it more difficult to translate effectively (cf. NET Bible notes). Therefore, the principle of *lectio difficilior* does not suggest that the LXX retains the original reading.

While the Peshitta (*'al rīšē mayyā*) aligns with the translation of the LXX (cf. Barthélemy 1992: 796; Gelston 2010: 110), it exhibits three distinct translation choices that diverge from the LXX. First, the Peshitta incorporates the preposition *אֶל* which has

an adversative function. Second, the Syriac term ܐܢܝܢ, is rendered in the plural form, contrasting with the singular form found in the LXX. Third, the inclusion of the preposition ܕܠ alters the grammatical role of ܐܢܝܢ, preventing it from functioning as the subject (or nominative subject) and instead designating it as the object of the preposition ܕܠ. Consequently, the translation indicates that the Lord is against the rulers of many waters. In this context, the rulers of many waters are treated as objects, in contrast to the LXX, which presents them as the subject. The Peshitta interprets Nineveh as the rulers of many waters, whereas the LXX depicts God as the ruler of many waters. There are also two reasons why the principle of *lectio difficilior* does not suggest that the Peshitta preserves the original reading. First, the Peshitta omits the particle ܐܘܢ, which complicates the protasis in the opening clause. Second, like the LXX, the Peshitta excludes the first instance of ܘܚܢ in the clause which complicates the syntax of the sentence, and its translation.

Although the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum include or presume the same text, the Masoretic text presents the more challenging reading, as the Vulgate and the Targum include the words *fuertint* and יהון respectively, which specify the subject as the people of Nineveh rather than the Lord. The reconstructed reading of Mur 88 (see Table 2) appears comparable to that of the Masoretic text. Thus, Mur 88 meets the principle of *lectio difficilior*. Consequently, the principle of *lectio difficilior* suggests that Mur 88 and the Masoretic text contain the original reading.

Table 2. *Lectio brevior*

Ancient Translation	Text in the First Clause	Word Count
LXX	τάδε λέγει κύριος κατάρχων υδάτων πολλῶν καὶ οὕτως διασταλήσονται	9
Masoretic Text	כה אמר יהוה אֱס־שְׁלָמִים וְכֵן רַבִּים וְכֵן נִגְזוּ וְעֵבֶר	13
Peshitta	<i>Kānā ʾāmar māryā, ʿal rīšē mayyā saggī ʿē d-ʿadwā (or gārwā?) w-ʿabrū.</i>	10
Vulgate	<i>haec dicit Dominus si perfecti fuerint et ita plures sic quoque adtondentur et pertransibit</i>	14
Mur 88	כהאמר יהוה שלממי רבים וכן נגזו וועבר	10
Targum	כדנן אמר יוי אם יהון שלמין בעיצא וסגיאין באתמניותא עממיא דמתכנשין לאעקא ליד ירושלם יגוזון על ית דגלת ויעברון על ית פרת וייתון לעניותיד	31

Lectio brevior

The initial clause in the Septuagint (LXX) presents a more concise version, comprising nine words, whereas Mur 88 and the Masoretic text contain ten words and thirteen words respectively (including the conjunction and the particle). The Syriac Peshitta offers ten

words in the first clause (including the conjunction), while the Latin Vulgate has fourteen words. The Aramaic Targum expands this first clause to thirty-one words. Therefore, the translation in the LXX is favoured by the principle of *lectio brevior*.

Lexical, contextual, and historical analysis. This section outlines two criteria for evaluating the original text. The first criterion involves examining the key terms, **שָׁלֹם** and **מַיִם**, as they appear in the book of Nahum. The second criterion focuses on the portrayal of the Lord and Nineveh within the same text. For instance, the LXX interprets the beginning of Nah. 1.12 as referring to the status of the Lord, while other translations attribute this to Nineveh.

The Hebrew noun **מַיִם** appears three times throughout the book of Nahum (2.9; 3.8[2x]).⁵ Conversely, the Hebrew verb **שָׁלַם** is found only in Nah. 2.1, where it pertains to Judah.⁶ If Nah. 1.12 were to utilize the Hebrew noun **שָׁלֹם**, could it potentially refer to Judah as well? This is unlikely, as Nah. 1.12–14 delineates two separate futures. The first describes Nineveh’s impending downfall, with the narrator employing masculine pronouns (the third person plural ‘they’ in Nah. 1.12, the third person singular ‘his’ in Nah. 1.13, and the second person singular ‘you’ in Nah. 1.14) to denote the people of Nineveh. In contrast, the future for Judah is characterized by deliverance, with the narrator using feminine pronouns to refer to the people of Judah. Therefore, lexical analysis does not support attributing **מַיִם** (‘water’) to the Lord (cf. the translation of LXX), and contextual analysis indicates that the Hebrew noun **שָׁלֹם** should be interpreted in relation to the punishment of Nineveh. In conclusion, both lexical and contextual analyses support the reading of the LXX.

Table 3. Lexical and Contextual Analysis

מַיִם (Water)		שָׁלֹם (perfect)	
Verse	Reference	Verse	Reference
2.9	Nineveh	2.1	Judah (Noun)
3.8	Nineveh (cf. 3.7)		
3.14	Nineveh		

Conversely, Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, the Targum, and the Syriac Peshitta satisfy the criteria of lexical, contextual, and historical analysis. While the Syriac Peshitta utilizes the LXX as its source text, the Peshitta often modifies its translations derived from the LXX. In terms of lexical analysis, the Peshitta attributes the Hebrew word **מַיִם** to Nineveh. The Masoretic text, Mur 88, the Vulgate, and the Targum also attribute **אֵם-שְׁלָמִים** to Nineveh. Considering the context, Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, the Targum, and the Syriac Peshitta concur that Nah. 1.12–14 pertains

5. Nahum consistently points **מַיִם** to Nineveh (cf. Table 3).

6. Cf. Table 3.

to the destruction of Nineveh, while the references to the river gates in Nah. 2.6 and the sea in Nah. 3.8 highlight Nineveh's water defenses. Historically, Nineveh utilized a network of dams and sluice gates to manage the waters of the Tebiltu and Khoser Rivers that traversed the city (Thompson and Hutchinson, 1982: 120–32). In addition to Nineveh's water defenses, Nah. 2.8 illustrates that Nineveh resembled a pool of water during its days.⁷ However, the Tebiltu River often exceeded its banks within the city, threatening the stability of palaces and other buildings. To address this flooding problem, Sennacherib altered the river's path within the city boundaries. Furthermore, he built a dam on the Khoser River outside the city, establishing a reservoir that regulated the water supply to Nineveh through an advanced double sluice gate (Luckenbill, 1927: 99–100; Reade, 1978a, 1978b).⁸

The second aspect to consider is the evaluation of YHWH's status during his speech and the status of Nineveh. The phrase **נאם יהוה** occurs in Nah. 2.14 and 3.5, both of which affirm YHWH's status as the Lord of hosts, **יהוה צבאות**. However, these instances do not refer to the Lord as the ruler over waters. Therefore, this analysis concludes that the reading of the LXX does not reflect the original text.

In addition, it is necessary to analyze the portrayal of Nineveh by the narrator in the book of Nahum. Table 4 illustrates the status and characteristics of Nineveh as presented in the book of Nahum. While Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, the Targum, and the Syriac Peshitta align with the criteria outlined in Table 4—particularly regarding Nineveh's designation as perfect and the king of many waters—the LXX does not conform to this classification, as its translation emphasizes the status of the Lord instead.

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7. Nah. 2.8 is fitting as Nineveh was renowned for its man-made pools, several of which supplied the royal gardens. Additionally, the city was traversed by two rivers: the Tebiltu and the Khoser. The Hebrew noun **בִּרְכָה** typically denotes a man-made water reservoir that is supplied by aqueducts, as opposed to a natural body of water (HALOT 161 s.v.). For instance, it is applied to artificial water reservoirs associated with royal gardens (Eccl. 2.6; Neh. 2.14) and to those in Jerusalem, some of which were served by aqueducts (2 Kgs 18.17; 20.20; Isa. 7.3; 22.9, 11; 36.2; Neh. 3.15–16). Additionally, it refers to the pool of Gibeon (2 Sam. 2.13), the pool of Hebron (2 Sam. 4.12), the pool of Samaria (1 Kgs 22.38), and the pools of Heshbon (Song 7.5). The pool of Siloam, constructed by Hezekiah and supplied by the underground aqueduct known as Hezekiah's Tunnel, is referred to as **בְּרִקְתָּהּ** in 2 Kgs 20.20 and in the Siloam Inscription (line 5).
 8. According to classical sources (Diodorus and Xenophon), just prior to the fall of Nineveh, a series of intense rainfalls inundated the region. The Khoser River overflowed, leading to the breach of the reservoir. The resulting surge overwhelmed the canal system, creating a gap in the city wall that measured twenty stades (approximately 2.3 miles or 3.7 km) wide, which allowed water to flood the city. Once the waters receded, the Babylonians invaded and captured Nineveh (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 2.26–27, particularly 27.1–3; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 3.4.12; Haupt, 1907: 65–83). This account appears to be supported by archaeological findings (Olmstead, 1923: 637).

Table 4. The status and characteristics of Nineveh

Nineveh		
	Status	Possession
1	The Lord's enemies (1.2, 8)	His yoke bar (1.13)
2	Like tangled thorns (1.10)	Your shackles (1.13)
3	Like drink of drunkards (1.10)	Gods (1.14)
4	Very dry stubble (1.10)	Graven image (1.14)
5	A wicked counselor (1.11)	The house of your gods (1.14)
6	You are contemptible (1.14)	Grave (1.14)
7	He is cut off completely (2.1)	Your strength (2.2)
8	Pool of water (2.9)	His nobles (2.6; 3.18)
9	Empty (2.11)	Their work (2.6)
10	Void (2.11)	Wall (2.6)
11	Waste (2.11)	The mantelet (2.6)
12	Bloody city (3.1)	The gates of the rivers (2.7)
13	Full of lies and robbery (3.1)	The palace (2.7)
14	Drunk (3.11)	Maids (2.8)
15	Hidden (3.11)	Silver (2.9)
16	Creeping locust strips (3.16)	Gold (2.9)
17	Creeping locust flies away (3.16)	Vessels of desire (2.10)
18	Swarming locusts (3.17)	Den of the lions (2.12)
19	Great grasshoppers (3.17)	The feeding place of the young lions (2.12)
20		Lion (2.12)
21		Lioness (2.12)
22		Lion's cub prowled (2.12)
23		Chariots (2.14)
24		Young lions (2.14)
25		Prey (2.14; 3.1)
26		Skirts (3.5)
27		Strongholds (3.12; 3.14)
28		People (3.13; 3.18)
29		Land (3.13)
30		Gate bars (3.13)
31		Water (3.14)

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

32	Merchants (3.16)
33	Courtiers (3.17)
34	Marshals (3.17)
35	Shepherds (3.18)
36	Bruise (3.19)
37	Wound (3.19)

A pertinent question arises: does the narrator refer to Nineveh as the perfect entity or the king of many waters? Nah. 3.8 poses the rhetorical question, ‘Are you better than Thebes, which was located by the waters of the Nile, surrounded by water, with the sea serving as its rampart and wall?’ The use of the interrogative particle η indicates a rhetorical question that anticipates a negative response. Consequently, this suggests that Nineveh cannot be considered the king of many waters, as Thebes is. If the narrator intended to affirm Nineveh’s status in this way, the rhetorical question would be contradictory. It would be inconsistent for the Lord to designate Nineveh as the king of many waters while simultaneously questioning this designation in Nah. 3.8. Thus, the text witnessed by Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum seems to be recommended by the second aspect of the lexical, contextual, and historical analysis.

משל מים or שלמים אם in Nah. 1.12

As we have already noted, textual criticism primarily utilizes two types of evidence: internal and external. The phrase *משל מים* or *שלמים אם* found in Nah. 1.12, however, serves as an illustration of the tension between external and internal evidence. External evidence supports the interpretations found in LXX, which is considered the earliest known source, dating back to around the early 2nd century BCE. In addition, internal evidence tends to favor the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum.⁹ Nevertheless, internal evidence is frequently regarded as more important, as it examines the text itself, whereas external evidence depends on external factors, including historical context or the age of the textual witnesses. Since internal evidence focuses on the text itself, it avoids the potential biases or uncertainties linked to external elements such as manuscript dating or provenance. Furthermore, internal evidence is useful in identifying inconsistencies or irregularities that may suggest scribal mistakes, interpolations, or later modifications (Parker, 2008). For instance, if a section employs vocabulary

9. This research omits analysis of the internal evidence of the Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll (8Hev XII gr = Rahlfs 943) since the text is so fragmentary (cf. Tov, Kraft, and Parsons, 1990: 44–51). The Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll has a similar reading to the LXX. Nah. 1.13–14 is one of the examples. The differences are in the lacunae. In other words, the differences appear in the *reconstructed* text: $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\ \sigma\omicron\upsilon$ (the LXX) vs $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\ \sigma\omicron\iota$ (Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll) and $\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \gamma\lambda\upsilon\pi\tau\acute{\alpha}$ (the LXX) vs $\gamma\lambda\upsilon\pi\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu$ (Nahal Hever XII Greek scroll) in Nah. 1.14.

or syntax that deviates from the rest of the text, this may suggest it is non-original. Scholars such as E. J. Epp and Gordon Fee assert that internal evidence is vital for grasping the author's intent and style, which are essential for reconstructing the original text (Epp and Fee, 1993). Additionally, internal evidence assesses how well a reading corresponds with the immediate context of the passage and the overall work. A reading that resonates with the author's thematic and theological concerns is typically favored. Bruce Metzger (2005) contends that internal evidence aids in resolving textual variants by considering the author's probable meaning. External evidence, such as the age or geographical distribution of manuscripts, can occasionally be misleading. In contrast, internal evidence is less prone to such biases since it concentrates on the text's inherent qualities rather than external influences.

A further issue identified in Nah. 1.12 pertains to the internal evidence, where there is a notable absence of agreement. For instance, the principles of *lectio difficilior*, along with lexical, contextual, and historical analyses, lead to the conclusion that Mur 88 and the Masoretic text reflect the original reading. In contrast, the principle of *lectio brevior* supports the readings of the LXX.

The principle of harmonization, derived from lexical, contextual, and historical analysis, is the foremost focus of this research. This principle is crucial as it assesses what the author likely intended to convey, in light of the text's style, vocabulary, context, and literary coherence. Following this principle, the next priority in the analysis is *lectio difficilior*. This principle posits that readings that are more challenging are often the original versions, as scribes typically tend to simplify, clarify, or smooth out difficult passages rather than complicate them or alter their length by adding or reducing the text. The final principle related to internal evidence is *lectio brevior*. While this principle indicates that shorter readings are generally favored—since scribes frequently added explanatory content—this guideline is not infallible. There are instances where scribes may have inadvertently left out words or phrases, particularly due to homoioteleuton, where similar endings lead to omissions. Nonetheless, scribes are more inclined to insert glosses or harmonize texts, which makes *lectio difficilior* a more dependable criterion overall. In conclusion, when external evidence conflicts with internal evidence, the latter should be deemed more reliable. In cases where there are inconsistencies within the internal evidence itself, the research should then prioritize lexical, contextual, and historical analysis. Following this, the principle of *lectio difficilior* should be applied, with *lectio brevior* being considered last.

Table 5 indicates that the original reading is אַם־שְׁלָמִים, which is found in Mur 88 alongside the Masoretic version. Consequently, the literary structure of Nah. 1.12 juxtaposes a positive present with a negative future. This contrasting language is similarly found in Nah. 2.8, which states that while Nineveh resembles a pool of water during its days, the inhabitants will flee: 'stand (stop), stand (stop)', yet none will return. Nah. 2.8 illustrates Nineveh's favorable present condition, characterized by the presence of a pool of water. However, the author also communicates a bleak future for Nineveh, where people will abandon the city. Likewise, Nah. 1.12 highlights Nineveh's current state of completeness שְׁלָמִים and abundance רַבִּים, yet it foreshadows a future where they will be cut off נִגְזָזוּ.

Table 5. Summary

אִם-שְׁלָמִים or לְשֵׁם יְיָ in Nah. 1.12	
Internal Evidence	Sources
1 Lexical, contextual, and historical analysis	Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum
2 <i>Lector difficilior</i>	Mur 88 and the Masoretic text
3 <i>Lectio brevior</i>	LXX
External Evidence	
1 The age of manuscript	LXX

אִם-שְׁלָמִים in Nah. 1.9–15. This study explores the linguistic, literary, and theological ramifications of אִם-שְׁלָמִים within the larger context of Nah. 1.9–15. The larger section (Nah 1.9–15) oscillates between condemnation of Assyria and optimism for Judah. In other words, the statement emphasizes Yahweh’s supreme power over tyrannical empires, offering both a caution and a comfort to the initial audience. The phrase אִם-שְׁלָמִים is part of a series of contrasts—Assyria’s seeming power juxtaposed with its forthcoming downfall (Wenyi, 2021: 97). The rhetorical impact of this expression lies in its challenge to human reliance on political or military power. Becking (2024: 222) interprets this passage through the lens of trauma theory, proposing that Nahum’s prophecy acts as a counternarrative to Judah’s suffering under Assyrian rule, transforming the trauma through divine retribution.

אִם-שְׁלָמִים in the book of Nahum. Recent academic research on the book of Nahum has increasingly emphasized its literary composition, theological motifs, and socio-historical background. The prophecy, aimed at Nineveh, is frequently interpreted as a narrative of divine punishment and nationalistic victory. Nevertheless, modern analyses have also investigated its psychological aspects and trauma-informed perspectives (Becking, 2024; Wenyi, 2021). The Hebrew term אִם-שְׁלָמִים in Nah. 1.12 has sparked considerable debate among scholars, with interpretations varying from references to Assyrian alliances to theological claims of divine justice (Christensen, 2009; Hagedorn, 2011). Theologically, אִם-שְׁלָמִים emphasizes Yahweh’s authority over nations. The supposed invincibility of Assyria is rendered impotent by divine command. This is consistent with Nahum’s central theme that no worldly power can resist God’s judgment (Christensen, 2009: 165). However, Becking rightly contests oversimplified interpretations of Nahum’s theology of vengeance, suggesting that Yahweh’s violence directed at Nineveh should be viewed not simply as retribution but as a response to trauma: The exaggerated descriptions of destruction (for instance Nah. 3.1–7) reflect the harshness that Judah endured under Assyria. In this context, Yahweh transitions from being a punisher to a therapist, enabling Judah to confront its pain by observing the downfall of Nineveh. This perspective diverges from conventional punitive readings (such as those offered by Christensen, 2009), presenting divine wrath as a means of restoration rather than mere vengeance. Consequently, the term serves as a critique of human pride, underscoring the

prophetic assertion that genuine security is found in divine loyalty rather than in political partnerships (Hagedorn, 2011: 180).

Conclusion

The assessment of two alternative translations אִם שְׁלָמִים or מִשַׁל מִים in Nah. 1.12 presents a complex challenge due to the conflicting external and internal evidence. External evidence aligns with interpretations found in the LXX, which is regarded as the oldest textual witness from approximately the 2nd century BCE. In contrast, internal evidence recommends the reading attested by Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum. Nevertheless, this article contends that the internal evidence is more important than external evidence.

Another complication in Nah. 1.12 is the lack of consensus of the internal evidence. For example, the application of the *lectio difficilior* principle, along with lexical, contextual, and historical considerations, suggests that Mur 88, the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Targum are more reflective of the original reading. On the other hand, the *lectio brevior* principle favors the reading of the LXX. This article contends that when inconsistencies arise within internal evidence, priority should be given to lexical, contextual, and historical analysis. Subsequently, the principle of *lectio difficilior* should be utilized, with *lectio brevior* invoked only as a last resort. As a result, this research concludes that the original reading is reflected in Mur 88 and the Masoretic text: אִם-שְׁלָמִים. This terminology highlights the present condition of Nineveh, characterized by completeness (שְׁלָמִים) and abundance (רִבִּים), while also hinting at a future scenario in which they will face destruction (נָגַד), as indicated in Nah. 1.12.

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