

## Dan 12:7 - What Does It Mean to Be Broken?

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There are 23 examples of the root *\*npš* in the Hebrew Old Testament. When Hiram delivers cedar logs to Solomon for the construction of the temple, he says: "

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Kings 5:9** My men will haul them down from Lebanon to the sea, and I will float them in rafts by sea to the place you specify. There I will separate them and you can take them away. And you are to grant my wish by providing food for my royal household."

Here we have things being separated without being broken, but normally words built on *\*npš* have to do with breaking things apart. This works if the things in question are fragile. Living beings do not break into pieces when struck, so there the idea is one of the clubbing type of motion that, when applied to fragile objects, would cause them to be broken up. A summary of the meanings of this root appears below

### Exhibit 1 Uses of the Hebrew Word *nappēš*<sup>1</sup>

10	Smash, club (people)	Jer 13:14; 51:20; 51:21, 21, 22, 22, 23, 23, 23 <sup>2</sup>
4	Break in pieces (pottery)	Judg 7:19; Ps 2:9; Jer 22:28; 48:12
4	Scatter (people)	Gen 9:19; 1 Sam 13:11; Isa 11:12; 33:3
1	Dash (infants)	Ps 137:9
1	Break (strength)	Dan 12:7
1	Burst forth (storm)	Isa 30:30
1	Crush (stones)	Isa 27:9
1	Separate (logs)	1 Kgs 5:23
23		

In addition to the sorts of literal breaking apart or clubbing normally associated with *\*npš* there are metaphorical uses of this root. In Dan 12:7 the strength (literally "hand") of God's people is said to be broken. The metaphor is closer to the idea of clubbing than it is to the idea of breaking up a fragile object, because the breaking occurs over an extended period of time.

The references to *mirmās* (<*\*rms* "trample") in passages such as Dan 8:13 and elsewhere<sup>3</sup> carry a meaning similar to *\*npš*, but there the repeated action of beating something down is performed by feet instead of hands.

<sup>1</sup> I'm using this as a citation form. Piel is not the only conjugation represented in exhibit 1.

<sup>2</sup> There is some exquisite imagery here. The smashing, clubbing motion denoted by *nappēš* occurs two times in vs. 21, three times in vs. 22, and three times in vs. 23. The way the word is used in the passage – over and over, more and more – corresponds vividly to the action denoted by the verb.

<sup>3</sup> See Isa 5:5; 7:25; 10:6; 28:18; Ezek 34:19; Dan 8:13; Mic 7:10.

With these things in mind it is clear that the period referred to in Dan 12:7 is a dreadful one in the history of the church. For 1260 years the strength of those who insist on following only God is beaten down and broken. They long for deliverance and this is supplied when God in turn strikes a blow at the one who has been striking blows at them.<sup>4</sup> Historically this occurred in 1798 when Napoleon's general Louis Alexandre Berthier took Pope Pius VI (r. 1775-99) into exile, where he died the following year.

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<sup>4</sup> Notice that the breaking action referred to in Rev 2:27, which also refers to the abuses of the Middle Ages, is precisely the same as that denoted by the Hebrew root *\*npš*.