

Zephaniah Chapter 2

Verses 1-12

Zephaniah calls upon the “Meek of the earth” to “seek” the LORD.

Then he lists the nations that Babylon will conquer.

The cities of the “Philistines (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod”, and “Ekron”), will be destroyed.

“Moab” will be reduced to rubble.

The “Ethiopians” will be “slain” by the “sword”.

Verses 2-3

With the announcement of coming judgment, God mercifully invited His people to repent.

They were to assemble to entreat the favor of the LORD and avert His wrath (Joel 2:16).

Zephaniah 2:1 "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired;"

“Nation not desired”:

No longer sensitive to God’s call to repentance through His many prophets, Judah had sunk to shamelessness.

This is probably, calling those together to repent of their sins.

It is a time of great shame.

They are not desired because of their sins.

Zephaniah 2:2 "Before the decree bring forth, [before] the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you."

The prophet calls to national repentance, as the only way to prevent national ruin.

A nation not desiring, that has no desires toward God, is not desirous of his favor and grace, has no mind to repent and reform.

Or not desirable; not having anything to recommend them to God.

To whom God might justly say, depart from me; but He says, gather together to me that you may seek my face.

We know what God's decree will bring against impenitent sinners; therefore, it highly concerns all to repent in the accepted time.

How careful should we all be to seek peace with God, before the Holy Spirit withdraws from us, or ceases to strive with us.

Before the day of grace is over, or the day of life; before our everlasting state is determined! Let the poor, despised, and afflicted, seek the LORD, and seek to understand and keep his commandments better, that they may be more humbled for their sins.

The chief hope of deliverance from national judgments rests upon prayer.

This is like John the Baptist said; "Repent for the LORD is coming".

This is just warning over and over, that there is still time to repent.

But they must do it quickly, before the anger of the LORD is upon them.

The three different mentions of the happenings of the day is to show them this judgment of God is to come very soon.

The chaff is there today, but will be gone when the thresher comes.

In fact, this chaff will be burned.

Zephaniah 2:3 "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."

"It may be ye shall be hid":

Even the humble, those who had followed the law of the LORD, were encouraged to continue to manifest fruits of repentance, so they would be sheltered in the day of His judgment (Isa. 26:20).

This is speaking to the people who have not strayed away from God, but are still living the believer's life.

This is saying to them, that even more than they have done in the past, they must make a stand for righteousness.

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

Even in the flood which covered the earth, God saved Noah and His family, because of the righteousness of Noah.

Genesis 7:1 "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."

Whatever generation of people it is, God will protect the meek and righteous, even in the midst of great judgment on the sinners.

It is a great comfort to know that God will protect them, if they do remain righteous.

Verses 4-15

God used the heathen nations to punish His people, but He would not permit those nations to go unpunished.

To illustrate this, 4 representative nations were chosen from the 4 points of the compass.

Zephaniah 2:4 "For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up."

"For Gaza shall be forsaken":

Therefore, seek the LORD; and not to the Philistines, since they would be destroyed, to whom Gaza, and the other cities later mentioned, belonged.

So Aben Ezra connects the words, suggesting that it would be in vain to flee here for shelter, or seek for refuge there.

Though others think that this and what follows is subjoined, either to assure the Jews of their certain ruin, since this would be the case of the nations about them.

Gaza was one of the five lordships of the Philistines.

A strong and fortified place, as its name signifies; but should be demolished, stripped of its fortifications, and forsaken by its inhabitants.

It was smitten by Pharaoh king of Egypt; and was laid waste by Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 47:1), and afterwards taken by Alexander the great.

"And Ashkelon a desolation":

This was another lordship belonging to the Philistines, that suffered at the same time as Gaza did by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 47:5).

This place was ten miles from Gaza, as Mr. Sandys says, and who adds, and now of no note.

And Strabo speaks of it in his time as a small city.

"They shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day":

That is, the Chaldeans shall drive out the inhabitants of Ashdod, another of the principalities of the Philistines.

The same with Azotus (Acts 8:40), "at noon day", openly and publicly, and with great ease.

"And Ekron shall be rooted up":

As a tree is rooted up, and withers away, and perishes, and there is no more hope of it.

This denotes the utter destruction of this place.

There is here also an elegant allusion to the name of the place, not to be imitated in a version of it.

This was another of the lordships of the Philistines, famous for the idol Beelzebub, the god of this place.

Gaza will be forsaken and depopulated, but in the time of Alexander the great, it will be settled again.

Jeremiah 25:20 "And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod,"

These were mentions of those who will be destroyed by the oncoming army.

Ashdod's destruction happens at noon, which is a strange time to have a battle.

Ashdod's inhabitants are driven out and a remnant is left.

Ekron is totally rooted up.

Zephaniah 2:5 "Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD [is] against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant."

"Cherethites":

Occasionally a synonym for Philistia, this term represented a branch from Crete (see note on Ezek. 25:16).

David's bodyguard was comprised of both Cherethites and Pelethites (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; see note on 1 Sam. 30:14).

This sea coast area is between Gaza and Ekron.

"Cherethites" means cutters off, and is another name for the Philistines.

Philistia is in a sense, like Canaan, because they will be totally annihilated.

There will not be a remnant left of them.

Zephaniah 2:6 "And the sea coast shall be dwellings [and] cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks."

"And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds":

That tract of land which lay on the coast of the Mediterranean sea, inhabited by the Philistines, should now become so desolate.

That instead of towns and cities full of merchants and sea faring persons, and houses full of inhabitants, and warehouses full of goods; there should now only be seen a few huts and cottages for shepherds to dwell in.

That shelters them from the heat by day, and where they watched their flocks by night, and took their proper repose and rest.

"And folds for flocks":

In which they put them to lie down in at evening.

The phrases express the great desolation of the land.

That towns should be depopulated, and the land lie untilled, and only be occupied by shepherds, and their flocks.

Who lead them from place to place, the most convenient for them.

The seacoast area was used for sheep and their shepherds, but the caves were unsafe part of the year, because the sea backed up over the land.

Zephaniah 2:7 "And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity."

"Turn away their captivity":

The LORD would initiate the physical return of Israel's exiles to occupy the land vacated by judgment on Philistia.

Ashkelon was destroyed, but later became a place of refuge for the remnant of Judah.

This area will be for the families of Judah who will return to the land.

God will restore Judah, and bring them back from their captivity.

God always has a remnant of Judah.

Verses 8-11

To the east, the descendants of Lot by his daughters through incest.

Moab and Ammon (Gen. 19:30-38), are mentioned.

They had reproached and reviled God's people incurring divine wrath (Gen. 12:3).

Like Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of their ancestor Lot, they too would come to ruin and desolation.

Zephaniah 2:8 "I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified [themselves] against their border."

"I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon":

Two people that descended from Lot, through incest with his daughters; and are therefore mentioned together, as being of the same cast and complexion, and bitter enemies to the people of the Jews.

Whom they reproached and reviled for the sake of their religion because they adhered to the word and worship of God.

This they did when the Jews were most firmly attached to the service of the true God.

And the LORD heard it, and took notice of it; and put it down in the book of his remembrance, to punish them for it in due time.

Even He who hears, sees and knows all things.

"Whereby they have reproached my people":

Whom he had chosen, and confirmed to be his people.

And who were called by his name, and called on his name, and worshipped him.

And professed to be his people, and to serve and obey him.

And as such, and because they were the people of God, they were reproached by them.

And hence it was so resented by the LORD; and there being such a near relation between God and them, he looked upon the reproaches of them as reproaches of himself.

"And magnified themselves against their border":

Either they spoke reproachfully of the land of Israel, and the borders of it, and especially of the inhabitants of the land.

And particularly those that bordered upon them.

Or they invaded the borders of their land, and endeavored to add it to theirs.

Or as the Jews were carried captive by the Chaldeans, as they passed by the borders of Moab and Ammon, they insulted them, and jeered them, and expressed great pleasure and joy in seeing them in such circumstances (see Ezek. 25:3).

Jarchi represents the case thus:

When the children of Israel went into captivity to the land of the Chaldeans, as they passed by the way of Ammon and Moab, they wept, and sighed, and cried.

And they distressed them, and said, what do you afflict yourselves for?

Why do ye weep?

Are not you going to the house of your father, beyond the river where your fathers dwelt of old?

Thus, jeering them on account of Abraham's being of Ur of the Chaldees.

Moab had always been opposed to Judah.

Perhaps, it was because of jealousy.

The Moabites and the Ammonites were both descendants of lot.

Lot had children by his own daughters.

Their children were the beginning of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

The Moabites and Ammonites were not in very good standing with God.

Jeremiah 12:14 "Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbors, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them."

They were, many times, grouped with wicked Edom.

Jeremiah 25:21 "Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon,"

Zephaniah 2:9 "Therefore [as] I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, [even] the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them."

"Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel":

The LORD here swears by himself; partly to show how provoked he was at, and how grievously he resented, the injuries done to his people.

And partly to observe the certain fulfilment of what is after declared.

And it might be depended upon it would surely be done, not only because of his word and oath, which are immutable; but because of his ability to do it, as "the LORD of hosts".

"Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah":

That is, should be utterly destroyed, as these cities were; whose destruction is often made use of to express the utter ruin and destruction of any other people.

Otherwise it is not to be supposed that these countries were to be destroyed, or were destroyed, in like manner, by fire from heaven.

"Even the breeding of nettles":

Or "left to nettles, or rather to "thorns", as the Targum.

And so the Vulgate Latin version renders it "the dryness of thorns", though to a very poor sense.

In general, the meaning of the phrase is, that those countries should be very barren and desolate, like such places as are overrun with nettles, thorns, briars, and brambles.

And these so thick, that there is no passing through them without a man's tearing his garments and his flesh.

For Schultens from the use of the word in the Arabic language, shows that the words are to be rendered a "thicket of thorns which tear"; and cut the feet of those that pass through them.

And even their whole body, as well as their clothes.

And, wherever these grow in such plenty, it is a plain sign of a barren land, as well as what follow.

"And saltpits, and a perpetual desolation":

Signifying that the countries of Moab and Ammon should be waste, barren, and uncultivated, as the above places were.

Where nothing but nettles grew, as do in great abundance in desolate places.

And such these countries of Moab and Ammon should be, and ever remain so, at least for a long time; and especially should be desolate and uninhabited by the former possessors of it (see Deuteronomy 29:23).

This was fulfilled about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

When Nebuchadnezzar, as Josephus relates, led his army into Coelesyria, and made war upon the Ammonites and Moabites.

And subjected them to him, who were the inhabitant of it, as the same writer says.

"The residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them":

That is, the Jews, the remnant of them that returned from Babylon.

Now these, in the times of the Maccabees, and those that descended from them, seized on several places in these countries, and possessed them.

For, after these countries had been subdued and made desolate by Nebuchadnezzar, they became considerable nations again.

Josephus says the Moabites in his time were a great nation; though in the third century, as Origen relates, they went under the common name of Arabians.

And, even long before the times of Josephus, they were called Arabian Moabites, as he himself observes.

They had evil beginnings, and they had never changed.

God speaks of the absolute truth of this happening.

He uses the expression "as I live".

He is eternal, so we know this is an unchangeable statement He makes here.

God, Himself, is LORD of hosts here, and God of Israel.

God rained fire and brimstone down on Gomorrah for their sins.

Gomorrah was totally destroyed.

Their ancestor, Lot, and their mothers were the only ones spared at Gomorrah.

All living were killed.

This is what God is speaking of here, their total annihilation.

This very thing does happen, and brings desolation to Moab and Ammon.

The people of Judah will somewhat inhabit this desolate land at a later date.

We do know that the Lord Jesus (their Messiah), did offer salvation to them, when He came to the earth.

In a sense, they are inhabited by the remnant.

Even today, the place where they lived is a barren land.

Zephaniah 2:10 "This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified [themselves] against the people of the LORD of hosts."

"This shall they have for their pride":

This calamity shall come upon their land, the land of the Moabites and Ammonites, for their pride, which often goes before a fall.

And has frequently been the cause of the ruin of kingdoms and states, and of particular persons. And indeed, seems to have been the first sin of the apostate angels, and of fallen man.

Of the pride of Moab (see Isaiah 16:6).

"Because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts":

They looked with disdain upon them, as greatly below them.

And spoke contemptibly of them, of their nation, and religion; and "made" themselves "great".

And set up themselves "above" them, opened their mouths wide, and gave their tongues great liberties in blaspheming and reviling them.

What was done to them is taken by the LORD as done to Himself (see Jer. 48:42).

In a sense, they are relatives, because Lot was the nephew of Abraham, and Ammon and Moab are descended from him.

They have never been friendly with the Israelites, however, and especially Judah.

God has warned, from the beginning, that those who are opposed to His people are opposed to Him.

God blesses those who bless His people, and curses those who curse His people.

Zephaniah 2:11 "The LORD [will be] terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and [men] shall worship him, every one from his place, [even] all the isles of the heathen."

“And men shall worship him ... all the isles of the heathen”:

The final fulfillment of these predictions is yet future depicting the Millennium when all the gods of the nations will be reduced to nothing and the LORD Himself will be worshiped universally (Isa. 66:18-21; Zech. 14:16; Mal. 1:11).

God is a jealous God.

He will not tolerate the worship of false gods.

He has waited for His people to do away with their own false gods, and the false gods of their neighbors, and they have not.

Now, God will do this Himself.

He will come and destroy the false gods they have been worshipping.

He defamed the false gods in Egypt with His 10 plagues.

He has given these people ample time to come to Him.

Now, He will destroy them, along with their false gods.

This statement reaches far beyond Ammon and Moab.

God will not allow anyone, anywhere in the earth, to worship false gods.

God will not share His creation with false gods.

He will destroy the false gods, so all will turn to Him.

The very first commandment is;

Exodus 20:3 "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Zephaniah 2:12 "Ye Ethiopians also, ye [shall be] slain by my sword."

Ethiopia lay to the south of Israel.

She would be judged by His sword, fulfilled in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and conquest of Egypt (Ezek. 30:24-25).

"Ethiopians" are the same as the Cushites.

They too, are an idolatrous nation.

These represent all the evil people from the south.

This was fulfilled, when the Assyrians conquered Egypt.

The Sword of Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

They will be won to Christ someday by that Word.

Then the spiritual side of this fulfillment will take place.

Verses 13-15

Zephaniah also predicts the fall of "Nineveh," the capital of "Assyria, located northeast of Israel, would be desolated as well."

The ancient metropolis will be reduced to the habitation of wild animals.

"Cormorant" (qaat), refers to a pelican or unclean bird.

"Bittern":

A large marsh bird of the heron family.

Assyria and Nineveh fell shortly after this prophecy, to the Babylonians (in 612 B.C.).

Famed for her irrigation system, she would be left dry.

Zephaniah 2:13 "And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, [and] dry like a wilderness."

"And he will stretch out his hand against the north":

Either the LORD, or Nebuchadnezzar his sword; who, as he would subdue the nations that lay southward, he would lead his army northward against the land of Assyria, which lay to the north of Judea, as next explained.

"And destroy Assyria":

That famous monarchy, which had ruled over the kingdoms of the earth, now should come to an end, and be reduced to subjection to the king of Babylon.

"And will make Nineveh a desolation":

Which was the capital city, the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy: Nahum prophesies at large of the destruction of this city.

"And dry like a wilderness":

Which before was a very watery place, situated by rivers, particularly the river Tigris.

So that it was formerly like a pool of water (Nahum 2:6), but now should be dry like a heath or desert.

Assyria first is a conqueror, and then becomes the conquered.

God is opposed to Assyrians for the very same reason.

They are idolaters.

They represent Israel's enemies to the North.

"Nineveh" means house of fish.

They worshipped fish.

We discussed the stretching of God's hand shows action against these people.

Nineveh was totally destroyed.

Nineveh became a deserted wasteland.

Zephaniah 2:14 "And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; [their] voice shall sing in the windows; desolation [shall be] in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work."

"And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her":

In the midst of the city of Nineveh.

In the streets of it, where houses stood, and people in great numbers walked.

But now, only should be seen the cottages of shepherds, and flocks of sheep feeding or lying down.

As is before observed of the sea coast of the Philistines (Zeph. 2:6).

"All the beasts of the nations":

That is, all sorts of beasts, especially wild beasts, in the several parts of the world, should come and dwell here.

Instead of kings and princes, nobles, merchants, and the great men thereof, who once here inhabited, now there should be beasts of prey, terrible to come nigh unto.

For these are to be understood properly and literally, and not figuratively; of men for their savageness and cruelty; comparable to beasts.

"Both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it":

Of the doors of the houses in Nineveh: or, "on its pomegranates".

The figures of these being often put on the upper part of a column, turrets, pinnacles, pillars, and posts in buildings, and over porches of doors.

And on these those melancholy and doleful creatures here mentioned, which delight in solitary places, should take up their abode.

"Their voice shall sing in the windows":

Of desolate houses, the inhabitants being gone who used to be seen looking out of them.

But now these creatures before named should dwell here, and utter their doleful sounds, who otherwise would not have come near them.

"Desolation shall be in the thresholds":

There being none to go in and out over them.

The Septuagint version, and which is followed by the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions, renders it, "the ravens shall be in its gates".

Mistaking "desolation", for "a raven".

"For he shall uncover the cedar work":

The enemy Nebuchadnezzar, or Nabopolassar, when he should take the city, would unroof the houses paneled with cedar, and expose all the fine cedar work within to the inclemency of the air, which would soon come to ruin.

All these expressions are designed to set forth the utter ruin and destruction of this vast and populous city; and which was so utterly destroyed.

As Lucian says, that there is no trace of it to be found; and, according to modern travelers, there are only heaps of rubbish to be seen, which are conjectured to be the ruins of this city (See Nahum 1:8).

This speaks of the absence of habitation.

A "cormorant" is a pelican.

A "bittern" is a wild bird.

These two birds show the desolation of this area.

The wild beasts and wild birds have taken up homestead here.

The lintels are speaking of places where the birds nest on top of posts that are left from the destruction.

It appears, the destroyed buildings still had windows, and they perched in there and sang.

The palaces had cedar paneling, as we read in another of the prophetic books.

Some of this cedar paneling seems to have not been destroyed, when the destruction came.

Now, the only ones enjoying all this broken down splendor are the wild birds and animals.

Zephaniah 2:15 "This [is] the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I [am], and [there is] none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, [and] wag his hand."

In language similar to that of the king of Babylon (Isa. 14:13-14; 47:8), and the price of Tyre (Ezek. 28:2), Assyria had claimed for herself divine attributes.

For this she would be brought to ruin.

These had been a very proud people.

They thought they were above everyone else.

They had no fear of others, because they thought they were the greatest.

Nineveh made a bad mistake, when she elevated herself up to say "I am and there is none beside me".

She was really defying God.

In more recent years, a ship maker put a statement on his ship that not even God could sink her.

The ship was the Titanic, and it sunk on its maiden voyage.

It is a dangerous thing for a city, or a ship, to proclaim power over God.

That is what Nineveh had done.

There will be no pleasant memory of Nineveh.

The city will be ridiculed forever.

Wag his hand is an expression of disgust.

Zephaniah Chapter 2 Questions

1. What is verse 1 calling them together for?
2. What things were mentioned that they should repent of, before this happened?
3. Who, in the New Testament, cried, "Repent for the LORD is coming"?
4. Who is verse 3 directed to?
5. What is it telling them to do?
6. Why did God save Noah and his family in the flood?
7. What great comfort is there for all of us who live for Jesus in verse 3?

8. When will Gaza be populated again?
9. What unusual time does Ashdod's destruction come?
10. "Cherethites" means _____.
11. Philistia is, in a sense, like _____.
12. What happens to Ashkelon later?
13. God always has a remnant of _____.
14. The _____ and _____ were descendent of Lot and his two daughters.
15. Moab shall be as _____.
16. The children of Ammon as _____.
17. What happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?
18. What happens to Moab and Ammon?
19. Why will God do this to them?
20. Those, who oppose God's people, are opposed to _____.
21. God is a _____ God.
22. "Ethiopians" are the same as the _____.
23. What is the Sword of Jesus?
24. What happens to Nineveh?
25. What will inhabit Nineveh?
26. What is a "cormorant"?
27. What is a "bittern"?
28. Why was Nineveh destroyed?