

The Judgment of the Lord on the Gentile Nations

Zephaniah 2

Zephaniah 2:1-3: *“Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,² before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff, before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you!³ Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.”*

Background Notes

The theme of Zephaniah is “the Day of the Lord.” The Day of the Lord has both an historical aspect and an eschatological (future) aspect. The historical aspect of the Day of the Lord was the Babylonian invasion of Judah in the 6th Century BC, when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar invaded the kingdom of Judah, destroyed the Temple, and took many people as captives to Babylon. This took place within about 50 years of the time that Zephaniah wrote this prophecy. No wonder he said that the Day of the Lord was at hand!

But the prophecies of chapter 1 were not completely fulfilled with the Babylonian invasion of Judah. Some are yet to be fulfilled in the End Times - in the ultimate or eschatological Day of the Lord. Zephaniah 2:1-3 is a continuation of the judgment pronounced upon the kingdom of Judah.

Here again we have a fusing of both historical and future aspects of the Day of the Lord. The “day of the Lord’s anger” (v2) came upon Israel historically when the Babylonian armies conquered Judah, the southern kingdom. But a remnant of Jews was spared at that time (v3) - in fact, the Jews who were taken into captivity in Babylon preserved the Scriptures and produced the godly remnant that came back to Jerusalem after the seventy-year captivity.

But there’s also an eschatological aspect to verses 1-3, and the historical aspect illustrates the future eschatological aspect. The coming Tribulation time that is described in the book of Revelation will certainly be “the day of the Lord’s anger” (v2). But a godly remnant will come out of that future time of tribulation. (Read Revelation 7.)

Verse 3 is not a reference to Christians who will be “raptured” to Heaven before the Tribulation. No, the godly remnant of verse 3 is composed of those faithful believers whom God will preserve and protect from His wrath upon the world at that time.

In the rest of chapter 2, Zephaniah pronounced the judgment of God on the Gentile nations surrounding Judah. Here again there are both the historical and eschatological aspects of the Day of the Lord. Our two doctrinal points will come from the messages of judgment pronounced upon these Gentile nations.

Doctrinal Points

1. God will judge those who mock and despise His people.

Zephaniah 2:4-11: *“For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted. ⁵ Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: “I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant.”⁶ The seacoast shall be pastures, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷ The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed their flocks there; In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them, and return their captives. ⁸ “I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the people of Ammon with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders. ⁹ Therefore, as I live,” says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “Surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah— overrun with weeds and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation. The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them.” ¹⁰ This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts. ¹¹ The Lord will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth. People shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations.”*

Zephaniah looked west and pronounced God’s judgment on Philistia (v 4-7), and then he looked east and pronounced God’s judgment on Moab and Ammon (v8-11). These prophecies of judgment have been partially fulfilled. Here again we have both the historical and eschatological (future) aspects of Old Testament prophecy.

Certainly the cities of the Philistines – Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron (v4) have been destroyed in history - in fact, I have been to the ruins of these cities several times. The Philistine people (“Cherethites”), who originated from the island of Crete, no longer exist, so verses 4-5 of the prophecy about Philistia have been fulfilled historically. But verses 6-7 have not yet been fulfilled. Much of this Formerly Philistine land area is known today as the “Gaza Strip.” It is not now under the control of the remnant of the house of Judah (v7) and the people there certainly don’t “lie down at peace” today – just read your newspapers! But peace will come to that area in the future, when the Lord returns!

In the prophecy of judgment about Moab and Ammon (v8-11) once again there has been partial fulfillment. This area is in the country of Jordan today. In fact, the name of the capital city of modern Jordan is “Amman” - that name traces back to

ancient Ammon. Most of this prophecy has already been fulfilled in history. If you drive today down the ancient Kings Highway from Amman to the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea, you will see what is described in verse 9: *“overrun with weeds and saltpits and a perpetual desolation.”* Some of the land is barren and salty because it’s in the Dead Sea area. There are “saltpits” or “sinkholes” along the Dead Sea shore because the water level of the Dead Sea has dropped. There are also a number of saltpits from the mining of phosphate salts. So the historical fulfillment of these prophecies has already taken place.

But the end of verse 9: *“The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them”* - that has not yet been fulfilled. And verse 11 is certainly not fulfilled yet: *“The Lord will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; people shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations.”*

In verse 10, notice why God pronounced judgment on these Gentile nations: *“This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts.”* God will judge those who mock and despise His people. Remember - this is just as true today as it was when Zephaniah wrote his prophecy!

There’s an encouragement in these verses for believers today. Have you ever been mocked, or despised, or stepped on, or put down, or physically persecuted for being a Christian? Listen - it’s important to realize that ***we don’t have to avenge ourselves. God will do it for us!*** Romans 12:19 says, *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves but rather give place to wrath, for it is written ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”* God will judge those who mock and despise His people.

2. God will judge those who exalt themselves above others.

Zephaniah 2:12-15: *“You Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by My sword.” And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness. The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation. Both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be at the threshold; for He will lay bare the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, “I am it, and there is none besides me.” How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss and shake his fist.”*

In these verses Zephaniah looked south and pronounced God’s judgment on Ethiopia in verse 12. Then he looked northeast to the land and nation of Assyria (v13-15). Not too many years after Zephaniah wrote this prophecy, the empire of Assyria was conquered by the Babylonians. The capital city of Nineveh fell in 612 BC, and the description of her desolation in these verses has been confirmed by history and archaeological excavation. For many centuries the exact

location of ancient Nineveh was unknown because its desolated ruins were completely obliterated and drifted over by dust and sand.

There may also be an End Time aspect to this prophecy of judgment on Assyria. Daniel spoke of the “king of the north” during the End Times, and Micah 5:6 mentions “the Assyrian” who will invade the land of Israel in the End Times.

Notice here in verse 15 why Nineveh, that great city, was judged: *“This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, ‘I am it, and there is none besides me.’* God will judge those who exalt themselves above others.

This statement was not only true of ancient Nineveh, but it is true of nations and individuals today. Proverbs 16:18 says, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* Also 1 Peter 5:5-6: *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”*

If you exalt yourself, God will have to humble you. There are no exceptions. If, on the other hand, you humble yourself, God will exalt you in due time. God will judge those who exalt themselves above others.

Practical Application

Are you hidden from the Lord’s anger?

Verse 3: *“Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.”* In the context, this verse referred to the godly remnant of Israel that was preserved by God during the Babylonian captivity. It also looks forward to the godly remnant that will be preserved during the future Tribulation period. But verse 3 certainly has an application for today as well.

Are you hidden from the Lord’s anger? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? If you don’t, then you are not hidden from the Lord’s anger. John 3:36 says, *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him.”*

Commit your life to Jesus Christ! Become a true Christian by trusting in His work on the cross for your salvation. That is the only way to escape the righteous wrath of God against sin.

Jesus died for our sins so that we could be sheltered from God’s judgment upon sin. Are you hidden from the Lord’s anger?