

## **Intro**

The kingdom of Israel's been divided. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom 100 years ago. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are left. Wicked kings plunged Judah into flagrant idolatry.

So God sends Zephaniah to bring Judah to repentance. Zephaniah proclaims a day of the LORD. A day that's near in which God will send Babylon as his servant to conquer Jerusalem, burn the temple to the ground, and take captives back to Babylon. All because Judah isn't keeping the covenant God made with Moses.

A day that's distant and universal. A time when all the nations will be judged.

This morning Zephaniah explains why repentance must take place.

## **READ PASSAGE (2:1-15)**

## **PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Big Picture**

- Repent because there's a final judgment
- The final judgment is the way that God rescues the remnant
- Reasons for the final judgment include pride and taunting God's people
- The final judgment is our hope

### **Point 1: Repent of pride (2:3-5, 9-15)**

#### **Explanation**

2:3 was a call to repent. Seek the Lord by seeking righteousness and humility. Lowliness, placing ourselves under God's authority is the essence of humility.

2:4 explains the reason why repentance was necessary:

*For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. – 2:4*

Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, and Ekron represent city states of Philistia. Philistia was part of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham as an everlasting possession (Gen 12:5-7; 13:14-15; 17:8). "For" indicates an explanation, a reason. In other words, **repent because the Philistines will be judged.**

*Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left. – 2:5*

Philistia will be utterly destroyed (“no inhabitant left”). In the case of Philistia, we have near and distant fulfillment. In his commentary on Zephaniah, **Thomas Renz** notes:

“While we lack sufficient knowledge to establish with certainty at what point the various cities were conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, what we know suggests that Ashkelon fell to the Babylonians in November or December of 604 and Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza sometime between 604 and 598/597.”

What happened in 604-597 BC was near fulfillment. But there’s future fulfillment. The remnant of Judah doesn’t possess Philistia today (2:7). Again, Zephaniah weaves between a near and distant day of the LORD.

Because of their pride, Zephaniah indicts Moab and the Ammonites :

*Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them." <sup>10</sup> This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts. – 2:9-10*

God swears by oath what he’ll do to Moab and the Ammonites. They’ll suffer punishment similar to Sodom and Gomorrah (“a waste forever”). Why? Because of their pride.

*You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword. – 2:12*

Cush = Nubia, which is located in modern day Sudan. They controlled Egypt in Zephaniah’s day.

*And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert. – 2:13*

Ninevah, the capitol of Assyria, fell in 612 BC to Babylon. Babylon fought with the Medes while Egypt supported Assyria. Zephaniah had to be prophesying sometime prior to 612 BC because Ninevah’s fall is a future reality.

Note that Assyria’s defeat is attributed to God, despite the fact that Babylon defeated them. Zephaniah understands Babylon’s victory to be an act of God.

*Herds shall lie down in her midst, all kinds of beasts; even the owl and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; a voice shall hoot in the window; devastation will be on the threshold; for her cedar work will be laid bare. – 2:14*

The picture is Assyria unpopulated. No humans, just animals. The powerful empire reduced to nothing. Why was Assyria destroyed?

*This is the exultant city that lived securely, that said in her heart, "I am, and there is no one else." What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist. – 2:15*

God stretched out his hand against Assyria because of her pride.

## **Big Picture Summary**

- 1) Zephaniah is saying, repent because judgment is coming on the nations. Humble yourselves, or else you’ll be repaid for your pride like the nations.

- 2) Some of these judgments are near. Some are distant = the final day of the LORD.
- 3) Despite Judah's humble circumstance under foreign control there's hope to be had. One day the remnant of Judah will plunder the nations.

## **Application**

If we've repented and believed, we're looking forward to the final judgment. But pride is something we'll do battle with as long as we live. Zephaniah diagnoses the essence of pride:

*"I am, and there is no one else."*

It's brash autonomy. I'm not accountable to a greater power (i.e., God). It's brash self-confidence. There's no one else that's on my level. It's brash self-sufficiency. I don't need God. God has no place in my success. It's worship of self. I am the center of the universe.

Pride stems from the heart. An internal sin that manifests itself outwardly. The sin of misplaced worship. Worshipping ourselves instead of God. Pride cries out, "I'm the center of the universe, not God." Pride manifests itself in a variety of ways.

For example, the pride of Moab and Ammonites that manifested itself in boasting (2:10). Like the child or adult who's always talking about how great they are. Their achievements, possessions, victories, intellect, skills. They make sure you know about it. The person who can't say enough about themselves. The person who has to be the best. The person who has to be noticed. The person who has to be celebrated.

However, pride isn't just boasting. Pride also manifests itself in **some cases** (not every case!) of depression. The root of our depression may be self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-worship. We demand to be the center of the universe, and when we're not celebrated as we desire, our heart sinks. When we're depressed because we want to be worshipped, pride is the root of our depression. I've observed people miserable because of extreme self-absorption.

The antidote to pride is faith and repentance. The way we come to Christ is the way we live the Christian life. When struggling with pride, turn from self-exultation to celebrating Jesus. See your weakness. See God's greatness. See your sin. See God's holiness.

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.* – Rom 12:3

Assess yourself accurately. Context is spiritual gifts, so acknowledge gifts given and gifts lacking. Acknowledge victories over sin and struggles that remain. Give all credit to God. Place all blame on self. It's confidence in what God can do, not what I can do. Confidence in God's promises, not myself. Develop God confidence not self-confidence. God confidence kills pride!

## **Point 2: Rest in God's vengeance (2:6-9)**

### **Explanation**

*And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks. <sup>7</sup> The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall graze, and in the*

*houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the LORD their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes. – 2:6-7*

God will act for Judah by punishing Philistia. Punishment on Philistia = being mindful of Judah. Upon Philistia's destruction (no inhabitant left – 2:5), the land will be Judah's possession. Grazing during the day and lying down at night envisions a time of peace and tranquility. Fortunes restored envisions a time without subjection to foreign rule.

*"I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites, how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory. – 2:8*

God kept a record of their insults (taunts) and mockery (reviling) and boasting.

*Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them." <sup>10</sup> This shall be their lot in **return** for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts. – 2:9-10*

Note the word "return." The return for Moab and the Ammonites taunting Judah (= pride) is being destroyed and plundered. The word "return" could also be translated, "in exchange for." It's the concept of "eye for eye" in Exodus 21:24. The word translated "for" is the same word translated "return" in 2:10. The idea is penalties must be just and appropriate. You don't fine someone \$10 for murder. You don't sentence someone to the death penalty for stealing \$10. God's wrath isn't sadistic or unstable. It's measured according to his holy and just character. God's punishment of the nations is measured.

Judah's salvation happens through judgment. It's through the destruction of the Philistines that Judah takes possession of the land (2:5-7). It's after Moab and the Ammonites are laid to waste that Judah takes possession of the land (2:8-9).

The remnant's salvation happens at the final judgment:

*The LORD will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations. – 2:11*

2:11 ("for") explains God's return for their pride in terms of the final judgment. There will come a day all false gods are defeated. At that time, every nation will bow before the LORD. The context here is punishment so this isn't bowing because of adoration. It's forced submission. In the New Testament, we discover that every knee will bow before Jesus, whether in worship or forced submission:

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Phil 2:9-11*

At the final judgment everyone bows before Jesus, whether willingly or unwillingly. This is a picture of the distant and universal day of the LORD. On that day, all opposition to God will cease. The remnant's salvation comes through the judgment of the nations.

Judah plunders Moab and the Ammonites because of God's judgment = a future plundering yet to be fulfilled, because these nations weren't plundered by Judah in 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The promise belongs to a remnant of Judah = not every person in Judah. Remnant speaks of the survivors of an elimination process. A portion within a larger group. With the final judgment in view, the remnant = all of believing Judah. When Christ returns to judge the nations, believing Judah will receive eternal possession of the land promised to Abraham. This promise belongs to us.

- all the nations blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3)
- Abraham promised an everlasting possession of Canaan (Gen 13:14-15; 17:8)
- Paul expands this promise to the whole world (Rom 4:13)
- Gentiles have been grafted into these promises (Rom 11:11-12, 17-19)
- those with faith are sons of Abraham and receive the promises given to him (Gal 3:7-9, 14, 29)
- Gentiles who've believed in Christ are no longer separated from the covenants of promise (Eph 2:12-13)

### **Application**

Like the believing remnant, our hope is salvation through judgment. Like Judah, we experience taunting: intolerant, unrepentant bigots, on the wrong side of history. How are we to respond? One biblical response is leave the vengeance to God.

*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. – Rom 12:19-21*

Returning evil with good brings us to another point.

### **Point 3: Respond to taunts with love**

#### **Explanation**

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." – Matt 5:43-48*

The Christian life is a life lived in tension. On one hand, we rest in God's vengeance. We entrust the judgment to God. The martyrs ask "how long"?

*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. – Rev 6:9-11*

On the other hand, we **respond to taunts with love**. Tangible acts of kindness and prayer for their souls. Jesus calls us to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19-20). Jesus calls us to love our neighbor (Matt 22:39). Jesus calls us to influence the people around us so that they'll worship him (Matt 5:13-16). So we hold truth in tension. We **rest in God's vengeance** instead of avenging ourselves. And we **respond to taunts with love**.

### **Non-Christians**

God's judgment is clear. He won't tolerate pride. He calls all to repent. He sent his Son Jesus to die in the place of sinners so that we could be forgiven. God is merciful to the undeserving while remaining just. Trust in Jesus' work on the cross to cover your sins. Exalt God, not yourselves. Are you interested in learning more about Jesus?

### **Point 4: Remember that God is mindful of you (2:7)**

#### **Explanation**

Brethren, God took notice of the verbal abuse Judah endured. God takes note of everything done to his people. Everything the Taliban is doing right now. All hostility and mockery. Your cancer.

God is mindful. God is touched by your suffering, like when Jesus wept over Mary's grief from her brother Lazarus' death (John 11:33-35). God promises peace and comfort in the midst of your struggles (2 Cor 1:3-7; Phil 4:6-7). And he promises an eternal possession where suffering has ceased.

#### **Conclusion**

**Repent of pride.** God-confidence not self-confidence. **Rest in God's vengeance.** Leave the justice to God. **Respond to taunts with love.** Imitate the kindness God showed you. **Remember that God is mindful of you.** God will end your suffering one day.