

Zephaniah 2:4-11- Encouragement to Repent

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Henry, Gaebelin, Geneva, JFB, Handfuls, Poole, Clarke, Delitzsch, Expositor, INT, Gill, Calvin, Clarke

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: God would have been completely justified if he simply destroyed Judah who had rejected his Word, abandoned proper worship, embraced idolatry, abused the widow, orphan, and foreigner, and passionately pursued their own pleasure. They were covenant breakers! They deserved to die and death was on the horizon! But God is a God of grace also...not just a God of justice. So God encouraged Judah to repent and take refuge in him. How would he encourage them to repent? He would assure them that **he would provide in abundance for them, he would stop their enemies from harassing them, and he would cause them to expand even more throughout the world.**

Our headings:

Provisions from the Philistines

Protection from the Moab

Propagation in the world

Our goals are: **That you will remember that the church will inherit the earth and so we need not be obsessed with working for creature comforts, but work for the glory of the Savior.**

Provision from the Philistines

4 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."

1. These Philistine cities (which were emigrant cities) were mentioned before the Babylonian captivity in Amos and they were mentioned after the Babylonian captivity in Zechariah.

All 3 times God said he would destroy these Philistine cities and give his people safety.

2. What would the destruction of these Philistine cities be like?

Gaza, a fortified city, would be deserted-forsaken. Everything they cherished would be taken away. Pun: **Gaza, Gazubah**. (We might say: Toronto would be tormented.)

Ashkelon, a large and beautiful city given to the Tribe of Dan long ago, would be desolate.

Ashdod, would be **driven out at noon**, which means they would be destroyed when they least expected it. Usually at noon, Easterners would take a nap because of the heat of the day.

Ekron, where Beelzebub was worshipped, the chief seat of devil-worship, **would be uprooted**, meaning that they would face an abnormal judgment. Everything they relied on for survival would be pulled away. Pun: **Ekron, Eker**.

Gath is missing (of the 5 great Philistine cities) likely because it was already under Judah's control. It was won recently by Uzziah and Hezekiah.

Cherethites who bordered the great Philistine cities were also **earmarked for judgment**. They were considered a branch of the Philistines. They were known for being violent, even to those who landed on their coasts from storms.

Note the language "woe," (V5). Woe was for all the cities.

3. Not one of these cities, as great as each one was, would stand up against God's judgment.

Isaiah 14:31 Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! **All you of Philistia are dissolved;** For smoke will come from the north, And no one will be alone in his appointed times."

And when God says he will do something, you can know that he will! And God's word was surely against these Philistines.

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** (fortunes, the things they captured).

4. Why would God destroy these surrounding cities?

a. These wicked nations were condemned to destruction by God when Israel entered the Promised Land, but Israel had never permanently captured these places. So as a blessing of Judah's repentance, if they repented, the Lord **promised** to give them these cities. And more, **God would give back to Judah the land that was his and Israel's.**

b. These cities would then be used as homes for the Jews (or huts for the shepherds) and as pastures for their animals, marking God's provisions for his people. These great cities would become sheep pens for his people.

c. God's people would have peace. This is why they could lie down in the evening and not worry about anything!

d. God's people would get back their prosperity (their power and prestige) that they had before.

5. Lessons:

a. God wants the church to repent of its complacency and idolatry. We have made gods of ourselves and our possessions. God encourages us to repent by promising that he would restore the fortunes of the church before the world. This is not a bribe (as God needs nothing from you); this is a reward! Yes, God would put what punishments he thought to put on you on your enemies!

b. When God says something, it will happen. No one can stop God's Words. The North Koreans can't do it. The Russians can't do it. The terrorists can't stop it. A judge can't stop it. So stop worrying and start obeying. Call the church to repent for our lethargy and our idolatry and start doing it yourself. And wait to receive God's blessings.

Protection from the Moab

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.** ¹⁰ This they shall have for their pride, Because they have reproached and **made arrogant threats** Against the people of the LORD of hosts.

1. God would not only provide prosperity for his people in the Philistine territory, but God would also free them from their arch enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites!

These 2 nations, Moab and Ammon, were the half-brothers of the Jews, formed through the wickedness of Lot and his daughters. They were perennial thorns in the side of the Jews.

They were cruel to the Jews when they left Egypt and were traveling to Canaan with their young children and animals. Moab even hired Balaam to curse the people of God!

Later, they tried to take away the land that belonged to God's people and failed. This was the land that God had given to his people when he brought them to Canaan. Their pride was hurt from failing to destroy God's people so they hated them!

Later still, they mocked the Jews when they were in trouble.

Ezekiel 25:3 "Say to the Ammonites, 'Hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you said, 'Aha!' against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity..."

Jeremiah 48:29 "We have heard the pride of Moab (He is exceedingly proud), Of his loftiness and arrogance and pride, And of the haughtiness of his heart."

Later still, they mocked the Jews for only having one God.

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 (thorny stinging nettles -) and saltpits, And a perpetual desolation. The residue of My people shall plunder them, And the remnant of My people shall possess them."

2. So God swore (showing certainty) to destroy Moab and Ammon like he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

God did not care about their pride being hurt. God would take away what they were producing and they would starve and die...famine being one of the worst ways to die.

Their land would be overrun by nettles and destroyed by salt pits. This happened when the Dead Sea overflowed its banks in the spring leaving its salt. Henry: *The country shall produce nothing but nettles, instead of corn; and there shall be brine pits, instead of the pleasant fountains of water with which the country had abounded.*

3. What would this mean to God's people?

God would give the Jews these cities (if they repented) and God would give them peace.

4. Lessons:

a. For God's kingdom to spread the enemies must be removed. But God would not remove your enemies if you live selfish, idolatrous, and unrepentant lives? No, the church must repent. God is not afraid of wicked political or judicial actors! But he is waiting for you and the church to get her life in order!

b. Pray for the destruction of the church's enemies. This is no politically correct, but it is necessary.

Psalms 123:4 Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud.

Jude 1:15 "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

The United Church is no longer going to discipline a lady pastor in Scarborough who doesn't believe in God. Think of the harm that church is doing! Should we pray for preservation of that church that refuses to repent as it leads souls to hell? Would we pray for God's blessing on a parent who is feeding his children poisonous food? No!

c. Ever wonder if God sees and hear the taunts of those who hate God and his church?

He does! But don't pain if God doesn't immediately respond. He will judge at the right time. That was Obadiah's concern with Edom!

Obadiah 1:12 But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress.

Propagation in the world

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.**

1. The ultimate goal of God's prospering and protecting his repentant people and ravishing their enemies was that his kingdom would expand to the ends of the earth.

And expand is what prosperous and protected people would do!

2. As an aid to the spreading of his kingdom, God would destroy the religion of those who were from pagan backgrounds – this is his “awesome” (literally-terrible) work.

All gods (and those who worship them) would bow to him. The people would have no more meat and wine to offer to their gods. “Big and powerful” means nothing to God. “Big and powerful” can be stopped with a thought from God.

Isaiah 46:1 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; Their idols were on the beasts and on the cattle. Your carriages were heavily loaded, A burden to the weary beast. 2 They stoop, they bow down together; They could not deliver the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity.

When idols are destroyed men will worship the true God. Men always want to worship someone.

3. On the other hand, God would convert those who are willing to look to him from all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth.

Isaiah 2:2...in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD’S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; **And all nations shall flow to it.**

Micah 4:1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD’S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; **And peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...”**

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that **everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King...**

Malachi 1:11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, **My name shall be great among the Gentiles**; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; **For My name shall be great among the nations,**” Says the LORD of hosts.

4. Lessons:

a. When God provides for his people, and when God protects his people, they are able to reproduce. So get his gifts!

b. More, God promised that his people would reproduce. Don’t give up the fight because we are at a down time in the history of church. God will do what he has promised. The church will rise again. This is the message of Jesus in Matthew 28. Also...

Revelation 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

c. But nothing good starts without prayer. Pray a prayer of repentance that the church will see how idolatrous we have become, how apostasy is taking over, how selfish we are! Also, pray that the Lord will conquer Gentile hearts.

Conclusion:

Judah had to repent. They had to repent because it was right. They had to repent because that was how they were going to receive God's prosperity and protection. They had to repent for the kingdom to expand. Through all of this God would be glorified.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Confess your sins and live a life of repentance. Confess your children's sins. Confess the church's sins. Confess your nation's sins. Call your family, church, and nation to repent of their sins. See how compromised the church is today. See how we have watered down worship. See how we have promoted idolatry.

2. In order to repent you must look to the cross. You need to remember the cost of your freedom from the Devil's clutches. If you don't see how wretched you were, you would never repent in deep sorrow!

3. Then use all the Lord's blessing to expand his church. You really do need these gifts to do the work the Lord has called you to do. (No one wants to have children if he can't afford to provide for them!) You have an abundance of provisions.

Finally, if you are not a Christian it means you have another god, a god that God will destroy...and God will destroy you too, that is, unless you repent of your sins and plead the work of Jesus on the cross as your work. Do it today.