

ZEPHANIAH 2

REVIEW...

- **Zephaniah** – the 36th book of the Old Testament - 9th of what is known as the 12 Minor Prophets
 - o Zephaniah – Yahweh has hidden – was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom...
 - o He was the great – great – grandson of King Hezekiah – 13th King of Judah – **Zephaniah 1:1**
 - o He prophesied during the reign of King Josiah – the last godly King of Judah...
 - o Josiah led Judah in a revival - but it was short lived – only lasting his lifetime...
 - o After Josiah died in battle – 609 BC - his sons led Judah in a moral decline for the next 22 years....
 - o Zephaniah saw this coming – and spoke about the coming judgment – the Day of the Lord!
- The book is broken into 3 sections:
 - o Chapters 1:2–2:3 – The judgment of Judah on the Day of the Lord
 - o Chapter 2:4-3:8 - The judgment of the nations on the Day of the Lord
 - o Chapter 3:9-20 – Healing and restoration from the Lord
- Zephaniah began his prophecy with the inflammatory statement...
 - o God will consume EVERYTHING – a dramatic introduction of absolute devastation...
 - o The reason for the destruction - to remove the stumbling blocks / wicked from Judah!
 - o 5 classes – worship Baal / priests / worship host of heaven / swear by the Lord / turn from God...
 - o When their punishment came – no one would say a word – they would be silent before the Lord...
 - o 4 classes – princes / those who leap / the merchants / and those who are complacent!
 - o The Day of the Lord was coming quickly – and nothing could save Judah (*nationally*)!

THE JUDGEMENT OF THE NATIONS... (4 THINGS)

- **1st – A GLIMMER OF HOPE... vs. 1-3**
 - o 1st – Undesirable nation... vs. 1-2
 - Judah had become an undesirable (*lo kasaph*) nation...
 - The heart of Judah should have been for the Lord – like King David wrote...
 - **Psalms 84:2** – “My soul longs [*kasaph*], yes, even faint for the courts of the Lord...”
 - But Judah was undesirable – because they no longer desired the Lord!
 - Their love had shifted – their desire was now ONLY for the things of this world!
 - Often we try to reason with God – how far away from the world do we need to be...
 - Can we at least look at the world – how about touch – just a light touch...
 - We do not want to be in the world – just really close – is that OK God...
 - The truth is - if we are not drawing closer to the Lord - then we are drifting away...
 - We can reassure ourselves that we attend Bible studies / attend church on Sunday...
 - But where is our heart - are we excited / or just going through the motions...
 - It is not worth the danger to play around with the love of this world...
 - It is far too easy to fall in love with this world – and lose our desire for Jesus!
 - **II Corinthians 13:5** – “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith...”
 - Therefore God commanded Judah to gather together before it was too late...
 - The allusion is coming together to pray as a nation for repentance...
 - In the days before Google Maps – I was driving on the New Jersey turnpike – VERY LOST...
 - I was convinced I was going the right way – but ended up going in circles!
 - It is easy to convince ourselves we are going the right way in life / right choices...
 - But our heart is deceitful – **Jeremiah 17:9** – and can easily turn away from the Lord...
 - The only way to be certain of the direction we are heading – is to check the ‘App’...

- Pray to the one who knows – who can turn us around if we are going the wrong way!
- Time was limited – that had until the decree was issued – the Babylonian onslaught...
 - Then the opportunity to repent would blow away like chaff on the wind...
 - And the fierce anger of the Lord would come upon Judah – the Day of Anger!
 - Judah had a very small window in which to repent – and it was closing fast!
 - There is a silly game called taboo – guess a word using anything but THE word...
 - It has a timer – that you have to rush to beat – before the buzzer rings!
 - I lot of people play a game – guessing at the meaning of life – before it is too late...
 - For too many the buzzer rings before they have it – with eternal consequences!
 - The decision on where we spend our eternity is limited to our time here on earth...
 - The moment we die our fate is sealed - there are no second chances - **Hebrews 9:27**
 - And God does not guarantee tomorrow - right now is the time to get right with God!
 - **II Corinthians 6:2** - “Today is the day of salvation...”

o 2nd – Hidden from judgment... vs. 3

- In spite of the terrible destruction that was coming nationally – there was hope individually!
 - Not everyone would perish in the coming waves of devastation...
 - Certainly Judah would be punished as a nation – and the wicked would be killed...
 - But there were some who ‘might’ be hidden – speaking of the difficulty in saving them!
 - Because saving sinners from judgment is not easy – it is the very definition of impossible...
 - The only thing that could keep us from hell – was God putting Himself on a cross!
- The Lord gave 5 characteristics of those who dared to have hope!
 - The list has many similarities with the opening of the Sermon on the Mount...
 - Because the characteristics of those who seek and find Jesus – do not change!
 - The list begins with Seek the Lord – because salvation is only found in ONE place – Jesus
- Meek - **Matthew 5:5** – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”
 - Meekness is not a lack of power – instead it is defined as power under control...
 - Jesus was meek – not that He lacked power – but He chooses to depend on the Father...
 - And it is when we look to Jesus (*not our strength*) that we find He is everything we need!
- Uphold justice - **Matthew 5:8** – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
 - Because although we are all sinners – we do not always do what is right - **Romans 3:10**
 - That does not mean we live a sinful life – we strive to uphold justice / live a pure life!
- Seek Righteous - **Matthew 5:6** – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”
 - We know what it means to be hungry and thirsty – but do we have that need for God...
 - Do we seek after the righteousness of God with the same passion as food and water...
 - When we hunger and thirst after God’s righteousness we will be filled!
- Seek Humility - **Matthew 5:3** – “Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - The only thing that will keep us from the Kingdom of Heaven is our righteousness
 - It is when we realize how poor we are that we long for and cling to Jesus righteousness!

▪ 2ND – THE JUDGMENT OF ENEMIES... vs. 4-7

o 1st – The next part of the prophecy...

- Having given a glimmer of hope – Zephaniah turns to the second part of his prophecy...
- The judgment of the nations on the Day of the Lord - he will list 5 specific nations!
- Those 5 nations will be broken up into 3 groups – clearly marked by paragraphs in the text...
- The nations are not randomly chosen – they represent 3 different categories...
- The Judgment of God on the Enemies of Judah / Family of Judah / and the Empires of world!
- Because while judgment began with Judah – Chapter 1 – it would not end there!
- Recent news been transfixed on the moral delinquency of our nation...

- Teachers having affairs with students / the impropriety of our politicians and actors...
- None of should which should come as a surprise – public education teaches sexual promiscuity
- Somehow we try and define an arbitrary line – everything is ok – except ‘THIS’...
- And we wonder how far off can judgment be – the answer is – it starts with the church!
- The church is to be set apart for God - we are called to convict the world by our lives...
- But if the church starts to look and act just like the world - then judgment of God is close!
- Because once God begins to judge the church – those who do not believe are not far behind!
- **I Peter 4:17** - “For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if *it begins with us first*, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”
- o 2nd – The 4 cities of the Philistines... vs. 4-6
 - Philistia was ruled by 5 cities – Gaza / Ashkelon / Ashdod / Ekron / and Gath...
 - Gath – is not mentioned here because Dave and Judah had conquered it – **I Chronicles 18:1**
 - The rest would be forsaken / desolate / driven out - uprooted at noonday (*during siesta*)!
 - Woe to the Cherethites – meaning the Cretans – the Philistines came from Crete...
 - The name Philistine means ‘emigrant’ – because they migrated to coastal area of Canaan...
 - But they were illegal immigrants who were living on borrowed time!
 - Because the Lord was against them – and would completely remove them from the Land!
 - Their land would become pastures for flocks of sheep and their shepherds!
 - When Israel first entered the Promised Land...
 - The Philistines had been allowed by God to remain in the Land...
 - **Judges 2:22** – “Through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD.”
 - It was not that God could not give victory to Israel – he was testing Israel...
 - Would they trust in themselves / false gods – or look to and trust in the Lord!
 - Sadly Israel would not trust God – and the Philistines would become their perpetual enemy!
 - Did you ever wonder why God did not perfect us the day we were saved...
 - He certainly could take away every sinful desire / make us completely holy...
 - But He allows us to have ‘Philistines’ in our lives – to test us...
 - Who are we going to look to – do we trust in ourselves / put our faith in this world!
- o 3rd – The remnant of the house of Judah... vs. 7
 - The land of the Philistines would become the inheritance of the remnant of Judah...
 - Hope here is given to Judah – they would be judged – but a remnant would return...
 - God would fight for them – and return their captives from Babylon – after 70 years!
 - Then that remnant would dwell in the houses of Ashkelon!
 - Quite literally fulfilled – there are no more Philistines – lost to history...
 - In fact the Roman Empire rename Judah – Palestine – in AD 132 (*did not like the Jews*)...
 - But the term Palestinian from then on referred to Jews (*until 1967 – Yasser Arafat*)...
 - And the city of Ashkelon still exists today – full of Jews – and LOTS of sheep!
 - If we have a sin our lives that we just cannot seem to overcome – there is hope...
 - Though there are consequences – in the end we can trust there is victory...
 - God will finish the work He began in us – He will give us the grace to overcome!
 - **Philippians 1:6** – “Confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ...”
- 3rd – THE JUDGMENT OF FAMILY... vs. 8-11
 - o 1st – Insulting the people of God... 8-10
 - God heard the insults of Moab and Ammon...
 - Moab and Ammon were family - the descendants of Lot - the nephew of Abraham...
 - Lot moved to Sodom and Gomorrah – with his wife and daughters...

- When God destroyed the city he and his daughters hid out in a cave...
- The girls thought the whole world had been destroyed – got pregnant by their dad...
- These nations were the result of that incestuous relationship - **Genesis 19:37-38**
- Yet Moab and Ammon mocked Israel / Judah – and arrogantly threatened them...
 - So as the Lord lives – they would become like Sodom and Gomorrah...
 - They too would be overrun by weeds and salt pits – a perpetual desolation!
 - And the remnant of Israel would possess and plunder them!
 - Again quite literally fulfilled – Moab and Ammon were in the area of the Dead Sea...
 - A place that to this day is a virtual wasteland – with only weeds and salt pits!
 - Which is part of Israel today – and the Dead Sea is mined / plundered for valuable minerals!
- Moab and Ammon insulted Israel – because of their pride... vs. 10
 - They pointed out the flaws of their brothers – to try and hide their own!
 - There are those who like to look down on the mistakes of others...
 - The reason - if they focus on others mistakes - it makes them look better...
 - Often when a believer is in trouble – and needs help - Christians tend to attack...
 - Rather than picking them up - they instead are quick to judge...
 - Christians unfortunately are famous for 'shooting their wounded!'
 - The tendency is to 'leave those in need alone' when we should be 'loving them'...
 - But it should not be that way in the church - we are to be known by love - **John 13:35**

o 2nd – Hope for family... vs. 11

- He will terrify (*awesome*) them – reducing to nothing all the gods of their land (*earth*)...
 - Then people from all over the world will worship the Lord – each in their own land...
 - Because when people see the judgment of God – failure of idols to save...
 - They will turn from their pagan ways – and instead put their faith in God!
 - Although this is the last mention of Moab (160x OT) and Ammon (83x OT) in the OT...
 - The devastation of Moab and Ammon was not complete – there was hope...
 - According to **Jeremiah 48:47** / **Jeremiah 49:6** / and **Daniel 11:41**...
 - God would one day restore these nations – they would call out on the Lord!
- Some of the hardest people to reach are family...
 - The problem is they know us too well – our mistakes / flaws / and sins...
 - When we share Jesus with them – they are quick to remind us of them all!
 - But do not give up on friends – they might give us a hard time...
 - But in due time – when the 'idols' they are trusting in fail...
 - We can be the loving hand that points them to Jesus – see them saved!

▪ 4th – THE JUDGMENT OF EMPIRES... vs. 12-15

o 1st – The Ethiopians and Assyrians... vs. 12-15

- The Ethiopians would be slain by the sword...
 - The capitol of Ethiopia / Egypt was the City of Thebes - the first of 7 great Empires...
 - Egypt / Assyria / Babylon / Medo-Persia / Greece / Rome / Anti-Christ
 - Yet in 667 B.C. Thebes was conquered by the Assyrians – never to regain its former glory!
 - Even today ruins stretch 27 miles - included the famous temples of Luxor and Karnack!
- God would also stretch out His hand against Assyria...
 - The city of Nineveh would be desolate – as dry as the wilderness...
 - The city would lie in ruins – birds nesting on the mighty capitols of her pillars...
 - The doorways would all be covered by rubble / the cedar beams open to the sky!
 - Nineveh – the city that rejoiced and dwelt securely...
 - The people who said they 'WERE IT' and there was 'NONE' like them...

- Would become a desolation – a place where wild animals laid down...
- Everyone who passed by would laugh and shake their fists at the ruins!
- The Assyrian Empire at its zenith was the largest the world had seen...
- They controlled most of the nations from the Black Sea in the north to Egypt in the South...
- From and Iran/Persia in the east all the way to Greece in the West!
- Until in August of 612 B.C. the Babylonians conquered the city of Nineveh!
- The ruins of which were hidden in the sands of Iraq until 1842 - for over 2000 years!
- The Ethiopians (*Egypt*) and Assyrians were the 2 world Empires in the days of Zephaniah...
 - They had ALL the power / ALL the money / ALL the influence...
 - But NONE of that was going to do them ANY good in the Day of Judgment!
 - People tend to put their trust in governments / financial systems...
 - They think they are OK because they are part of the 'Greatest nation on earth'...
 - Or they are confident of their future because they have a great stock portfolio...
 - But when you really look at our economy – \$20 trillion in debt - \$63k per person!
 - You realize how fragile the US is - and that our hope should NOT BE in this world!
 - Not to trust in power / riches / or influence – because they cannot save us!
 - **Mark 8:36** – “What good is it if a man gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”
- o 2nd – The Day of Judgment...
 - Zephaniah lays out 4 different classes of Judgment in the first 2 chapters...
 - God would judge His people – Judah – and He did with 70 years of captivity in Babylon...
 - God would judge the enemies of Judah – Philippians – completely wiped out today...
 - God would judge the family of Judah – Moab / Ammon – weeks and salt pits...
 - God would judge empires – Ethiopia / Assyria – ruins are all that remains...
 - All that to say – there is NO QUESTION if God will judge – it is certain / proven!
 - The only question is - are we among those who will be HIDDEN in the judgment!
 - This is the message of Zephaniah – seek the Lord / be Meek / uphold Justice...
 - Seek Righteousness and Humility – because the Day of the Lord is coming...
 - And the only hope we have – is to put our faith in Jesus!