

Message #5

Zephaniah 2:1-3

We have said on multiple occasions in this church that what is happening in Israel is under the sovereign control of the sovereign God. We have also said that it is part of setting the stage for the fulfillment of the futuristic/eschatological plan of God.

Now the recent attacks that Hamas has leveled against Israel have come from Gaza and from the coastal regions of Israel. When we come to chapter 2 of Zephaniah, what we see is that Gaza and the coastlands are specifically mentioned as critical to the prophetic program of God (2:4, 5).

Now we have been learning in Zephaniah that there are intervals of judgment that God brings against people and places. There are times when He targets certain people and areas and permits negative things to hit that leave many people and places destroyed.

God has certainly done this in Israel. When Zephaniah wrote, the attack against Jerusalem and Judah started just 20 years later and 38 years later, Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

Back in July 1, 2021, about 5 months after a new President was sworn into office, an EF1 tornado started in Arlington. It snapped and uprooted trees and destroyed homes. The tornado crossed the Potomac River into Washington DC and hit the national mall. It destroyed the temporary fencing that had been put up for the 4th of July celebration. Then it caused trees to fall on cars. Amazingly only one person was injured.

Now here is the question, did the tornado cause the political leaders of this nation to say, we need to humble ourselves and get right with the God of the Bible? Did that tornado cause them to realize this is just a snip it glimpse of what God is capable of doing and will do? No, it did not.

That is exactly what happened in Israel. God sent wave after wave of warning that He was going to judge and it made no difference to most of the people.

As Zephaniah comes to this part of his prophetic writing, what he says is this:

GOD IS GOING TO TARGET AND DESTROY SPECIFIC PLACES IN HIS ANGER AND WRATH AND HE INVITES PEOPLE TO REPENT AND GET INTO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM BEFORE HE DOES IT.

Now the invitation given in this context is an invitation to get right with God before the decree takes effect (2:2). The decree being referred to is the decree for the Day of the LORD destruction.

The invitation is given to people right now to get into a right relationship with God before judgment hits. If you are a believer, the invitation is to stop grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching the Holy Spirit in view of the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ.

People do not realize how devastating and intimidating God's judgment will be. Those who are not right with God have no clue as to what will happen. They do not realize that once those decreed Seal Judgments are opened starting in Revelation 6, there is no going back.

Now as we come to this text of Scripture, there are some very important thoughts that Zephaniah communicates:

THOUGHT #1 – God invites a nation to gather itself together. **2:1**

Notice that two times it is repeated for emphasis that this is what the nation needs to do. It needs to gather itself together. This is a national invitation.

Now the word for “nation” is goy. There are some who take this to mean it is an invitation given to the nation Israel, who was viewed as a heathen nation, and others take it to mean it is an invitation to a Gentile nation.

We think it is an invitation to any nation. The invitation is to nationally gather themselves together and be ashamed of their sin. This was the problem. The nations have not been ashamed of their sin, they flaunt their sin. They are not ashamed of the evil they have done against God so God calls them to gather themselves together.

That word “shame” (niksap) is one that means there was no embarrassment and no blushing or change of face color over sin. The Niphal stem of the verb means they never in and of themselves were ashamed of their sin.

So God's call to repent is not due to their conviction, it is due to the threat of His coming judgment.

The nation Israel and the nations of the world need to realize God is going to judge and that threat should be enough to cause people to realize, I need to be ashamed of my sin and evil.

Israel has been a proud nation totally unashamed of the sin that was bringing about the judgment. What God invites this nation to do is to gather itself together before God and repent. This is a national invitation.

Can you imagine what it would be like if right now the leaders of this nation said we are going to go before God and acknowledge that we have become a depraved and wicked nation and we are gathering ourselves together to acknowledge this?

We have turned our backs on God and His word and His program. We have promoted depraved things and what a remarkable thing it would be if this nation said we are turning back to the God of the Bible.

That is what God invites the nation to do here.

THOUGHT #2 – God invites the nation to repent before the disastrous judgment decree hits.
2:2

The thing that jumps out at you in this verse is the preposition that is repeated three times - “before.”

The repentance needs to take place:

- 1) Before the decree takes effect.
- 2) Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you.
- 3) Before the Day of the LORD’S anger comes upon you.

This is a serious time invitation. Any nation or individual wants to get right with God before this happens. It is going to happen. **What God invites people to do is to be ashamed of their sin and get into a right relationship with Him before judgment hits them.**

Now when God implements His judgment decree, it will move in like the wind and blow away the targets of His wrath like chaff.

By using the words “burning anger” and “anger” God is stressing that this judgment will be ferocious and relentless because He will pour out His wrath.

The word “anger” (aph) refers to an anger that is like an adrenaline anger. The breathing is hard and heavy and the nostrils are flaring (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 69). This word is often used to describe the anger of God.

The adjective “burning” added to the word anger means God’s anger has reached a hot and terrifying level (*Ibid.*, p. 303).

So when this decree is finally implemented, God will be raging in anger. His sovereign emotions will be surging and His sovereign adrenaline will be flowing to pour out His wrath.

God invites nations and individuals to repent before this happens.

THOUGHT #3 – God invites a nation or individual to seek a relationship with Him in view of His coming ferocious judgment. **2:3**

You will notice that the verb “seek” is used two times in this verse. Both verbs are Piel stem which emphasizes eager action of one’s self. It means to eagerly busy self with the action of seeking a relationship with God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 150).

The actual verb “seek” (baqash) is one that means to really seek or search for something. It means to really strive after something and go after something (*Ibid.*, pp. 137-138).

So when this verb is used in the Piel stem, it is emphasizing very intense action and focused action to have a right relationship with God before His judgment comes.

Now we get a glimpse in this verse of the kind of relationship we are to go after before judgment comes.

Now there are five qualities that apparently coincide with seeking a right relationship with God:

Quality #1 - There will be an intense desire to have a right relationship with God. **2:3a**

The verbs “seek” certainly indicate that. When you seek after something, there is effort in it. There is drive and focus.

One will be ashamed of sin and ashamed of evil one has done in life. This will be true for an individual and a nation that desires to escape the fierce anger of God.

Quality #2 - There will be humility in the seeking for the relationship with God. **2:3b**

There is no room for pride in a relationship with God. One who wants a relationship with God will be humble about pursuing it.

Quality #3 - There will be an intense desire to know and obey God’s word. **2:3c**

The words “carried out the ordinances” certainly imply one knows the ordinances of God and then desires to obey them and implement them in their own life.

Quality #4 - There will be an intense desire to seek the righteousness of God. **2:3d**

One who will seek a right relationship with God will be very concerned about what God says is righteous and will be after it.

Quality #5 - There will be an intense desire to seek humility. **2:3e**

This word is the same word used earlier in the verse. By virtue of the fact the word is used twice means that is a very important issue to consider. The word means to be humble of a lowly mind (*Ibid.*, p. 643). This describes an attitude before God that is lowly, meek, contrite and gentle.

If one wants a right relationship with God, one cannot be proud, arrogant, pushy, dominant and harsh.

God invites people to seek a relationship with Him before He begins to pour out His angry decree.

THOUGHT #4 – God says if one seeks a right relationship with Him, He will perhaps hide them and protect them when He is doing judgmental things. **2:3f**

The word “hidden” is a word that means to conceal and to hide something (*Ibid.*, p. 596-597). The Niphal stem indicates that God may take it upon Himself to actually hide and protect people who are after a right relationship with Him, even when He is pouring out wrath.

Think of the potential of what is said here. It is possible to be in such a proper relationship with God that when He is burning angry and has decreed destruction, He actually hides and protects one who is dedicated to Him.

There have been moments in Israel’s history where God has protected those who were seeking a right relationship with Him. In fact, He specifically did that for individuals. Individuals like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Then there was Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There was Mordecai and Esther.

These literally were protected by God when God sent a judgment force like the Babylonians or the Medes and Persians to specifically destroy.

Now if one is a believer in Jesus Christ, one will not face the burning anger and wrath of God. One will face a Bema Seat Judgment to determine the gaining or losing of rewards. We will be raptured before the Great Tribulation and time of wrath.

But once the Rapture occurs, there will be millions left on this earth to experience God’s burning anger and wrath.

This message needs to go out to the nations of the world.

God is going to send a ferocious judgment to this world. It is going to hit every nation that has made mockery of Him and it will go against Israel. If one will seek the Lord and humble himself or herself before God and be ashamed of the evil and the sin, one perhaps will be hidden in the day of the LORD’S anger.