

ZEPHANIAH

Scripture Reading: 3:1-8

INTRO: We have now come to the little book of Zephaniah. Once more we go to the very first verse for some important introductory information (read). Again, we note that this book is a word from the Lord, and that it came to a man named Zephaniah. This Zephaniah is said to be the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah. Now it is questioned whether this Hezekiah is King Hezekiah of whom we spoke in the book of Nahum. What gives credibility to this view is that we read further that Zephaniah prophesied during the days of Josiah. The timing would be about right as far as dates are concerned. If this is so, then the good king, Josiah, and Zephaniah are related through Hezekiah.

After Hezekiah, Manasseh began to reign and he reigned for some 55 years. He was a very wicked king almost right up to the last, when he repented of his wicked ways. But his son, Amon reigned after him for a very short time, but once more he was a wicked king. But turn to 2 Kings 21 to see what happens (read 21:19-22:2).

Well, it is in the reign of Josiah that Zephaniah prophesied. Let me note here as well that the name Zephaniah means, "the Lord has hidden" or "the Lord hides." J.R. Church calls Zephaniah, "Jehovah has hidden." We may have more on the significance of that later. Let me note here as well that this book is written about 625 BC. Zephaniah and Habakkuk lived at the same time, and they were both born toward the end of Nahum's life. Jeremiah was born around the time of Habakkuk and Zephaniah, but seems to have lived quite a lot longer. All three of these lived during the time Josiah was king, and through the time of Jehoikim's reign, and maybe early into Zedekiah's reign, who reigned when Babylon took Jerusalem.

You may have forgotten by now, but at the very outset of these message I talked to you about various kinds of prophecy. One of those I mentioned was called telescopic prophecy. That is where the writer sees two events but they look like one. I gave you an illustration of what looks like one Island off the shores of Alaska but it is in fact two. The smaller Island in front belongs to the USA and the larger one behind it belongs to Russia. From the shores of Alaska it looks like one island, but when

fog moves in between those two, you can only see the smaller one. We looked at some examples of that in Scripture.

Now, that is what it appears we have in the prophecy of Zephaniah. What is in view is the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, which is like the nearer island. This took place in 586 BC. But the larger fulfillment has not yet happened. It will happen in the tribulation which is spoken of at the Day of the Lord. Note this in Zephaniah 1:14 (read). That great day of the Lord will be fulfilled in the tribulation which is still future.

So in this message we will look at two points, the blight and blessing of Judah.

I. THE BLIGHT OF JUDAH (1:2-2:15)

A. Prediction (1:2-18)

As I outline the book, the blight of Judah goes from 1:2-3:8. In verses 2-6, the Lord spells out the blight of Judah and before we read these verses let me tell you what Exodus 34:14 says, "...you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God..." Now we'll read verses 2-6 (read). The northern kingdom is already gone because of their idolatry, and now the Lord will deal with Judah and Jerusalem. You see, this is the southern kingdom. And the reason God will deal with them so harshly is their idolatry.

Then in 1:7-18, we have the punishment of Jerusalem. Let us read this section (read). Notice in verse 7 the sacrifice (read). The sacrifice the Lord is preparing is Jerusalem. He will offer His beloved city as a sacrifice to Babylon because of their idolatry. You see, there does come a time when sin must be dealt with and God says to Judah, that time is now here.

In verse 7, reference is made to the day of the Lord, and in verse 14 again. I think what we have here is a prophecy that has a far and a near fulfillment. The near fulfillment took place when Babylon came and took Judah captive and destroyed Jerusalem. The far fulfillment will take place in

the tribulation, which is the beginning of the day of the Lord. We are very near that time right now and this Scripture speaks of it. Look briefly again at verses 14-16.

B. Exhortation (2:1-15)

1. Content - seek the Lord (2:1-3)

That brings us to chapter 2 which is a call to seek the Lord. Verses 1-3 are very important. We'll start with verses 1-2 (read). Judah had become an undesirable nation, I think both to the world around them and to God. Here is a word to Christians. When Christians try to fit into the world, they become undesirable to God and the world. And in these verses God calls them to gather together before the day of the Lord. It is time to repent before the fierce anger of the Lord is spilled out.

Then in verse 3 we have a very interesting concept (read). The Lord exhorts the meek of the earth who have upheld His justice to seek righteousness and humility. As I grow older and observe the teachings of Scripture and how righteousness and humility work, I am absolutely amazed at the power of these two things.

Now look at what follows. It says, "It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." In the near fulfillment of this, I understand that some were spared when Judah and Jerusalem were sacked. And if we take the far picture of this, during the tribulation, the faithful will once more be hidden during the time of God's wrath. I want you to see this in the book of Revelation chapter 12. This chapter is written in highly symbolical language and speaks of Israel in the great tribulation (read 13-15). There will be a remnant of godly Jews who will be divinely protected by God for the last 3 1/2 years of the tribulation.

2. Reason - judgment (4-15)

When we come to verse 4, it starts with the word 'for'. This word caused me considerable difficulty. It seems Israel is called to repentance based on the reason that God will deal with the nations mentioned in verses 4-15. And then when you consider the nations to be judged, they are the nations immediately on the west, east, south and north. The near fulfillment of this prophecy on these nations, of course, has taken place long ago.

Albert Barnes says that by giving these 4 nations which lie on every side of Israel, the Lord includes all mankind on all sides. That is possible. And I feel that this passage speaks to more than the past, and is yet to find further fulfillment in the future.

a. Philistines judged (4-7)

In verses 4-7, we have the nation to the west, the land of the Philistines (read). Now Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron were four of the five main cities of the Philistines. One city is left out, Gath, and it seems it had already been destroyed, likely by Uzziah.

This first area mentioned by Zephaniah is the area which is today inhabited by a people who call themselves Palestinians. I must tell you something about the Palestinians of today. In 1920, the land we know as Israel was mandated to Great Britain. They called the land west of the Jordan River Palestine, and east of the Jordan, Transjordan. The name Palestine is of Roman origin. Wikipedia says, "The term Palestine was coined in the Western culture from the name of Palaestina province of the Roman ([Syria-Palaestina](#)) and later Byzantine Empire (Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda."

Dave Hunt, in his book Judgment Day, writing of this name 'Palestine' says, "Surprise! The land into which God led Abram was *not*

'Palestine.' There was no such a place. Nor was there such a people as 'Palestinians.' In all of history, there never were a Palestinian people, nation, government, language, culture, religion, or economy. There are those today who call themselves 'Palestinians' and claim that they descended from a Palestinian people who lived for thousands of years in a land called Palestine. In fact, that claim is an outright hoax. Yet today the world accepts this lie as the basis of a false peace that they have been attempting for years to force upon Israel" end quote(55-56).

I read of a certain man, I do not remember if he was a Jew or not, who got into an argument about the legitimacy of the country of Palestine and the Palestinian people. And in his argument he said, "Please give me one name of an official leader of this country of Palestine." And the facts? There never have been any! And somehow I think that this prophecy speaks of what God will yet do in this area. Gaza will be forsaken, Ashdod will be driven out, Ashkelon will be desolate, and Ekron will be uprooted.

b. Moab and Ammon judged (8-11)

Then in verses 8-11 we have Moab (read). Moab and Ammon were sister nations which descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham you will have read about. These two nations were on the East.

c. Ethiopia judged (12)

Now note verse 12 (read). Ethiopia, which is also known as Cush, lay directly to the south. Here we have one verse directed to this country and it is significant.**

d. Assyrians judged (2:13-15)

Well, when we turn to the one direction left, north, we have Assyria. We have

mentioned Nineveh numerous times and it was a city in Assyria. Assyria of that time would have included the two countries we know as Syria and Iraq today. Well, today's news is full of headlines from all of these countries. And I believe these prophecies will yet find complete fulfillment in these nations in the near future.

C. Pronouncement of Woe on Jerusalem (3:1-7)

That brings us to chapter 3 and in verses 1-8 we have a woe pronounced on Jerusalem. As we read verses 1-2, note what this city is guilty of (read). May that speak to us this morning. Then note in verse 3 what the princes, leaders, and priests have been guilty of (read). This is the cause of the tragedy that will befall this city and its country.

So, in 2:2-3 God had warned this city to repent and seek the Lord. And verse 4 began by giving the reason they should repent, in the word 'for'. The reason was God would cut off her enemies. Now in verse 6, speaking prophetically, He says, "I have cut off the nations..." (read). Then in verse 7 He confides that He had said to Himself, "If I cut off Israel's enemies she will repent so that she will not need to be cut off." But in spite of all this, Jerusalem and Judah only rose up to corrupt all their deeds. It was useless. She must suffer. But her suffering, in the end, will finally bring about God's desired results. We will see this in verses 8-20 which I have called the blessing of Judah.

II. THE BLESSING OF JUDAH (3:8-20)

A. Destruction of the Nations (8)

And if I see verse 8 right, it is an introduction to the results of all God has been seeking to bring about (read). We are transported into the tribulation, when once more God will judge the nations. This verse speaks, I think, of the tribulation. And the Lord says Israel is to wait for Him. There is no doubt that in the future, when God judges the nations there will be faithful Israel's who will be waiting for Him. Other prophecies,

especially the book of Revelation tell us this. And this time Israel will turn. Though those who turn and live will be but a small remnant, for most of the righteous will die as martyrs, yet there will be a faithful remnant at the end of the tribulation. And they will be waiting for Him. They will have found their Yeshuah, Hamashiach, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and when they have waited until the end of those horrible seven years, something very wonderful will happen and we will look at that in the remainder of this book.

B. Restoration of a Pure Language (9)

Now, verse 9 is very interesting and has caused a lot of speculation (read). Let me give you the points of interest and you can ponder them yourselves. First, it says that God will restore to the peoples, plural, a pure language. It has been speculated that this refers to the Hebrew language. For almost 2000 years, the Hebrew language was not used for conversation, commerce or education (Jimmy DeYoung). Then in the 1800's and early 1900's, 50 years before Israel became a nation, one man, living in Israel, Eliazer Ben-Jehuda, decided that God's chosen people who lived in God's chosen land should speak the language of His chosen people. Single handedly, overcoming huge obstacles, he managed to achieve that goal, and today, after 2000 years, it is the official language, not of Palestine, but Israel. On January 7, of 2010, Israel honored Eliazer Ben Yehuda for his work to restore the Hebrew language.

Listen to Jeremiah 31:23, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: 'The LORD bless you, O home of justice, and mountain of holiness!'" That verse, along with this one in Zephaniah are used by some to show that it was prophesied that Hebrew would be the restored language of modern Israel.

C. Restoration of the People (10)

Verse 10 has also given rise to much speculation (read). Some take the first part of this verse as a

prophecy of the return of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel which is still going on today. I have read you the numbers of those who have returned and that by the end of this year, Israel hopes to have all those Ethiopian Jews who could prove they are Jews settled in Israel. There will still be some left who claim to be Jews but cannot prove it. This view does find support in this book but we do not have time to discuss it.

Then, in the last part of verse 10 it says that these Ethiopian Jews will bring His, the Lord's offering with them. It is speculated by some that this speaks of the ark of the covenant. It is viewed, and has been for many years, that the ark of the covenant was taken to Ethiopia and has been safe guarded there all this time. It is interesting that while all the instruments for temple worship have been remade in modern Israel, this ark has not been remade. It is speculated that the Jews know where it is and are counting on using it.

D. Revival of the People (11-13)

In verses 11-13 the Lord describes His restored people (read). And in these verses are revealed for us the major causes of all trouble. The very first thing that will be removed will be pride. There is the chief cause of all trouble. Pride has its roots everywhere. In Jerusalem, the then capital of the world, here referred to as 'My holy mountain', there will be no haughtiness. In the place of leadership or where the heads of state gather, there is the chief place of pride. When it is not in the capital, now you can deal with it in the rest of the country. Since Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, pride will be rooted out of the world.

The absence of pride will then give way to the presence of meekness and humility (read verse 12). Meekness and humility are the fertile soil of trusting God. It is pride that keeps us from trusting, and trusting God is the final aim of all God's work in us.

And when pride has been rooted out, and meekness and humility are in place, and people trust God,

something else happens. We find it in verse 13 (read). Unrighteousness, especially lies and a deceitful tongue are the cause of such things as caused God to destroy Jerusalem and Judah. Righteousness is a breastplate. It protects. Deceit and lies expose one's soul to the devil so that he can use us for his purposes.

And when pride is rooted out and meekness and humility are resident in the hearts of people, and they do righteousness instead of speaking lies and using deceitful tongues, then??? Then??? Then what? Then God reigns!!!

E. Rejoicing of the people (14-20)

I want you to see, as we close this book, the results of such a time in verses by reading 14-20 (read).

CONCL: In this book, the Lord foretold the blight of Judah and Jerusalem. Then He called on them to repent and to seek the Lord in order that they may be hidden in the time when God's wrath is poured out. And there are verses in the OT that almost sound like rapture verses, verses that indicate some will be spared God's wrath. But these verses speak of a remnant in Israel that will be hidden during the outpouring of God's wrath. And why should they seek to be among those that would be hidden? Because God will judge the nations! These nations, it seems to me, will include all the nations of the world!

Then, at the close of the book, the Lord promises the blessing that is yet to come on Judah and Jerusalem. This prophecy speaks of the destruction of the Gentile nations, the restoration of their language, and of their people. All pride will be removed, and in its place will come meekness and humility. This will be the fertile soil in which trust in God will grow. Unrighteousness, the deceitful tongue, and lies will come to an end and righteousness will be the result. And when righteousness takes place, then God will truly reign in mankind!

Now, I have wanted to tell you some stories of when Israel became a nation. Today I have time to tell you a story. You see, before all such prophecies as these can be fulfilled, Israel had to become a nation again. That did not happen

for almost 2000 years. And then, just prior to 1948, when Israel did become a nation again, the Jews were in a very desperate plight. They needed money. When they needed money they went to the Jews in the United States. Now they had sent Eliezer Kaplan to raise funds and he came back with nothing. He reported bitterly that at most they could probably get 5 million dollars. But they needed at least 25 or 30 million. According to Collins and Lapierre, David Ben Gurion, the leader of these hopeless Jews sprang up and said, "Kaplan and I must leave for the United States immediately to make the Americans realize how serious the situation is." Then a quite female voice interrupted and said, "What you are doing here I cannot do, however, what you propose to do in the United States that I can do. You stay here and let me go to the States to raise the money." Ben Gurion was red faced and furious but the group decided she should go and to the United States went a little woman in search of millions of dollars.

And so, two days after that decision she landed in New York on a cold January day wearing a thin spring dress and no more baggage than a handbag clutched in her hand and ten dollar bill in her pocket. When a puzzled customs agent asked how she intended to support herself in the US she simply said, "I have family here." On her first speaking engagement, at the sight of her simple austere figure moving to the speaker's stand someone in the crowd murmured, "She looks like the woman from the Bible." And when she spoke she captivated the Jews of America and traveled all over the country in speaking to her 'Jewish family' of the desperate needs in Israel, then known as Palestine. Collins and Lapierre say, "The woman who had arrived in the United States one bitter January night with ten dollars in her pocketbook would leave with fifty million, ten times the amount Eliezer Kaplan had mentioned, twice the figure set by David Ben Gurion, the man who had wanted to go in her place" (164-65).

If you read the history of the Jews beginning in the mid 1800's until now, you would read of miracle after miracle after miracle. But we are seldom told those stories in an anti-Semitic world.

The woman of our story is Golda Mabovitch who would become Golda Meir. She was born in Kiev Russia, May 3, 1898. She would later move to the United States and then on to

Israel. And after Israel did become a nation, she was to become the fourth president of Israel.