

Zeph. 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired;

Zeph. 2:2 Before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you.

Zeph. 2:3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.

My first thought upon reading these verses was that the prophet is speaking to Judah. I was surprised to note that the Hebrew for *nation* (v1) made specific reference to the Gentiles or heathen although it was broad enough to include people in general. In context with the ending of the previous chapter and the bookend of verse 3, I'm inclined to think application can be made of the message as a call to repentance to all on planet earth. Since we know Zephaniah was prophesying primarily to Judah, you can't deny application to the Jews of that time specifically.

Sadly, I don't know Hebrew, so I'm dependent on the majority of translations and commentaries that indicate that "not desired" is a reference to being shameless. Chuck Smith's commentary at http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/chuck_smith_c2000/Zep/Zep001.html states: "the Hebrew literally means 'a nation that knows no shame.'" In that regard, it's not surprising that the prophet would use language identifying Judah with the heathen.

Basically, the prophet is calling for the people to come together in repentance before God's judgment falls. The call is urgent because the window for repentance is small; it can pass as swiftly as the chaff blows away.

The message of verse 3 is directed specifically to the "meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment." They are being encouraged to petition the Lord in prayer to help them continue in righteous living with humility in spite of the wicked influences surrounding them. The motivation—"it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger." Due to my interest in prophecy, this phrase immediately jumped out at me. I referenced at the end of the last chapter that Ezekiel tells us that God placed a seal of protection on the righteous in Judah to preserve a remnant in the land when they were judged by Babylon. I also referenced the fact that He will preserve a remnant of the Jews through the tribulation period of Daniel's 70th week. God is quite consistent in what He chooses to reveal to us in scripture. Noah and his family were delivered from the judgment of the flood. Lot and his family were delivered before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. I can't help but make application to the fact that whether delivered through or removed from, God does not direct His judgment at people of faith. It was also significant that the Hebrew for *hid* states "be absent, keep close, conceal." In its future application to the "day of the Lord" in end times, I can't help but make a connection to the rapture for people of faith.

I can't help but be reminded of a verse in my study of Isaiah.

Is. 26:20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

(See comments in Journal on Isaiah 26.)

Zeph. 2:4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up.

In context, the prophet's message continues its address to the Gentile nations, specifically those near Judah. These first four cities are all part of the land of the Philistines, and are generally in the area today known as the Gaza strip.

- Gaza – It was in Gaza that Samson was imprisoned and met his death. In context, the prophet seems to be saying that judgment on Judah would also affect these cities, and Gaza was captured by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 BC according to Eerdman's Dictionary. I thought it was interesting to note that the Hebrew for *forsaken* made reference to relinquish or leave destitute. I can't help but make application to now in light of what happened when Israel relinquished the Gaza strip and the current destitution of the people.
- Ashkelon – This is the place where Samson succumbed to the wiles of Delilah and was taken captive. Its future—to be made a wasteland.
- Ashdod – A couple of the commentaries made note that noon is the general siesta time, so this implies an attack when least expected. According to Wikipedia, "The Port of Ashdod is Israel's largest port accounting for sixty percent of the country's imported goods," and is the fifth largest city in Israel today. Can't help but think that the surprise attack at noon has future application as well.
- Ekron – This was the northernmost of these four cities and was set more inland. The Hebrew for "rooted up" references extermination.

The first three cities were on a major travel route along the coast; Ekron is on a different travel route more inland. As far as I can tell, only Gaza is part of the "Palestinian" territory today.

Other scriptures seem to reiterate this prophecy.

Amos 1:8 And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD.

Zechariah prophesies regarding these cities in connection with the destruction of Tyre.

Zech. 9:3 And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets.

Zech. 9:4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.

Zech. 9:5 Ashkelon shall see *it*, and fear; Gaza also *shall see it*, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

Zech. 9:6 And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

Zech. 9:7 And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, *shall*

be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.

I can't put it together in my mind, but I can't help but wonder if future application is tied to the terrorist activities of Hizbullah (in Lebanon), Hamas (in Gaza) and Syria and Iran as their sponsor states.

Zeph. 2:5 Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD *is* against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.

Zeph. 2:6 And the sea coast shall be dwellings *and* cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks.

Zeph. 2:7 And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

Eerdman's identifies the Cherethites as loyal bodyguards of David who came from the southern part of the land of the Philistines. The whole of the land of the Philistines was located along the Mediterranean coast in the western part of Israel. The prophet's message is emphasizing complete destruction of this land. It's interesting that the destruction being prophesied will leave this land "no inhabitants." It will become a place for flocks and shepherds and a place of refuge for "the remnant of the house of Judah." As I read through these verses again, I noticed that the prophecy is directed to "the land" and its inhabitants. As I researched on the web, I find that indications are that though the Philistines as a nation disappeared from the scene, inhabitants in the land did not. Though Israeli's gained some benefit from living in the Gaza Strip before being recently removed by their own government, this doesn't seem to fit the description as a place where God visits them and turns away their captivity. That seems to be yet future.

Zeph. 2:8 I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified *themselves* against their border.

Zeph. 2:9 Therefore *as* I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, *even* the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.

Moab and Ammon are the descendants of Lot that occupied some of the area known today as Jordan. Scripture portrays them as ever at enmity with Israel. They lived on Israel's eastern border, and were always looking for an opportunity to benefit from attack on Israel by her enemies. God is fed up with these ungrateful cousins of Israel. Their attitude towards Israel reflects their attitude toward YHWH, the God of Israel. The people and their land are prophesied to meet the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah—"perpetual desolation." Again, I cannot find historical fulfillment for this prophecy. These lands are still inhabited today. Verse 9 indicates that the people of Israel will one day "spoil them" and "possess them." I think one can safely conclude that has not happened yet.

Zeph. 2:10 This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified *themselves* against the people of the LORD of hosts.

Zeph. 2:11 The LORD *will be* terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and *men* shall worship him, every one from his place, *even all the isles of the heathen*.

God hates the sin of pride, and Moab in particular is rebuked for her pride many times in scripture. God is pronouncing judgment on them in answer to their pride and the contempt with which they have treated the Israelites, God's chosen people. Though directed at Moab and Ammon, verse 11 broadens the picture to include judgment against "all the gods of the earth." *Famish* is a reference to emaciating or making thin; Webster adds the idea of killing to destroy with hunger. This paints a picture to me of God showing once for all the impotence of these false gods through the terrible devastation happening among the people who worship them.

I think it is important to note that God's judgment will result in Him being worshipped by every one, "even all the isles of the heathen." This is definitely still future and has to be referring to His wrath as directed at the planet during those last seven years on planet earth before Jesus Christ comes back as King of kings and defeats the Antichrist and his armies and establishes His earthly Kingdom. The word *isles* can be misleading; in the Hebrew it is a reference to "a habitable spot, dry land, and a country" as well as the coastlands.

Zeph. 2:12 Ye Ethiopians also, ye *shall be* slain by my sword.

The Ethiopians are the descendants of Cush through Ham; I have often heard it described as referring to what we know as black Africa or Sudan. This is supported in part by the words of Jeremiah.

Jer. 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.

The prophecy is short and pointed, "you will be killed by my sword." We know that God isn't going to employ an actual weapon. His sword is His Word.

Eph. 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Rev. 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations:

[referring to Jesus when He returns as Kings of kings]

It is judgment declared by the word of God whether using other men or natural disaster or supernatural means. Because of the context we know that they are positioned as enemies of God and His people Israel. As I searched through the scripture to try and pinpoint actions by Ethiopia against Israel, the only thing I could really identify was that they were often in league with Egypt. Since I think there is more application to end times than to Zephaniah's audience at that time,

you have to note that Ethiopia is part of the Gog/Magog alliance that attacks Israel and I believe is yet future. (See journal for Ezekiel 38.)

Zeph. 2:13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness.

Zeph. 2:14 And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; *their* voice shall sing in the windows; desolation *shall be* in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work.

Zeph. 2:15 This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, *I am*, and *there is none beside me*: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

“And he...” = YHWH, the LORD

The “north” in general is the direction from which most of Israel’s enemies attacked. Assyria is singled out as those who had conquered the Northern Kingdom and dispersed them throughout their empire. Yes, they were instruments of judgment in the hand of God, but they acted with evil far beyond God’s purposes. It is only natural that God would choose to use wicked nations to bring judgment since it is in accordance with their evil desires and practices. It doesn’t, however, provide them with free pardon for their evil actions. Isaiah tells us that, again, it is pride that provokes God’s anger.

Is. 10:12 Wherefore it shall come to pass, *that* when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, **I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.**

Is. 10:13 For he saith, By the strength of **my hand I have done *it*, and by **my** wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*:**

Is. 10:14 And **my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are* left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.**

Is. 10:15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if it were no wood.

Is. 10:16 Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

This obviously applied to the King of Assyria at that time, but I believe there is future application to the Antichrist. (Note: the Assyrian empire was a part of the Roman empire (the heritage of the future Antichrist), and I believe there is definite connection between “the Assyrian” referenced in Isaiah and the Antichrist. Yes, I listen to Chuck Missler, with whom I agree more often than not. See journal for Isaiah 10, 14, 30, 31, and 52.)

Nineveh was first established by Asshur, the son of Shem, and became the capital of Assyria.

Gen. 10:11 Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah,

Easton's Bible Dictionary describes it as follows:

"Nineveh in its glory was (Jonah 3:4) an "exceeding great city of three days' journey", i.e., probably in circuit. This would give a circumference of about 60 miles. ."

Nineveh was spared judgment for approximately 100 years after responding in repentance to the message of God declared by a reluctant Jonah. It was destroyed by the Medes and Babylonians around 612 BC. The people of Nineveh are described as dwelling carelessly--confident that they could never be destroyed. (Doesn't that sound like pride again?) She is described as thinking that there is no other city on earth that compares to her. Doesn't that remind you of the attitude of the city of Babylon in Revelation 17?

Rev. 18:7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Her destruction is described in much the same way as that of Babylon by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jer. 50:13 Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues.

Jer. 50:39 Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell *there*, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.

Nineveh is at least a type of the future destruction of Babylon.