

Zephaniah 2

Zephaniah is about judgement on Israel and it is also about the judgement on the whole world. They are linked. The world clock is based on what happens to Israel. When we bless Israel, good things happen to all of us. I would be willing to bet that the benefits received by Israel from the USA during Epic Freedom are already putting the USA on a better trajectory. We see an improvement in politics and fraud discovery. This correlation has always been in play.

It works both ways. God used the surrounding nations to provoke Israel to turn back to God. They were allowed to play the role of a *spoiler* for a while.

Read Zephaniah 2:1-3: God gives an opportunity to repent. He always begins with his own people.

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? (1 Peter 4:17)

Despite any advantages God's people have, we all have a *baseline accountability*. God has built a conscience into us. Even isolated people groups know innately what is right and wrong.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (Romans 1)

In the case of Judah, God had been calling for national repentance. He sent over 10 prophets to get Judah to repent. It is like The Parable of the Vinyard. The servants who were beaten and killed looking for a fruit dividend were these prophets.

³³ *“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he*

said. ³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matthew 21)

Major prophets and minor prophets who called Judah to repentance before the Babylonian invasion (late 8th–6th centuries BCE):

- Isaiah (active c. 8th century BCE)
- Micah (contemporary of Isaiah, 8th century BCE)
- Hosea (prophet to Israel, but his ministry warns both kingdoms and overlaps with Judah's pre-exilic period)
- Amos (prophet to Israel in the 8th century BCE; his message affected Judah as well)
- Joel (date disputed; tradition can place him pre-exilic—often listed among pre-Babylonian prophets)
- Nahum (addresses Assyria's judgment; dated mid-7th century BCE — prior to Babylon's rise)
- Zephaniah (late 7th century BCE; warns Judah of coming judgment)
- Habakkuk (late 7th–early 6th century BCE; questions coming Chaldean judgment)
- Jeremiah (active c. 627–586 BCE; primary pre-exilic prophet warning Judah of Babylonian destruction)
- Obadiah (short oracle against Edom; date disputed—some place him around the exile, others earlier)

Notes:

- Prophets like Amos and Hosea primarily addressed the northern kingdom (Israel) but their themes and timing overlap and influenced Judah.
- Dates for Joel, Obadiah, Nahum vary among scholars; Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Isaiah, and Micah are widely accepted as pre-exilic voices to Judah.

God may give us all kinds of time to repent; but once we plow past that boundary, there is no telling how long and how hard that road will become. God is dealing with people who refuse to use logic, love or any form of mutual understanding. They are living out their lusts. Once your passions over-ride your controls and societal boundaries, you need *a hard stop*. God has to intervene when we clearly cannot stop ourselves.

Once judgement happens, the people will gather within Jerusalem’s fortress and pray. They have no choice. That is not really repentance as much as regret. It is always better to pray as free men; than to pray because you are in an awful situation as a result from ignoring God. There is no honor in being caught red-handed; while trying to go even further.

Read Zephaniah 2:4-7: After God judges his people; he turns to his implements of discipline and correction. He did this with Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Philistines.

How broken and shattered is the hammer of the whole earth! How desolate is Babylon among the nations! (Jeremiah 50:23)

The Philistines were a warlike people from Crete who were judged. They were the archrivals of Israel. God often used one agent of discipline to wipe out a previous agent of discipline. The Philistines were strengthened to provoke Israel to repent. God sent the Babylonians in 604 BC to wipe out the Philistines. The Philistines were tools in God's hands to turn their reliance on him.

But they forgot the Lord their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. ¹⁰ They cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned, because we have abandoned the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroath; but now save us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve You.' (1 Samuel 12)

⁶ Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; so they abandoned the Lord and did not serve Him. ⁷ And the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. ⁸ And they afflicted and oppressed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they oppressed all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan, in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. ⁹ And the sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was in great difficulty. ¹⁰ Then the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have abandoned our God and served the Baals." ¹¹ And the Lord said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not save you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? ¹² And when the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I saved you from their hands. ¹³ Yet you abandoned Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer save you. ¹⁴ Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress." (Judges 10:6-14)

Read Zephaniah 2:8-11: Moab and Ammon were very near to Israel. They were competitors. They were envious and full of hate for the children of Israel. It is

interesting that their distant cousins (through Lot) became so adversarial. Jesus said that whoever is not with me is against me. In other words, being agnostic or distant from God's influence will gradually make you an enemy of the cross.

Abraham and Lot are juxtaposed to give us an illustration of the man who wants to maximize his God experiences, versus the man who wants to minimize spiritual pursuits. It may not be so apparent at first; but the fruit of going the way of the world will sour you on the Kingdom and its people.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. (1 Corinthians 1:18-19)

The word of the Lord came to me: ² "Son of man, set your face against the Ammonites and prophesy against them. ³ Say to them, 'Hear the word of the Sovereign Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Because you said "Aha!" over my sanctuary when it was desecrated and over the land of Israel when it was laid waste and over the people of Judah when they went into exile, ⁴ therefore I am going to give you to the people of the East as a possession. (Ezekiel 25)

Read Zephaniah 2:12-15: Ethiopia and Assyria are also going to be wiped out by the Hammer to the Nations, Babylon. God uses evil people to accomplish good things in our lives. It is not a voluntary thing. If God is going to use you, it's a done deal.

The Ethiopians were mercenaries to Egypt. Egypt certainly had a heavy hand on Israel during its formative years. Similarly, Assyria imposed its brutal will on Israel and Judah. Similarly, God used the Babylonians to wipe out all of the bad actors playing various roles as spoilers and abusers of Israel.

Zerah's invasion of Judah (around 896 BC): An Ethiopian commander named **Zerah led a massive army against King Asa of Judah**, but King Asa prayed and God delivered Judah to complete victory.

All said, God is shaping his people through soft and hard circumstances and tough customers.. Once the effort is complete, God disposes of his societal tools.