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## **Zephaniah 2**

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Zephaniah 2.

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### Topics.

- Gather together before the day of the anger of the LORD, comes.
- Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron shall become a desolation.
- Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, O Canaan.
- The seacoast will become the possession of the house of Judah.
- Moab will become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah.
- The LORD will famish all the gods of the earth.
- The LORD will make the exultant city of Nineveh desolation.
- The history of Israel's captivity in Babylonian.

**INTRODUCTION:** Zephaniah prophesied during the reforms of King Josiah (640–609 B.C.), who brought spiritual revival to Judah after the long and disastrous reign of Manasseh. Zephaniah pronounced God's judgment on corruption and wickedness, but also his plan to restore Judah. He spoke of the coming "Day of the LORD," when sin would be punished, justice would prevail, and a "remnant" of the faithful would be saved. The term "Day of the LORD" occurs throughout the Bible referring both to impending historical judgments from God and to his final judgment at the end of time. Though Zephaniah does not give details about this day, he speaks of its worldwide consequences (Zeph. 1:18) and calls people to seek the Lord (Zeph. 2:3).

**FOR INFORMATION:** concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

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### ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3

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#### **Gather together Before the Day of the Anger of the LORD, Comes.**

- **Zephaniah 2:1-3:** Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, <sup>2</sup>before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there comes upon you the burning anger of the LORD, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.

This is a continuation of Zephaniah prophetic warning in chapter one of the impending doom that is about to come upon the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, because of their gross wickedness before the LORD.

**O shameless nation:** refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the people of Judah.

**Before the decree takes effect:** refers to the prophetic words of the prophets who constantly warned God's people to forsake their wicked ways, their rebellion and the pagan gods they worship and turn to the LORD their God.

**Seek the LORD:** the humble and faithful amongst the prideful wicked are encouraged to seek the LORD and His righteousness so that they, may be "hidden" on the day of the anger of the LORD (v3). Those who did heed the word of God were protected from utter destruction, but not in a way we today might think they would have been. God sent them prophets to

tell them to surrender to the king of Babylon and go into captivity to Babylon and God would watch over them while in captivity. Those who obeyed were spared from being killed and seeing their families slaughtered and their women raped in the city when the fierce and cruel armies of Babylon did invade the city of Jerusalem and burn their houses and destroy the Temple of God. For greater detail of Israel's captivity in Babylon see the title: "The History of Israel's Captivity in Babylonian," (at the end of this study).

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## ZEPHANIAH 2:4

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### **Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron shall become a Desolation.**

- **Zephaniah 2:4:** For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted.

**Gaza:** (one of the five chief cities of the Philistines) it was allotted to Judah, but it was almost always under non-Israelite control. Modern Ghuzzeh is the metropolis of the Gaza Strip which is crowded with Arab refugees today.

**Ashkelon:** (one of the five chief cities of the Philistines) it was located about 12 miles from Gaza along the sea-coast. It was taken by the tribe of Judah shortly after the death of Joshua, but was retaken by the Philistines and was in their hands through much of the OT period.

**Ashdod:** (one of the five chief cities of the Philistines) it was assigned to Judah, but they failed to dispossess the inhabitants, it was a center of Dagon worship (the fish-god)

**Ekron:** (one of the five chief cities of the Philistines) it was the most northern of the five chief cities of the Philistines assigned to Judah. It is located on the boundary between Judah and Dan.

**Gath:** the other chief city of the Philistines is not mentioned in Amos prophetic message maybe it had lost its influence and power by now.

**Zephaniah is warning:** all the inhabitants of these cities that unless they turn from their wicked ways and seek the LORD and His righteousness the day of the burning anger of the LORD will come upon their cities and their land.

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## ZEPHANIAH 2:5-6

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### **Woe to the inhabitants of the Seacoast, O Canaan.**

- **Zephaniah 2:5-6:** Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left. <sup>6</sup>And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks.

**Cherethites:** were a Philistine tribe in southern Palestine.

**Canaan:** is the land of the Canaanites, it is the same as modern day Palestine.

**Philistines:** is the place from which the Philistines originally came, our word "Palestine" is derived from the term Philistine, they worshiped the Semitic gods Dagon, Astarte and Baalzebub and were a major contender against the Hebrews for possession of Palestine.

**Zephaniah is warning:** the Cherethites, the Canaanites and the Philistines that unless they turn from their wicked ways and seek the LORD and His righteousness the LORD is against them and the day of His burning anger will come upon their people, their cities and their land.

**The Seacoast will become the Possession of the House of Judah.**

- **Zephaniah 2:7:** The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall graze, and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the LORD their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes.

**Remnant of Judah:** refers to the Jews who returned from Israel's seventy years in Babylonian captivity. When Cyrus king of Persia conquered the Empire of Babylon and gave the Jews written permission to return to their beloved city Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of God. Multitudes of scattered Jewish families returned to the land of Israel and repossessed much of the land along the seacoast. After the Temple was rebuilt and the Jewish faith was again established a golden age of peace followed for Israel

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**ZEPHANIAH 2:8-9**

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**Moab will become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah.**

- **Zephaniah 2:8-9:** "I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites, how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them."

**Moab:** the child that the eldest daughter had to her father Lot was called Moab; he is the father of the Moabites their land was on the East Side of the River Jordan. The Moabites did not meet Israel with bread and water when they came out of Egypt and Moab hired Balaam against Israel to curse them.

**Ammon/Ammonites:** the child that the younger daughter had to her father Lot was called Ben-ammi he is the father of the Ammonites. Even though they were related to Israel they refused to give Israel bread and water when they came out of Egypt. They joined with the Moabites in securing Balaam to curse Israel and they opposed the work of Nehemiah in restoring the walls of Jerusalem. They were fierce in nature, rebellious against Israel, idolatrous in their religious practices and they threatened to thrust out the right eye of all in Jabesh Gilead. They were given to brutish murder and their chief idol was Molech to whom they were guilty of offering human sacrifices. For further information concerning Molech see the title: "Molech" in, Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

**Sodom and Gomorrah:** became symbols of wickedness and of God's judgment. Following is a list of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah proclaimed their sin and did not hide it meaning they boasted of it and spoke of it as being alright (they had no guilt or shame). They committed adultery spoke lies; joined with wrongdoers and did not turn away from any evil. They were full of pride and even though they had an excess of food, were prosperous and living in ease they did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty (meaning arrogant, conceited and full of self-importance) and indulged adultery, rape and sexual immorality. They pursued unnatural desire (i.e., sex with family members, paedophilia, sex with animals (Lev. 20:15-16) heterosexual men and women having sex with each other, male and female prostitution and orgies etc.). (Gen. 13:13). (Isaiah 3:9). (Jer. 23:14). (Ezek. 16:49-50). (Jude 1:7). The expression, "unnatural desire" is often used to condemn to hell those who are born with a natural desire toward the same sex, should anyone like to view a more compassionate understanding see the title: Same Sex Relationships (ON WEBSITE MENU).

**The LORD will famish all the gods of the Earth**

- **Zephaniah 2:10-11:** This shall be their (Moab and the Ammonites) (v8) lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts.  
<sup>11</sup>The LORD will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations.

**The LORD will famish all the gods of the earth:** means there will be no-one to worship them.

**Zephaniah's focus in chapter one:** is Jerusalem and Judah while his focus in chapter two is the surrounding nations of the Middle East, so when he says, all the gods of the earth he has in mind all the gods of the Middle East, of course there are far reaching ramifications of Zephaniah's words for the entire world, but we will discover the awesome wonder of his message for all the people of the earth when we reach chapter three. Until then the focus is on the local fulfilment of the prophet Zephaniah and his warnings regarding Israel, Jerusalem and the surrounding nations. Both Israel and Judah at this time have rebelled against the LORD and are worshipping idols and pagan gods of the surrounding nations. This is why Zephaniah in chapter one is prophetically warning the people of Jerusalem and Judah of God's impending judgment. Sadly they did not heed the message of the prophet and were taken into captivity to Babylon for seventy years, but while there God like a master potter moulded them into one united nation with only one God, the LORD their God.

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**ZEPHANIAH 2:12-15**

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**The LORD will make the Exultant City of Nineveh a Desolation.**

- **Zephaniah 2:12-15:** You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword.<sup>13</sup>And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert. <sup>14</sup>Herds shall lie down in her midst, all kinds of beasts; even the owl and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; a voice shall hoot in the window; devastation will be on the threshold; for her cedar work will be laid bare. <sup>15</sup>This is the exultant city (Nineveh) that lived securely, that said in her heart, "I am, and there is no one else." What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

**Cush:** (Cushites) are the descendants of Cush the oldest son of Ham, (one of the sons of Noah). The descendants of Cush (the Cushites) were mostly located in Arabia probably SE of Babylon. Nimrod is said to be a descendant of Cush.

**Assyria:** the people of Nineveh were Assyrians (Iraq) they were a great international power and are depicted as lions and a very cruel race. In the British Museum there are huge statues of lions always depicted with wings (symbolizing aggression). The land of Assyria is along the upper Tigris River in Iraq.

**Nineveh:** was one of the most ancient cities of the world, founded by Nimrod the great-grandson of Noah. It was the capital city of the Assyrian empire (North Iraq) and was a great international power and administrative centre.

**Zephaniah speaks in the past tense:** Zephaniah was the last prophet before Judah's seventy year captivity to Babylon, so these events have not yet taken place, yet Amos speaks using the past tense as though what is saying has already happened, (i.e., Amos says, "What a desolation Nineveh has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.") (v15), even though these events are still to be fulfilled in the future, Amos speaks as though they have happened.

**Bible prophecy and past and present tense:** often a prophecy is spoken in the present tense as though the event has already happened when in actual reality the fulfilment of it may still be many years away. This is because the prophet is seeing the vision in the present moment and speaks it as he sees it in present time. The people the prophet is speaking to know when the prophecy is a future event, but sometimes it can be difficult for those reading it thousands of years later to realise, because of the tense it is written in. When a prophet speaks, he is often speaking as the voice of God, therefore the words he speaks are guaranteed to come to pass. This is another reason the prophet can speak the words of God in the present moment because they are certain to happen at the right time in the future. Another reason many future prophecies are spoken in the present tense, is because the prophet is speaking the words of God or the vision as they come to him in his time. The prophet himself may not always be aware of the echoes contained in his prophecy or that the words he is speaking, actually have contained within them the ability to transcend time and travel thousands of years through history to a future age or a future person.

The following verses are a good example of this principal:

- For a nation (Babylon) has come up against my land (Judah), powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. <sup>7</sup>It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. (Joel 1:6-7).

This event has not taken place, yet Joel speaks it in the past tense as though it has already happened. This is simply because Joel is speaking what he is seeing happening in his vision. God is giving Joel a complete picture in his mind of what is about to take place. Joel in a sense is watching a movie being played out in his mind and is simply speaking it out as the events take place, thus the reason Joel speaks in the past tense, in his mind the events have already taken place, but in real life they are still to be played out in the future.

**A second key to understanding prophecy:** is to know that the verses are not always written in chronological order. It is almost as though the prophet is so inspired that he immediately speaks the words as they come to him. They are then recorded in the order that the prophet spoke them, but that does not always mean they are in the actual chronological order that they will unfold throughout history. Sometimes the latter verses of a chapter may actually be the first events to take place in God's foreordained plan of events. In the book of Revelation this principle applies not only to some of the individual verses of the chapters but also too many of the chapters themselves.

**The pride of a nation:** Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria a most powerful nation in the region, they believed that they were the top nation, exalted above all others and so secure, nothing could bring them down, but no matter how strong and secure a nation may look, nothing can protect it from the judgment of the LORD, except turning in repentance toward God forsaking violence, injustice and oppression of the poor amongst all nations (especially to make greater profits), and oppression of employers for one's own selfish gain.

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## THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL'S CAPTIVITY IN BABYLONIAN

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Israel set their hearts diamond hard against the word of God's prophets they rebelled against the LORD they turned to other gods and entered into gross sin so the LORD used Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon (who He called His servant (Jer. 25:9) to bring the curses of the covenant upon them. The fierce armies of Babylon invaded the land of Judah, laid their farm land waste, attacked Jerusalem and pillaged the temple and took the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) into captivity later Babylon conquered Assyria who had previously taken Israel (the ten tribes

in the land of Samaria) captive. Israel and Judah were under Babylonian rule for seventy years. They went into captivity to Babylon as two rebellious nations who had turned from God to idols and who were even sacrificing their own children to pagan gods. Archaeologists have found that all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed at this time, thus ended the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon. Observers would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated, and indeed, the other nations conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians did cease to exist. But the prophets proclaimed a better hope for the chosen people. "A remnant shall return" Isaiah had said, and in time this remnant, purged and returned, became the basis on which a new Israel would be built.

**Now here is the good news:** while in captivity God moulded them like a master potter moulds a beautiful clay jar, Israel and Judah went into Babylon as two unfaithful nations that had turned away from the LORD to idols and other gods. Seventy years later, Cyrus (King of Persia) who the LORD called His anointed shepherd and took by His right hand to conquer the Empire of Babylon (Isaiah 44:28) (Isaiah 45:1) gave written permission for Israel to return to Jerusalem. Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought Israel and Judah back to their beloved city Jerusalem as one united nation faithful to only one God, the LORD their God, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Israel never turned to idols or pagan gods again). Multitudes of Jewish families who had been scattered throughout the nations returned to Jerusalem and the land of Israel with triumphant joy and rejoicing. When the temple of God was completed their faith was once again established and a time of prosperity and peace followed. Sadly Israel as a nation never recognised their Messiah the Christ when he came, but even this was in the LORD'S sovereign will. The prophet Zechariah tells us when, the Lord returns in glory: -

- God will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn (Zech. 12:10-14).

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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