

# **Zephaniah**

## **Chapter 2**

### *Judgment on Judah's Enemies*

**Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, 2 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. 3 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. 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. 5 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. 6 And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks. 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. 8 “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. 9 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.” 10 This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts. 11 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. 12 You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword. 13 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. 14 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. 15 This is the exultant city 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.**

**2:1–3** The prophet’s exhortation to repent. This call to repentance and the later indictment of Jerusalem for refusal to repent frame the series of judgments that illustratively detail God’s acts in the coming day of the Lord (2:4–3:5). (CSB)

**2:1** *O shameless nation.* The Lord summons Judah to hear His call to repent. (TLSB)

**2:2** *like chaff.* A simile of the wretchedness of the wicked. Chaff is carried away by the lightest wind, and its removal brings about cleansing by extracting what is utterly useless. (CSB)

*burning anger* – Frightening picture of the fire (1:18) of God’s wrath streaming forth from His flared nostrils (cf 2 Sam 22:9). (TLSB)

**2:3** *Seek the LORD.* Even though destruction is imminent, there is still time to be sheltered from the calamity if only the nation will repent. (CSB)

*humble.* Those who abandon the arrogance of their idolatry and wickedness and humble themselves in repentance before God. (CSB)

*seek righteousness* – The only righteousness that counts before God is the Lord’s righteousness, His power to save (Php 3:9). All who humbly trust in Him will be spared on the Day of Judgment. (TLSB)

**2:4–3:8** God’s coming judgment on the nations—including Jerusalem (cf. Am 1–2). (CSB)

**2:4** *Gaza ... Ashkelon ... Ashdod ... Ekron.* These were Judah’s enemies. (TLSB)

The four Philistine city-states here mentioned are clearly representative of the entire country. (Kretzmann)

*at noon.* Ashdod will be destroyed in broad daylight. (TLSB)

Ashdod was the chief seat of the worship of Dagon. Since she would be helpless even at midday, so that there would be no need of resorting to a night attack. (Kretzmann)

*uprooted.* Like a weed, Ekron will be pulled up by its roots and left to die. (TLSB)

**2:5** *Cherethites!* Related to Crete; Philistine origins are partially linked with this island. (TLSB)

*Canaan.* Ancient name of the land along the eastern seashore of the Great Sea, stretching from Sidon in the north to Gaza in the south, and reaching inland as far as the Jordan Valley. Philistines lived in the southwest part of Canaan. (TLSB)

*I ... left.* The Lord’s announced purpose. (CSB)

The nation as such to be destroyed.

**2:6** The once-populous Philistine cities will revert to pastureland. (CSB)

Following the destruction of Judah’s enemies, a peaceful, pastoral scene emerges along the seacoast. (TLSB)

*folds for flocks* – Stone-walled enclosures for sheep and goats. (TLSB)

**2:7** The faithful remnant of Judah will occupy this land and graze their flocks on it. (CSB)

OT prophets often referred to the remnant of the house of Judah, which would again possess the land following the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. (TLSB)

*be mindful.* The Lord will remember His people with a friendly intent. (TLSB)

*restore their fortunes.* Here and in vv. 9, 11 the prophet anticipates the ultimate outcome of the day of the Lord, which he spells out more fully in 3:9–20. (CSB)

God’s people will again enjoy good times. (TLSB)

**2:8** *taunts.* Insults and reproaches. (TLSB)

*Moab ... Ammonites.* For the hostility of Ammon and Moab toward Israel see Am 1:13–15; 2:1–3. They had often threatened to occupy Israelite territory (see Jdg 11:12–13; Eze 25:3–6). (CSB)

These two nations east of Jordan and of the Dead Sea, were related to the children of Israel, but later became the enemies of God's people and made known their hostility in bitter blasphemies in proud mockery and scorn. They acted violently against the boundary of the Lord's people, constantly attempting to get into possession of some of Israel's territory. (Kretzmann)

*revilings.* Insults hurled at another person. (TLSB)

*Ammonites.* Inhabitants of Ammon, a country north of Moab, east of the Jordan River. (TLSB)

**2:9** *therefore as I live* – This is an oath as certain as the eternal existence of the Lord, who swears it. (TLSB)

*Sodom ... Gomorrah.* See Ge 19. They were used in the OT to typify complete destruction at the hands of God (see Dt 29:23; Isa 13:19; Jer 49:18), and their mention added ominous overtones to the prophet's description of the day of the Lord. (CSB)

*nettles.* A symbol of depopulation (see Isa 7:23–25). (CSB)

Moab and Ammon would be completely destroyed, as were Sodom and Gomorrah. (TLSB)

*remnant ... will inherit their land.* God foretells the time when His people would turn the tables on their enemies. (TLSB)

**2:10** *in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking.* In reprisal, the faithful remnant will occupy Ammonite and Moabite territory. (CSB)

The downfall of the Moabites and Ammonites. (TLSB)

**2:11** *famish all the gods.* The gods were thought to eat the sacrifices of their worshipers, so when their worshipers are swept away in judgment, the gods will starve. Wycl: "Who may see a greater abomination than to see the people to be led away from God, and they be taught to worship for God that thing that is not God nor Saviour of the world?" (TT 275). (TLSB)

*bow down.* All people will fall down to worship the Lord (Php 2:10–11). (TLSB)

**2:12** *You also.* Without elaboration, the prophet simply announces God's purpose against Egypt. (CSB)

*Cushites.* Egypt was ruled from 715 to 663 B.C. by a Cushite dynasty. (CSB)

Cush was the ancient name of the territory south of Egypt, later referred to as Ethiopia. (TLSB)

*my sword.* Probably Babylon. (CSB)

**2:13** *north.* Although Nineveh was east of Judah, Assyrian armies normally invaded Canaan from the north, having first marched west along the Euphrates. (CSB)

Turning from Ethiopia in the south, the prophet now directs his attention to the north. (TLSB)

*Assyria*. Located far to the north and east of Judah between the Upper Tigris and Euphrates rivers. (TLSB)

*Nineveh*. See the books of Jonah and Nahum. Since Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., Zephaniah's ministry had to be before that date. (CSB)

Capital of the Assyrian Empire, on the Tigris River. (TLSB)

*like the desert*. Even the site of Nineveh was later forgotten—until discovered through modern excavations. (CSB)

The Hebrew for “desolate” implies that people will be astonished at the devastation. Over 150 years earlier, Nineveh's destruction had been averted (cf Jnh 3), but this time it would not be spared. (TLSB)

**2:14** *shall lie down* – Proud Nineveh will become a lair for wild animals. (TLSB)

*owl and the hedgehog*. Neither creature is normally a city dweller, which underscores that Nineveh will be abandoned to nature. (TLSB)

**2:15** *exultant city*. Nineveh once rejoiced in its power and greatness. Now its beautiful architecture will be exposed to the elements. (TLSB)

*lived securely*. Nineveh's citizens believed their city was so secure it could never be conquered. (TLSB)

*I am ... none besides me*. See Isa 47:10. Assyria's boast belongs properly to God alone (see Isa 45:5–6, 18, 21). (CSB)

*has become*. Anticipating Nineveh's impending destruction. (CSB)

*hisses*. People would show contempt for the site of Nineveh with shrill whistles as they passed by. The city that once prided itself on its own importance will become as object of scorn. (TLSB)

**Ch 2** Zephaniah urges the people of Judah to seek the Lord, then describes the devastation that will fall on neighboring nations because of their sins. We, too, are guilty of arrogance, pride, and boasting. The Lord calls us to humble repentance and, through trust in Jesus as our Savior, He promises to shield us from His anger. • Lord, may I never boast except in the cross of Jesus, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)