

# CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we have,

**I.** An earnest exhortation to the nation of the Jews to repent and make their peace with God, and so to prevent the judgments threatened before it was too late (v. 1-3), and this inferred from the revelation of God's wrath against them in the foregoing chapter.

**II.** A denunciation of the judgments of God against several of the neighbouring nations that had assisted, or rejoiced in, the calamity of Israel.

**1.** The Philistines (v. 4-7).


**2.** The Moabites and Ammonites (v. 8-11).

**3.** The Ethiopians and Assyrians (v. 12-15). All these shall drink of the same cup of trembling that is put into the hands of God's people, as was also foretold by other prophets before and after.

## ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3

### THE PEOPLE EXHORTED TO REPENT

Here we see what the prophet meant in that terrible description of the approaching judgments which we had in the foregoing chapter. From first to last his design was, not to drive the people to despair, but to drive them to God and to their duty — not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins. In pursuance of that he here calls them to repentance, national repentance, as the only way to prevent national ruin. Observe,

**I.** The summons given them to a national assembly (v. 1): *Gather yourselves together*. He had told them, in the last words of the foregoing chapter, that God would make a *speedy riddance of all that dwelt in the land*, upon which, one would think, it should follow, “Disperse yourselves, and flee for shelter where you can find a place.” When the decree had absolutely gone forth for the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that was the advice given ( Matthew 24:16), *Then let those*

who are in Judea flee into the mountains; but here it is otherwise. God warns, that he may not wound, threatens, that he may not strike, and therefore calls to the people to use means for the turning away of his wrath. The summons is given to a *nation not desired*. The word signifies either,

**1.** *Not desiring*, that has not any desires towards God or the remembrance of his name, is not desirous of his favour or grace, but very indifferent to it, has no mind to repent and reform. “Yet *come together*, and see if you can stir up desires in one another.” Thus God is often *found of those that sought him not*, nor *asked for him*, <sup>(צחב)</sup> Isaiah 65:1. Or,

**2.** *Not desirable*, no ways lovely, nor having any thing in them amiable, or which might recommend them to God. The land of Israel had been a *pleasant land, a land of delight* (<sup>(צחב)</sup> Daniel 11:41); but now it is unlovely, it is a *nation not desired*, to which God might justly say, *Depart from me*; but he says, “*Gather together to me*, and let us see if any expedient can be found out for the preventing of the ruin. *Gather together*, that you may in a body humble yourselves before God, may fast, and pray, and seek his face. *Gather together*, to consult among yourselves what is to be done in this critical juncture, that every one may consider of it, may give and take advice, and speak his mind, and that what is done may be done by consent and so may be a national act.” Some read it, “*Enquire into yourselves*, yea, *enquire into yourselves*; examine your consciences; look into your hearts; search and try your ways; *enquire into yourselves*, that you may find out the sin by which God has been provoked to this displeasure against you, and may find out the way of returning to him.” Note, When God is contending with us it concerns us to enquire into ourselves.

**II.** Arguments urged to press them to the utmost seriousness and expedition herein (v. 2): “Do it in earnest; do it with all speed before it is too late, *before the decree bring forth, before the day pass*.” The manner of speaking here is very lively and awakening, designed to make them apprehensive, as all sinners are concerned to be,

**1.** That their danger is very great, that their all lies at stake, that it is a matter of life and death, which therefore well requires and well deserves the closest application of mind that can be. It is not a trifle, and therefore is not a thing to be trifled about. It is the *fierce anger of the Lord* that is kindled against them, and is just ready to kindle upon them, that *devouring*

fire which none can *dwell with*, which none can make head against or hold up their head under. “It is the *day of the Lord's anger*, the day set for the pouring out of the full vials of it, that you are threatened with, that *great day of the Lord*” spoken of, <sup>314</sup>Zephaniah 1:14. “Are you not concerned to prepare for that day?”

2. That it is very imminent: “Bestir yourselves now quickly, *before the decree bring forth*, and then it will be too late, the opportunity will be lost and never retrieved. The decree is as it were big with child, and it will *bring forth the day*, the terrible day, which shall *pass as chaff*, which shall hurry you away into captivity as chaff before the wind.” *We know not what a day may bring forth* (<sup>315</sup>Proverbs 27:1), but we do know what the decree will bring forth against impenitent sinners, whom therefore it highly concerns to repent in time, in *the accepted time*. Note, It is the wisdom of those whom God has a controversy with to agree with him quickly, while they are in the way, before his fierce anger comes upon them, not to be turned away. In a case of this nature delays are highly dangerous and may be fatal; they will be so if by them the heart is hardened. How solicitous should we all be to make our peace with God before the Spirit withdraw from us, or cease to strive with us, before the day of grace be over or the day of life, before our everlasting state shall be determined on the other side of the great gulf fixed!

III. Directions prescribed for the doing of this effectually. It is not enough to gather together in a consternation, but they must seriously and calmly apply to the duty of the day (v. 3): *Seek you the Lord*. That they might find mercy with God, they are here put upon seeking; for so is the rule — *Seek, and you shall find*. A general call was given to the whole nation to *gather together*, but little good is to be expected from the far greater part of them; if the land be saved, it must be by the interest and intercession of the pious few, and therefore to them the exhortation here is particularly directed. And observe,

1. How they are described — they are *the meek of the earth*, or of *the land*. It is the distinguishing character of the people of God that they are the *meek ones of the earth*; this is their badge; it is their livery. They are modest, and humble, and low in their own eyes; they are mild, and gentle, and yielding to others, not soon angry, not very angry, not long angry; they are the *quiet in the land*, <sup>316</sup>Psalms 35:20. And they are subject and submissive to their God, to all his precepts and all his providences.

Actuated by this principle and disposition, they have *wrought his judgments*, that is, have obeyed his laws, observed his institutions, have made conscience of their duty to him, and have laid out themselves for the advancement of his honour and interest in the world.

2. What they are required to do; they must *seek*, which denotes both a careful enquiry and a constant endeavour, that they may know and do their duty.

(1.) They must *seek the Lord*, seek his favour and grace, address him upon all occasions, ask of him what they need, seek him early, seek him diligently, and continue seeking him.

(2.) They must *seek righteousness*. “Seek to God for the performance of his promises to you, and see to it that you abound yet more in duty to him; seek for the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to you, for the graces of God’s Spirit to be implanted in you; hunger and thirst after them.”

(3.) They must *seek meekness*. This is a grace they were so eminent for that they were denominated *the meek of the land*, and yet this they must *seek*. Note, Those that are ever so good must still strive to be better, those that have ever so much grace must be still praying and labouring for more. Nay, those that excel in any particular grace must still seek to excel yet more in that, because in that most assaults will be made upon them by their enemies, in that most is expected from them by their friends, and in that they are most apt to be themselves secure. *Si dixisti, Sufficit, periisti* — *Say but, I am all that I ought to be, and you are undone*. In the difficult trying times approaching, the meek will find exercise for all the meekness they have, and all little enough, and therefore should seek it earnestly, and pray that when God in his providence gives them occasion for it he would by his grace enable them to exercise it, *to show all meekness to all men*, in all instances, that, *as the day is, so may the strength be*.

IV. Encouragements given to take these directions: *It may be, you shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger*.

1. “You particularly that are the *meek of the earth*. Though the day of the Lord’s anger do come upon the land, yet you shall be safe, you shall be taken under special protection. *Verily it shall be well with thy remnant*, <sup>2451</sup>Jeremiah 15:11. *Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey*, <sup>2455</sup>Jeremiah 45:5. *I will deliver thee in that day*, <sup>2497</sup>Jeremiah 39:17. *It may be, you*

*shall be hid*; if any be hid, you shall.” Good men cannot be sure of temporal preservation, for *all things come alike to all*, but they are most likely to be hid, and stand fairest for a distinguishing care of Providence. It is expressed thus doubtfully to try if they will trust the goodness of God's nature, though they have but the *it may be* of a promise, and to keep up in them a holy fear and watchfulness lest they should seem to come short, and should do any thing to throw themselves out of the divine protection. Note, those that hold fast their integrity, in times of common iniquity, have reason to hope that God will find out a hiding-place for them, where they shall be safe and easy, in times of common calamity. They shall be hid (as Luther says) *aut in coelo, aut sub coelo* — *either in heaven or under heaven*, either in the possession of heaven or under the protection of heaven. Or,

2. “You of this nation, though it be a *nation not desired*, yet, in the day of the Lord's anger with the neighbouring nations, when his judgments are abroad, *you shall be hid*; your land shall be preserved for the sake of those few meek ones that stand in the gap to *turn away the wrath of God*.” It concerns us all to make it sure to ourselves that we shall be hid in the great day of God's wrath; and, if we hide ourselves in the chambers of duty, God will hide us in chambers of safety, <sup><2350></sup>Isaiah 26:20. If we prepare an ark, that shall be our hiding-place, <sup><000></sup>Genesis 7:1.

## <sup><3114></sup>ZEPHANIAH 2:4-7

### THE PUNISHMENT OF THE PHILISTINES

The prophet here comes to foretel what share the neighbouring nations should have in the destruction made upon those parts of the world by Nebuchadnezzar and his victorious Chaldees, as others of the prophets did at that time, which is designed,

1. To awaken the people of the Jews, by making them sensible how strong, how deep, how large, the inundation of calamities should be, that the *day of the Lord*, which was near, might appear the more dreadful, and they might thereby be quickened to prepare for it as for a general deluge.

2. To comfort them with this thought, that their case, though sad, should not be singular (*Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris* — *The wretched*

*find it consolatory to have companions of their woe*), and much more with this, that though God had seemed to be their enemy, and to fight against them, yet he was still so far their friend, and an enemy to their enemies, that he resented, and would revenge, the indignities done them.

In these verses we have the doom of the Philistines, who were near neighbours, and old enemies, to the people of Israel. Five lordships there were in that country; only four are here named — *Gaza* and *Ashkelon*, *Ashdod* and *Ekron*; Gath, the fifth, is not named, some think because it was now subject to Judah. They were the *inhabitants of the sea-coasts* (v. 5), for their country lay upon the Great Sea. The *nation of the Cherethites* is here joined with them, which bordered upon them (<sup><0814></sup>1 Samuel 30:14) and fell with them, as is foretold also, <sup><3256></sup>Ezekiel 25:16. The Philistines' land is here called Canaan, for it belonged to that country which God gave to his people Israel, and was inserted in the grant made to them, <sup><0813></sup>Joshua 13:3. This land is yet to be possessed (*five lords of the Philistines*), so that they wrongfully kept Israel out of the possession of it (<sup><0803></sup>Judges 3:3), which is now remembered against them. For, though the rights of others may be long detained unjustly, the righteous God will at length avenge the wrong.

**I.** It is here foretold that the Philistines, the usurpers, shall be dispossessed and quite extirpated. In general, here is a woe to them (v. 5), which, coming from God, denotes all misery: *The word of the Lord is against them* — the word of the former prophets, which, though not yet accomplished, will be in its season, <sup><2445></sup>Isaiah 14:31. This word, now by this prophet, is against them. Note, Those are really in a woeful condition that have the word of the Lord against them, for no word of his shall fall to the ground. Those that rebel against the precepts of God's word shall have the *threatenings* of the word against them. The effect will be no less than their destruction,

**1.** God himself will be the author of it: *“I will even destroy thee, who can make good what I say and will.”*

**2.** It shall be a universal destruction; it shall extend itself to all parts of the land, both city and country: *Gaza shall be forsaken*, though now a populous city. It was foretold (<sup><2476></sup>Jeremiah 47:6) that *baldness* should come upon Gaza; Alexander the Great razed that city, and we find (<sup><4885></sup>Acts 8:26) that Gaza was a desert. *Ashkelon shall be a desolation*, a

pattern of desolation. *Ashdod shall be driven out at noon-day*; in the extremity of the scorching heat they shall have no shade, no shelter to protect them; but then, when most incommoded by the weather, they shall be forced away into captivity, which will be an aggravating circumstance of it. *Ekron* likewise shall be *rooted up*, that had been long taking root. The land of the Philistines shall be dispeopled; there *shall be no inhabitant*, v. 5. God made the earth *to be inhabited* (<sup><23></sup>Isaiah 45:18), otherwise he would have made it in vain; but, if men do not answer the end of their creation in serving God, it is just with God that the earth should not answer the end of its creation in serving them for a habitation; man's sin has sometimes subjected it to this vanity.

**3.** It shall be an utter destruction. The sea-coast, which used to be a harbour for ships and a habitation for merchants, shall now be deserted, and be only *cottages for shepherds* and *folds for flocks* (v. 6), and then perhaps put to better use than when it was possessed by the lords of the Philistines.

**II.** It is here foretold that the house of Judah, the rightful owners, shall recover the possession of it, v. 7. The remnant of those that shall *return out of captivity*, when God visits them, shall be made to *lie down* in safety *in the houses of Ashkelon*, to lie down *in the evening*, when they are weary and sleepy. There *they shall feed* themselves and their flocks. Note, God will at length restore his people to their rights, though they may be long kept out from them.

## <30> ZEPHANIAH 2:8-11

### THE PUNISHMENT OF VARIOUS NATIONS

The Moabites and Ammonites were both of the posterity of Lot; their countries joined, and, both adjoining to Israel, they are here put together in the prophecy against them.

**I.** They are both charged with the same crime, and that was reproaching and reviling the people of God and triumphing in their calamities (v. 8): *They have reproached my people*; while God's people kept close to their duty it is probable that they reproached them for the singularities of their religion; and now that they had revolted from God, and fallen under his

displeasure, they reproached them for that too. It has been the common lot of God's people in all ages to be reproached and reviled upon one account or other. Thus the old serpent spits his venom; and pride is at the bottom of it; it is in their pride that they have *magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts*, thinking themselves as good as they, as great, and every way as happy. It is the *contempt of the proud* that God's people are filled with, <sup><BCTH></sup>Psalm 123:4. They have *spoken big* (so some read it, *magna locuti sunt* — *they have spoken great things*) *against their border* (v. 8), against those of them that bordered upon their country, whom upon all occasions they insulted, or against the property they claimed, which they disputed, or the protection they boasted of, which they ridiculed; they *spoke big against the people of the Lord of hosts* as a deserted abandoned people. *Great swelling words of vanity* are the genuine language of the church's enemies. “But *I have heard them*” (says God), “and will let you know that I have heard them. I have heard, and I will reckon for them,” <sup><BHS></sup>Jude 1:15. And, if God hears the reproaches and revilings we are under, it is a good reason why we should be as a *deaf man that hears not*, <sup><BHS></sup>Psalm 38:14, 15. Nay, God not only takes notice of, but interests himself in the reproaches cast on his people, because they are his; and it is certain that those who look with disdain upon the people of the Lord of hosts thereby dishonour the Lord of hosts himself. See this very thing charged on Moab and Ammon, <sup><BHS></sup>Ezekiel 25:3, 8.

**II.** They are both laid under the same doom. Associates in iniquity may expect to be such in desolation. See with what solemnity sentence is pronounced upon them, v. 9. It is *the Lord of hosts*, the sovereign Lord of all, who has authority to pass this sentence and ability to execute it; it is *the God of Israel*, who is jealous for their honour; it is he that has said it, nay, he has sworn it, *As I live, saith the Lord*. The sentence is,

**1.** That the Moabites and Ammonites shall be quite destroyed; they *shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah*, the marks of whose ruins in the Dead Sea lay near adjoining to the countries of Moab and Ammon; they shall, though not by the same means (even fire from heaven), Yet almost in the same manner, be laid waste; not again to be inhabited, or not of a long time. The country shall produce nothing but *nettles*, instead of corn; and there shall be *brine-pits*, instead of the pleasant fountains of water with which the country had abounded.



2. That Israel shall be too hard for them, shall *spoil them* of their goods and *possess* their country by lawful war. Note, Proud men sometimes, by the just judgment of God, fall under the mortification of being trampled upon themselves by those whom once they haughtily trampled upon. And *this shall they have for their pride.*

**III.** Other nations shall in like manner be humbled, that the Lord alone may be exalted (v. 11): *The Lord will be terrible* unto the Moabites and Ammonites in particular, who have made themselves a terror to his Israel. For,

1. Heathen gods must be abolished. They have long had possession, and their worshippers have both glorified them and gloried in them. But *the Lord will famish all the gods of the earth*, will starve them out of their strong-holds. The Pagans had a fond conceit that their idols were regaled by their offerings, and did *eat the fat of their sacrifices*, <sup><628></sup>Deuteronomy 32:38. *Omnia comesta ... Belo — Bel has eaten all.* But it is here promised that when the Christian religion is set up in the world men shall be turned from the service of these dumb idols, shall forsake their altars, and bring no more sacrifices to them, and thus they shall be famished, or *made lean* (as the word is), their priests shall. This intimates the vanity of those idols; it lies in the power of their worshippers to famish them; whereas the true God says, *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee.* It intimates also the victory of the God of Israel over them. *Now know we that he is greater than all gods.*

2. Heathen nations must be converted; when the gospel gets ground, by it men shall be brought to worship him who lives for ever (for that is the command of the everlasting gospel, <sup><648></sup>Revelation 14:7), *every one from his place*; they shall not need to go up to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel, but wherever they are, they may have access to him. *I will that men pray every where.* God shall be worshipped, not only by all the tribes of Israel and the strangers who join themselves to them, but by all *the isles of the heathen.* This is a promise which looks favourably upon our native country, for it is one of the most considerable of the isles of the Gentiles, by which God will be glorified.

## <312> ZEPHANIAH 2:12-15

### ETHIOPIA AND ASSYRIA THREATENED

The cup is *going round*, when Nebuchadnezzar is going on conquering and to conquer; and not only Israel's near neighbours, but those that lay more remote, must be reckoned with for the wrongs they have done to God's people; the Ethiopians and the Assyrians are here taken to task.

**1.** The Ethiopians, or Arabians, that had sometimes been a terror to Israel (as in Asa's time, <449> 2 Chronicles 14:9), must now be reckoned with: They *shall be slain by my sword*, v. 12. Nebuchadnezzar was God's sword, the instrument in his hand with which these and other enemies were subdued and punished, <374> Psalm 17:14.

**2.** The Assyrians, and Nineveh the head city of their monarchy, are next set to the bar, to receive their doom: *He* that is God's sword *will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria*, and make himself master of it. Assyria had been the rod of God's anger against Israel, and now Babylon is the rod of God's anger against Assyria, <205> Isaiah 10:5. He *will make Nineveh a desolation*, as was lately and largely foretold by the prophet Nahum. Observe,

**(1.)** How flourishing Nineveh's state had formerly been (v. 15): *This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly*. Nineveh was so strong that she feared no evil, and therefore dwelt carelessly and set danger at defiance; she was so rich that she thought herself sure of all good, and therefore was a rejoicing city, full of mirth and gaiety; and she had such a dominion that she admitted no rival, but said in her heart, "*I am, and there is none besides me* that can compare with me, no city in the world that can pretend to be equal with me." God can with his judgments frighten the most secure, humble the most haughty, and mar the mirth of those that most laugh now.

**(2.)** How complete Nineveh's ruin shall now be; it shall be made *a desolation*, v. 13. Such a heap of ruins shall this once pompous city be that it shall be,

**[1.]** A receptacle for beasts, such a wilderness that *flocks shall lie down in it*; nay, such a waste, desolate, frightful place, that wild beasts, shall take

up their abode there; the melancholy birds, as the *cormorant and bittern*, shall make their nests in what remains of the houses, as they sometimes do in old ruinous buildings that are uninhabited and unfrequented. The *lintels*, or chapiters of the pillars, the *windows and thresholds*, and all the fine *cedar-work* curiously engraven, shall lie exposed; and on them these rueful ominous birds shall perch, and their *voice shall sing*. How are the songs of mirth turned into hideous horrid noises! What little reason have men to be proud of stately buildings, and rich furniture, when they know not what all the pomp of them may come to at last!

[2.] A derision to travellers. Those that had come from far, to gratify their curiosity with the sight of Nineveh's splendour, shall now look on her with as much contempt as ever they looked upon her with admiration (v. 15): *Every one that passes by shall hiss at her, and wag his hand*, making light of her desolations, nay, and making sport with them — “There is an end of proud Nineveh.” They shall not weep, and wring their hands (the adversities of those are unpitied and unlamented who were insolent and haughty in their prosperity), but they shall *hiss and wag their hands*, forgetting that perhaps their own ruin is not far off.