

Zephaniah 2:12-15 – Encouragement to Repent – Part 2

Calvin, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Gill, Geneva, Clarke, Handfuls, JFB, Poole, Trapp, Delitzsch, Henry, Poole, Gaebelin, Clarke, INT Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **Judah was being called to repent** by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zephaniah so that God wouldn't have to send them into Babylonian captivity (被掳) – where the Babylonians would be God's whip against his own covenant people.

As an **incentive (激励) to repent (悔改)**, God gave the Jews many promises. Last week you saw how God promised the Jews **prosperity (丰盛)**, **protection**, and the guarantee that they would **propagate (遍布传播, 繁衍)** throughout the world. But for the kingdom to **propagate near and far, God would have to destroy and remove those enemies that were near and far**. This is what you will see today.

Our headings are:

The Destruction of the distant Gentiles (外邦人) would allow propagation farther

The Desolation (荒凉) of the distant Gentiles would allow propagation farther

The Disgrace (耻辱) of the distant Gentiles would allow propagation farther

Our goals: **That knowing the church will be successful, will spread, and will inherit the earth, the church must stop obsessing about worldly things and work for the kingdom instead.**

The Destruction of the distant Gentiles would allow propagation farther

12 "You Ethiopians also, You shall be slain by My sword." 13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north, Destroy Assyria, 14. God would bring ultimate destruction of the Ethiopians with the power of the sword.

1. In order to reward Judah for their repentance and turning from idolatry (偶像崇拜) and allow them to propagate throughout the world, God promised that he would destroy the Ethiopians (埃塞尔比亚人) .

Who were these Ethiopians? These were not the same Ethiopians of today that are far south of Israel. These were nearer to Arabia and were sometimes called Arabians. But they were quite dark skinned peoples. "Ethiopian" is often translated "black faced." But God's judgment was not a racial (种族的) thing. God destroys black, white, yellow, or brown who threatens his church. And the Ethiopians were next in line. Look at how God viewed the Ethiopians long before Zephaniah.

Amos 9:7 **"Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me,** O children of Israel?" says the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, The Philistines from Caphtor, And the Syrians from Kir? 8 "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on **the sinful kingdom,** And I will destroy it from the face of the earth...

2. God's unstoppable personal sword would bring ultimate destruction on Ethiopia.

Ezekiel 30:9 On that day messengers shall go forth from Me in ships To make the careless Ethiopians afraid, And **great anguish shall come upon them,** As on the day of Egypt; For indeed it is coming!" Ethiopia's destruction would be a **violent overthrow.**

3. In order to reward Judah for their repentance and their turning from idolatry and allow them to propagate throughout the world, God would bring ultimate destruction on Assyria.

The Assyrians were the dominant (统治) power of the time. They were situated in modern day Iraq. They had not yet been conquered by the Babylonians, the "whip of God." (This meant there was still hope for Judah.) **People lived in deadly fear of the Assyrians.** The Assyrians had already taken the northern 10 ½ tribes of Israel into captivity and spread them over the earth. And they were setting their eyes on Judah, the 1 ½ remaining tribes of God's people.

4. God's unstoppable personal sword would bring ultimate destruction on Assyria.

This speaks of a **violent overthrow.** And Assyria deserved every bit of it. God said and he was willing and able to do it. So judgment was certain.

5. Lessons:

a. God will use physical violence when it suits his purposes. It is not your right to do so except to protect the unjust taking of human life or self-defense. But don't cringe (畏缩) when God uses violence. This is how God works.

b. God has all power over all nations. He raises one up and brings him down when it suits his purposes. God is not your grandfather to do what you like... He will not avoid something that might offend you. Henry: God will mar (毁坏) the mirth (欢笑) of those who laugh a lot now...

c. No nation is too great to be brought low. God doesn't believe in "too big to fail." When people heard of the Assyrian army, they shook in fear. They were the ones who bashed babies' skull on brick walls. They lined their streets with human skulls of people they killed. Some even had skulls of their victims in their houses. But God wasn't afraid of them. God brought them low.

The Desolation of the distant Gentiles would allow propagation farther

13...And make **Nineveh a desolation**, As dry as the **wilderness**. 14 The **herds shall lie down in her midst**, Every **beast of the nation**. Both the **pelican** (鹈鹕) and the **bittern** (鹭鸶) Shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; Their **voice shall sing in the windows**; **Desolation** shall be at the threshold; For **He will lay bare the cedar** (香柏木) work.

1. God would not only destroy these Gentiles, he would also make their land desolate so Judah could propagate.

When a nation is destroyed, it can usually be rebuilt. Hiroshima (广岛) and Nagasaki (长崎) have been rebuilt after the great destruction by the atomic bombs, but Ethiopia and Assyria would be eliminated for the spread of the Gospel.

2. And in order to emphasize the coming desolation of the land that he would destroy so his people could propagate, God used Nineveh, the most beloved city in the Assyrian Empire, to showcase (展示) his judgment.

Nineveh, Assyria's pride and joy, would be destroyed. Nahum prophesied in detail of Nineveh's destruction. Nineveh was a remarkable city with extremely high and thick walls, with houses built on them. It was green and situated on the Tigris River. It was a rich city with much activity. It was probably 100kms around the city with 1500 towers. Some walls were 10 stories high. Three chariots could go abreast on the walls. It was known for its celebrations. They loved their Epicurean (享乐主义的, 伊比鸠鲁的) delights. They felt safe from any enemy as they partied. Mosul (摩苏尔城) is likely the spot of Nineveh. The place that was known for being well-watered and having beautiful gardens would be desolate. This most remarkable city of the times would become desolate... **a passage way for the God's kingdom to spread.**

But remember that his was not a threat against Nineveh alone...God just used the greatest city to highlight his point. All nations that stood against his people's expansion would be destroyed as well.

3. Look at the details of the desolation.

a. Animals would live in the houses and on the streets of Nineveh. They would likely have been left behind.

b. Wild roaming beasts would live in Nineveh. There would be no more kings, nobles, traders, and tradesmen.

c. The pelican (or some kind of sea bird which got its name from vomiting, something pelicans do, and which likes to live alone) and the bittern (which was known for making a loud screeching sound to replace joyful singing) would live and make a mess on Nineveh's capitals and pillars.

d. Every door would be open and desolation would enter. There would be no one to go in or out of the homes.

e. All decorations from their magnificent buildings would be removed.

4. Lessons:

a. No man can say he deserves only a little punishment. Man deserves nothing short of total judgment. The payment for sin is death. This is what every church and nation deserves that refuses to worship and work for God.

b. God will honor his threat to bring judgment on any nation that stands in the way of his people expanding, just like the judgment God brought on Nineveh. Nineveh was destroyed by Cyaxares and Nabopolassar, 625 B.C. So don't worry about communism, totalitarianism (极权主义), Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or our own federal or provincial government and judges. Don't fear the homosexual's assault or the Toronto school board's assault on the church. **God will deal with them if we get our act together and repent of breaking God's law.** The church has every reason to get its house in order.

The Disgrace of the distant Gentiles would allow propagation farther

15 This is the rejoicing city That dwelt securely, That said in her heart, "**I am it**, and there is none besides me." How has she become a desolation, A place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her Shall hiss and shake his fist.

1. The destruction of Ethiopia and Assyria was bad, but when that was combined with the desolation of the nations (highlighted by Nineveh's desolation), then disgrace would become the Gentiles' companion.

2. But before we look at the disgrace, note one more reason for the disgrace God would put on the Gentiles?

The Gentiles would boast about their security and used that as the ground for **declaring their absolute independence from God**. They would argue for self-perpetuity (自存, 自有永有) . **They would use God's title (I Am) as theirs** and argue that they were the final authority on all matters. (Isn't it stunning that is exactly what Alberta's government wanted children in Christian schools to be taught – that the state was the ultimate authority, not God!) The nations would say:

Isaiah 47:8 "Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, Who dwell securely, Who say in your heart, '**I am, and there is no one else besides me**...' "

This was similar to what the King of Tyre said.

Ezekiel 28:12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "**You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.**

But hear God's response to those who claim his title:

Isaiah 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: '**I am** the First and I am the Last; **Besides Me there is no God.**

Isaiah 45:21...there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me.

3. What would the Gentiles' disgrace look like?

The Gentiles would be ashamed when they saw animals living in their homes where they should be. The Gentiles would be ashamed when passersby, who used to be afraid of them, hide from them and cry, would then threaten the remnant of the Ninevites, and they could do nothing about it.

Nahum 3:19 Your injury has no healing, Your wound is severe. All who hear news of you Will clap their hands over you, For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?

4. Lessons:

a. Wicked church leaders who have encouraged compromise (妥协) , or have given in to compromise, will one day be humbled (使降卑) and embarrassed by the Lord. Their churches will be empty. This is beginning to happen. Many of the churches that thought if they watered down their doctrines they would attract more people have ended up disappointed. They have lost more than they have gained. And even if more people went to some of those churches, they wouldn't last. The Lord will bring those churches low.

b. The wicked political leaders who have encouraged and financially supported wickedness will be shamed by God. One of our government ministers said Canada will continue to urge nations overseas to support abortions. That leader will be disgraced by God. This is also a warning to nations who think that they will last forever because of their wealth or their system of government. They will be disgraced as well. Wealth and power do not make a nation invincible (不可战胜的) . Repenting and staying close to Jesus will make a nation invincible.

c. And you know what the root is for this: Self-importance. Self-existence. Self-gratification满足. Self-promotion. This is idolatry. This is just like Canada today! We must fight this invasive 侵入性的self-love movement. It is not about what you want. It is about what God wants.

d. Knowing you don't want the church to be destroyed, deserted (被废弃) , and disgraced, you will speak the truth to her. You will fight against those who speak lies even in the pulpits (讲台) . You will speak to God for change – for repentance or destruction in the church.

Conclusion:

God promised his people would spread if they repented. And nothing could stop him from keeping his promise. God would destroy the Ethiopians and the Assyrian, leave their lands desolate, and disgrace them! What blessed freedom to be freed from their enemies.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Let us get our act together. Let us see our sins. Let us repent of our sins and call on our brothers to do so – because the church is in mortal (致命的) danger. Idolatry is killing us!

2. Let us be encouraged to repent knowing that God will remove our enemies if we do – enemies that are inside and outside the church – and make us to expand. He promised this.

3. Let us work to reproduce. We will do so by speaking of the beautiful work done for sinners on the cross that gives life to dead men and women. We will fill the world with those who love and worship Jesus.

Finally, you could be like Nineveh or like New Horizon. You could be bound for desolation of hell or for the delights of heaven. If you want to be a part of God's church and wait for heaven, ask God to save you because Jesus died for sinners like you. God will do it.