

The Prophets

Lesson #24

Zephaniah

Outline

I. ***Judgment In The Day Of The Lord (1:1-3:8)***

- A. The judgment on the whole earth (1:1-3).
- B. The judgment on the nation of Judah (1:4-2:3).
 1. Causes of the judgment (1:4-13).
 2. Description of the judgment (1:14-18).
 3. Call to repentance (2:1-3).
- C. The judgment on the nations surrounding Judah (2:4-15).
 1. Judgment against Gaza (2:4-7).
 2. Judgment against Moab and Ammon (2:8-11).
 3. Judgment against Ethiopia (2:12).
 4. Judgment against Assyria (2:13-15).
- D. The judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7).
 1. Jerusalem's wickedness (3:1-4).
 2. The Lord's justice (3:5-7).
- E. The judgment on the whole earth (3:8).

II. ***Salvation In The Day Of The Lord (3:9-20)***

- A. The promise of conversion (3:9-13).
- B. The promise of restoration (3:14-20).

Notes

Zephaniah 1:1-3:8

- The judgment on the whole earth (1:1-3).
 - The author gave us more information about his ancestry than any other prophet, tracing his pedigree back four generations. Perhaps this was because the good king Hezekiah was his great-great-grandfather.
 - Zephaniah announces a universal and all-consuming judgment. The judgment is portrayed as comparable to the great flood in its universal scope.
- The judgment on the nation of Judah (1:4-2:3).
 - Causes of the judgment (1:4-13).
 - Judah and Jerusalem are the objects of God's wrath, for they had known better. In stretching out His hand He consumes and cuts off. "Chemarims with the priests" reflects the traces of idolatrous worship that yet remained despite official action against the cult. God intended a judgment that would totally eliminate baalism. This was fulfilled in Judah by the Babylonian invasion.

- Because God is to be present, silence is commanded as in Habakkuk 2:20. "The day of the Lord" always refers to a day of judgment against the wicked.
- The royal leaders who bore chief responsibility were singled out for special notice. They should have led the people in righteousness instead of evil. Those of royal blood bore responsibility for the conditions in Jerusalem.
- The "merchant people" are not Canaanite or Phoenician merchants, but merchants of Judah who had become as Canaanites in the way they conducted their business (cf. Hosea 12:7).
- "Settled on their lees" is a metaphor from the treating of wine. In the stupidity of their hearts, the people of Judah ignored God and were indifferent to Him.
- Description of the judgment (1:14-18).
 - Once more Zephaniah stresses the nearness of the day of the Lord. It is hastening speedily towards its realization; it is nearer than the people realize.
 - It will be a bitter day, a day of such complete defeat that the strong men who have fought violently to defend their city and homeland will weep bitterly at their failure.
 - The dreadful character of the great day of the Lord is reflected in the words "trouble," "distress," "wasteness" and "desolation." The deep distress was "because they have sinned against the Lord." The judgment the people would experience would cause them to stagger and stumble like the blind (cf. Deuteronomy 28:29).
- Call to repentance (2:1-3).
 - Vs. 1 opens with the invitation to "gather yourselves together" in repentance and includes a derogatory note: "nation not desired."
 - This gathering together must take place before the judgment if it is to be averted. The reference to "chaff" indicates that the wicked nation would be scattered before the anger of the Lord, as chaff is scattered before the wind.
 - Repentance must be manifested in works: seeking the Lord and doing what He commands.
- The judgment on the nations surrounding Judah (2:4-15).
 - Judgment against Gaza (2:4-7).
 - The four cities -- Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron -- represented the entire area of Philistia. Gaza and Ashkelon are summarily dismissed in judgment by a typical Hebrew synonymous couplet. Ashdod and Ekron are to be uprooted and emptied at midday -- unusual since this hottest time is used for a siesta in the Orient. Judgment will fall on them when they least expect it.

- In its complete destruction Philistia is to share the lot of Canaan. The once heavily inhabited seacoast, where a strong nation of people dwelt, will become pasture land for shepherds.
- Judgment against Moab and Ammon (2:8-11).
 - The reproaches of Moab and the revilings of Ammon against God's people extend back to the time of Moses. Amos announced the judgment of God upon each of these nations because of their cruelty towards others (Amos 1:13-15; 2:1-3).
 - Zephaniah declares that though these two, Moab and Ammon, would be destroyed, His people would continue and would build on the ruin of these heathen nations.
 - In reproaching the people of God and in magnifying themselves above them, these descendants of Lot had reproached Israel's God and magnified themselves against Him.
- Judgment against Ethiopia (2:12).
 - Ethiopia was the most remote of the nations to the south known to the Jews. For years Egypt had been under the rule of Ethiopian kings; therefore, when the prophet foretold the downfall of Ethiopia his prophecy would include Egypt as well.
 - The spoil of these nations would be as wages from God to Nebuchadnezzar for the executing of His will against Tyre, who came under His wrath and judgment, and against these two great powers of the south (Ezekiel 29:17-20).
- Judgment against Assyria (2:13-15).
 - The prophecies against surrounding nations climax with Assyria, the strongest political factor and the most northerly nation of that time.
 - Instead of marching armies and a prosperous population, the prophet predicted that flocks of sheep and goats and all kinds of creatures would be found at Nineveh.
 - Nineveh's magnificent buildings, crumbled into debris, would become dwelling places for various creatures. Only doleful sounds would emerge from the doorways.
- The judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7).
 - Jerusalem's wickedness (3:1-4).
 - As God had pronounced woe upon the Philistines, so now He pronounces woe upon the city of His own people. Jerusalem is described as rebellious against the will of God and polluted as a result of rebellion.
 - Four charges are leveled against the rebellious city and four classes in Jerusalem to whom the people looked for guidance are introduced and exposed as unfit for the calling to which they had been appointed.

- The Lord's justice (3:5-7).
 - In the midst of a city filled with such wickedness and perversion of right, God can only act consistently with His own character and nature. He must do what is right (2 Timothy 2:13).
 - Although filled with rebellion and sin, His people had recognized no wickedness on their part nor felt any shame for what they had done.
 - As an object lesson, God reminded His people what He did to other nations. In view of these judgments, the Lord spoke imploringly to His people, declaring that judgment and punishment could have been averted and avoided.
- The judgment on the whole earth (3:8).
 - "Therefore" anticipates a promise to pour out deserved judgment on the wicked people. Instead, the punishment was veiled; they were admonished to "wait ye upon me."
 - The decision of God for judgment would not be for complete extermination, but it would be of a fiery and refining nature that out of it would come His prey or portion. God would make the judgment so fierce that only the purest of metal would survive; the dross would be consumed.

Zephaniah 3:9-20

- The promise of conversion (3:9-13).
 - The lips that had been profaned by the names and worship of idols would be purified so that they may call on the name of God in unison, speaking from purified hearts through cleansed lips (cf. Isaiah 6:5, 7; Jeremiah 1:9; Daniel 10:16).
 - "In that day," the day of the fulfilling of vss. 9-10, the people of the Lord would not be put to shame. That which had brought shame upon them will have been abolished, or will have given way to a nobler and purer condition.
 - Although poor and afflicted, this redeemed remnant would find power and glory in the purity of their character. This is a glorious picture and promise of hope, given in the wake of the dark picture of judgment and wrath.
- The promise of restoration (3:14-20).
 - As Zephaniah had introduced the character of the redeemed remnant under the Messiah in the previous section, he now describes their joy as he calls upon them to sing and rejoice in their salvation.
 - Zion, Israel and Jerusalem are again one, rejoicing in God. Although the Messiah is not specified, it is evident that God would be in their midst in the person of the Messiah.

- Slack or fallen hands are a symbol of despair; so now with God in their midst and with nothing to fear, let the fallen hands be lifted up (cf. Hebrews 12:12).
- Zephaniah closes with a renewal of the promise of God to gather what was driven away and make them a praise to Himself. The people had refused to listen to Him when He had called; therefore, He had scattered them. Now it would be He who would bring them back. They would rejoice and hope in this assurance.