

Judgment Day for the Nations

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- [0 : 0 0] I thought I'd start by talking about our own nation, Australia, as we think about judgement on the nations this morning. And I wanted to think about whether Australia is an arrogant or proud nation.
- I don't know what you think. I think in many respects we're not that arrogant. We're known as a fairly laid-back sort of people and that's not really the same as arrogant.
- I mean, maybe when it comes to sport we're arrogant, but I think we don't really like arrogance in Australia. So if you can cast your mind back a long time ago when Australia used to do well in the cricket, I guess we didn't like it so much then because we're not that arrogant in some respects.
- So we thought it might be good if we were beaten once in a while or had more stiff competition. I must admit it's a bit hard to take humbling, especially at the hands of the Poms in cricket.
- Are we a proud people as Australians? I think we're proud of our country. We're proud of our wealth and achievements. We pretty much have everything that we want in Australia.
- [1 : 1 1] We're safe, we're secure. There's endless opportunities for self-advancement and we take pride in ourselves and in our achievements. Is that a bad thing? Well, I guess we want to ask, what does God think of Australia?
- Does He think that we're proud and arrogant? I'm not sure. Will Australia just continue on through the 21st century as it always has?
- Will we continue to be safe and secure, a land of plenty, the lucky country? Maybe. I'm not sure. Last week we talked about the theme of God's judgment, which will continue today in the book of Zephaniah.
- And as we live safe and secure in the lucky country, it is hard to imagine that all of that would one day come to an end. This morning we're going to look at what God says about judgment on the nations and that will include our own nation, the nation of Australia.
- Let me recap just briefly on what we heard last week, or if you weren't here last week, here's a little brief summary of it. Zephaniah is very much a prophet of judgment.
- [2 : 2 3] And last week, chapter 1 was just unrelenting in the theme of judgment as we saw. And what Zephaniah said last week was that God would judge the whole world. He'd bring an end to creation.
- He would judge everything and everyone in this creation. And as part of that, God's people were not to be exempt from God's judgment. God said He would judge His people for their apathy and complacency, for ignoring God, for their idolatry by which they had an each-way bet, following God, but also following the ways of the world.
- God would judge them. And indeed, the Babylonians came not long after Zephaniah spoke and destroyed the temple and Jerusalem and Judah and took God's people into exile.

And that, Zephaniah was saying, was like a little foretaste of judgment of the great day of judgment, of universal judgment to come. And we were reminded last week that God's judgment is certain.

It will certainly come and it should focus our minds to live now in light of the coming judgment of God. But we're also reminded that Jesus' death on the cross means that the judgment that should fall on us come judgment day has already fallen on Jesus in our place so that we will be spared God's judgment when it comes.

[3 : 43] Well, that brings us to chapter 2 that we had read for us before. Some people have been saying to me from time to time during the week and maybe to Andrew too, all this stuff in Amos and Zephaniah is judgment.

All we're hearing about is judgment over and over. Can we have something positive please? Well, sorry, no. I can't promise you that. There is a little bit of positive stuff though in the chapter today so watch out for that.

Well, Zephaniah chapter 2 is broadly in two sections, uneven sections. Verses 1 to 3 are a call to seek God in repentance and verses 4 to 15 describes God's judgment on the nations.

So let's look at verses 1 to 3 first of all. Chapter 1 was really a description, statements from God about what would happen in the judgment. Verses 1 to 3 now are commands from God.

And verse 1, first of all, he commands his people to gather, gather together, gather, O shameless nation. And they're to gather together in repentance before it's too late.

[4 : 50] Before, verse 2, you are driven away like the drifting chaff. Before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the Lord. Before there comes upon you the day of the wrath of the Lord.

You see there the repetition again in Zephaniah. Three times in verse 2 repeats the word before. The day of the Lord is near, it's coming, the time is short. So gather together, he says, before it's too late.

Before there comes upon you the fierce anger of God, the day of the wrath of the Lord. We were reminded last week of the terrible ferocity of God's wrath at sin.

That sin really is that bad. That God really is angry with sin. And that one day he will indeed judge all people for sin. And Zephaniah is saying here, the time is short, that we need to gather together in repentance before that day comes.

And so the punchline for that is in verse 3 to seek God. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land who do his commands. Seek righteousness. Seek humility.

[6 : 01] Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath. There's that repetition there again. Three times the word seek there is repeated. And Zephaniah calls on them to seek ultimately God himself.

He says, seek the Lord. So not so much that to take specific actions to stop certain sins or to start acting a different way. I mean, that's included in repentance.

But much more important than that, to seek God himself. God is the one whose wrath will be poured out. And God alone is the one who can spare us from his wrath to come.

So that even though judgment comes from God, it is only God himself who can rescue us. And so there's nowhere else to turn except to God. So we're to seek the Lord.

It's interesting there, those who are called on to seek the Lord are called the humble of the land, the meek. And they are those who do his commands, who obey him. So he's saying for those who already trust in God, to keep trusting God, to keep seeking God.

[7 : 06] Those who trust in God won't be spared in some respects that judgment that will come at the hands of the Babylonians. They'll be included and caught up in that judgment.

So they're to seek God as well, the people of Judah, and to keep repenting, to seek righteousness, to keep doing what is right and to seek humility, to keep humbling themselves.

before God. And perhaps, Zephaniah says in verse 3, perhaps they'll be hidden, sheltered, protected on the day the Lord pours out his wrath.

There's no guarantee that they'll be protected on that day. When the Babylonians come, they too may suffer in that judgment of God, but maybe they'll be protected.

Now this is not talking, by the way, about assurance of salvation. We saw last week, as I mentioned before, that if you trust in Jesus, that when God's judgment comes, you'll be spared God's wrath.

[8 : 06] God's wrath that you and I deserve has already fallen on Jesus on the cross. So when judgment day comes, we can be assured that we'll be spared God's wrath.

In fact, you can be 100% sure. Jesus hasn't paid for your sins 70% or 80% or 90%. He either has taken God's judgment or he hasn't. Either you will be spared God's judgment or you won't.

It's yes or no, black or white, and the Bible's saying we have 100% assurance that we will be spared God's wrath come judgment day. But we don't have that assurance that we'll be spared God's judgments in this life.

In this life, God may judge nations. He will judge nations with war, natural disasters, famines, fire, flood, as we've seen in Queensland, devastating floods.

And as God judges the nations, we may not be spared that. I was watching on the news this week, you might have seen it, there was an extended interview with a lady who had lost both her parents.

[9 : 11] The flood had come into their kitchen where her parents were and washed them away. And as I was listening to this woman at the start of the interview, I thought, boy, she's very calm and collected for somebody who's just suffered such a horrendous tragedy.

But as the interview went on, it was obvious to me and I hope to others why, it was very clear that she was a committed Christian. And that was great to see and her testimony on the news was great.

But it reminds us that, as Christians, we're not spared disasters when they come in this life and we're not assured of that protection. Now, I'm not saying that the judgment of God on Queensland is for specific sins.

I'm not saying that at all. It's part of the general judgments of God that come because of the fall, because of sin in general. And I'm certainly not saying that if Christians are caught up in that judgment that it's for some specific sin, it might be, but we have no word from God, certainly with these floods, that that's the case.

And Zephaniah is saying here again that judgments in this life and the coming final judgment of God should focus our minds to live in light of God's judgment now, to seek God, to humble ourselves before Him, he says in verse 3.

[10 : 30] I read somewhere in, I can't remember where, but in Martin Lloyd-Jones, I've been reading his sermons the last couple of years, great stuff, if you haven't read Martin Lloyd-Jones before.

But I was reading in Martin Lloyd-Jones, he makes this point which I took to heart and I hope you might take to heart. He was saying that if when things are good you're dull to the things of God, if you're kind of getting slack in the Christian life when things are good, when things are good, then God might make you wake up with sufferings or disasters in this life now.

And so Martin Lloyd-Jones was urging us like Zephaniah does, seek God now, humble yourself now before God when times are good, if that's the case for you and me now. Because otherwise, God might use disasters or sufferings to make us wake up and take Him more seriously.

And it's far better, he's saying, to humble ourselves now when times are good than to have to go through the sufferings of God's discipline. Zephaniah calls on God's people here in verse 3, for those who trust and obey God already to keep seeking Him earnestly now, to keep humbling ourselves before God now.

And I should ask you then, does that describe you? Are you seeking God now? Are you humbling yourself before God?

[11 : 54] Again, these are commands in verses 1 to 3, God commands us to do this. Now, there may be people here this morning who are not yet Christian, I hope so, and I'm very glad that you're here if you are.

But this also is a word of God to you and we're reminded in the New Testament reading those famous words of Jesus where He says, we search in our translation, but seek and you'll find, knock and the door will be opened.

That for you too, if you're not yet a Christian, you need to seek God and Jesus is saying, if you seek God, you'll find Him, it's not hard. And if you need to know more about God, if you need to find more about Jesus, that course that Andrew mentioned that starts on Thursday night will be a great way in which to do it and if you're not yet a Christian, I'd urge you to go to that.

Jesus has died in your place, He's taken your judgment on Himself so you will be spared His judgment when it comes. You can be forgiven your sins and so I hope you too will take to heart what this says and to seek God and humble yourself before Him.

And there are people here who can help you and talk to you afterwards after the service about how to do that. Well, let's go on to the second section then, verses 4 to 15 describe God's judgment on the nations.

[13 : 18] And I mentioned last week that the people of Judah would have looked forward to judgment on the nations at the time when they would be vindicated and those who had persecuted from the nations would be judged and they're partly right.

God says here He will judge the nations for how they have treated His people. God is the God of all the earth, of all nations and He has the right as our Creator and Maker to judge all people everywhere.

But perhaps particularly and ominously in verse 9 in that second line of verse 9 God says He's the God of Israel.

He's the God of Israel, His people and He'll judge the nations for how they've treated them. Now the nations that He focuses on in verses 4 to 15 are the nations that surround the Promised Land.

In fact, the map that Ruth had for us which is a bit different from Amos showed you some of those nations surrounding the Promised Land but in one sense they're representative of all nations.

[14 : 15] God will judge all nations but His focus here is on the nations surrounding Judah and in particular He's covering the four points of the compass here north, south, east and west.

So there's four little sections to verses 4 to 15. Verses 4 to 7 deal with the Philistines to their west. Verses 8 to 11 deal with the Moabites and Ammonites to the east.

Verse 12 deals with the Ethiopians to the south and verses 13 to 15 deal with the Assyrians to the north. I'll just mention with that last one that the Assyrians are in modern day Iraq really so they're to the east but it says to the north because when they come into Israel and when they conquer the ten northern tribes they come round in a big arc and come down from the north through the Promised Land.

But the point is north, south, east, west these nations will be judged by God. And there's a big connection between this judgment on the nations and verses 1 to 3 that call on us to seek God and humble ourselves before Him.

And perhaps the most important word in the chapter makes that connection. The first word in verse 4 there is the little word for, F-O-R. And so that tells us that it's saying because God will judge the nations that's why we're to seek God and humble ourselves before Him.

[15 : 34] Well let's look in just a bit more detail at this judgment on the nations then. The first little section verses 4 to 7 is judgment on the Philistines. In verses 4 and 5 God announces that He will judge the Philistines.

In verse 4 He mentions their towns their Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and He says that the people in those towns that they will be driven out from them.

Those towns will be deserted and become desolate and will be uprooted. God says He will judge the Philistines and remove them from their land. In the middle of verse 5 particularly chilling He says the word of the Lord is against you O Canaan land of the Philistines and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left.

God Himself is against the Philistines and will judge them. And this word of Zephaniah came true. I doubt anybody here has ever met a Philistine. They are no more.

At least you haven't met a literal one even if you've met a metaphorical one. But as surely as Zephaniah says that the Philistines will be judged they were and just as surely the final judgment is certain and sure to come.

[16 : 50] Verses 6 and 7 are still about excuse me about the Philistines. verse 6 goes on to speak of the land that has been vacated of people and it's just left as pastures and meadows for shepherds and their flocks.

And then verse 7 here's a bit that is encouraging. Verse 7 says So here Zephaniah introduces this important theme of the remnant that even though God's judgment chapter 1 said is certain it's sure it can't be stopped it's coming yet God says after the judgment there will be a remnant who will be spared his judgment and who will be restored again.

And the remnant and clearly from verse 3 those who are humble and who seek God and repent and in the future they will possess the land of the Philistines this is saying they'll live in their houses and lie down at peace 4 verse 7 continues for the Lord their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes.

God will restore his people after judgment he'll bring them back to the promised land and here they'll possess the land of the Philistines. So this is a positive reason then to seek God and humble themselves before God it's saying the positive reason is that a remnant will be restored after judgment and will inherit the land.

Now you need to trace that through to the New Testament a little bit to see what that means for us but Jesus says the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount he says the meek will inherit the earth which is exactly the same as the humble inheriting the land same thing those who trust in Jesus again and again we're called on in the New Testament to humble ourselves before God in James 1 Peter other places and that's because Jesus himself was meek and lowly we sang that in the hymn earlier on that Jesus is meek Jesus was meek and lowly and so we who follow him are to be like that as well and the humble will inherit the land the meek will inherit the earth which in the New Testament is the new heavens and the new earth the promised land was like a picture foreshadowing the new heavens and the new earth and in the New Testament those who seek God and humble themselves before him will inherit the new heavens and the new earth so that's encouraging now the next little section back to Zephaniah chapter 2 is quite similar in verses 8 to 11 this time it's against the Moabites and Ammonites to the east they lived across the Jordan River east of the promised land and again God says he'll judge them and that the remnant will inherit their land in verse 8

[19 : 44] God says I've heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites how they've taunted my people and made boasts against their territory and God goes on to say in verse 9 we'll look at it in a moment that he'll punish the Moabites and the Ammonites for these taunts and revilings of his people that is they'll be punished for their verbal persecution of God's people which is interesting not just physical persecution but for verbal persecution they'll be judged now there is physical persecution as well it says they've made boasts or threats against their territory at the end of verse 8 so they've made threats against the land of God's people and we saw that a couple of weeks ago in the summer series in Amos chapter 1 where it spoke there a century earlier about how the Ammonites ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory and God says he'll judge them for trying to take the territory the land off his people

God speaks in verse 10 as well about their pride this will be their lot in return for their pride in their pride they scoffed boasted poured scorn upon God's people again that verbal persecution and their pride is of course the opposite to the humility that God's people should have and so God will judge them for their pride as well in verse 9 he swears an oath he swears by himself as he lives that the Moabites and the Ammonites will become like Sodom and Gomorrah their land will be devastated and once again further on in verse 9 he speaks of the remnant and says the remnant will possess their land which is really the punishment fitting the crime as the Moabites and Ammonites tried to take the land of God's people so in reverse they will take the land of the Moabites and Ammonites the remnant will inherit their land and finally in this little section verse 11 is quite interesting verse 11 first of all gives a different reason why God will judge the nations an additional reason because of their worship of false gods verse 11 the Lord will be terrible against them he will shrivel all the gods of the earth

God will judge the nations for their worship of false gods now it's worth us remembering that as well in this day and age I know it's very politically incorrect to say that there's anything wrong with other religions people of course may well be sincere in other religions and good people in a relative sort of sense but that does not mean that the teachings of other religions are correct and you don't have to be a Christian to think about it even briefly to realise that all religions cannot at all be correct if Islam says that Jesus didn't die on the cross as they do and Christianity says he did die on the cross they can't both be true modern Judaism says Jesus didn't rise from the dead and he's not the Messiah Christianity says he did rise from the dead and he's the Messiah and they can't both be true so it's nonsense to say that all religions are okay patently they're not and Christianity says that God is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ that Jesus is God in the flesh and other religions deny that and that means if you follow

Allah or the God of Rabbinic Judaism or Buddha or Krishna or the Hindu gods or even Mary and the saints for that matter it means you're following false gods and this is saying you'll be judged because only trusting in Jesus can spare us from the judgment to come and trusting in Jesus alone and no other but positively verse 11 goes on that to God shall bow down each in its place all the coasts and islands of the nations one day God's saying he'll remove all those false gods and there will be a remnant not just from Judah but from all nations who will worship him to the furthest ends of the earth and here we are today seeing the fulfilment of that the most distant islands of the nations he says in verse 11 here we are with the most people in the world on the most distant island or one of them on earth Jew and Gentile worshipping God we here today are the very fulfilment of what

Zephaniah is saying in verse 11 so God's word has come true now just as a bit of a tangent or an aside I want to speak a little bit about one of the phrases in verse 11 one of my little hobby horses here just indulge in it for a moment it says that it's very interesting that the nations will worship God or bow down each in its own place it's a little bit different to what some of the other Old Testament prophets say about the nations coming to Jerusalem to worship God here it says they'll all worship God in their own lands just as we're doing here today and Jesus himself in John's gospel for example speaks about that when he speaks to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 he tells her how people will no longer worship on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem because God wants people to worship him in spirit and truth or in other words he's saying in the New Testament I think he's saying there's no such thing anymore as the holy land or the holy city Jerusalem or a holy place in fact Galatians 4 says that Jerusalem below is in slavery and Revelation 11 actually calls the present day Jerusalem

[25 : 21] Sodom it's quite severe there's no more holy place today because there will be a new heavens and a new earth where the remnant from Jews and Gentiles will all be worshipping God together and here it's saying as is the case today each in their own land people will worship God and that's what we're seeing fulfilled right here this morning end of hobby horse let's keep going with Zephaniah 2 verse 12 very brief but it's the third section is a brief word that God will judge the people to the south it's literally that he'll judge the Cushites who were the Ethiopians as it says there or from northern Sudan and it's curious that it doesn't mention Egypt to the south which is normally mentioned but earlier in that century the Cushites had taken over that whole area including Egypt so maybe that's why Egypt isn't mentioned but either way God is saying the people to the south the major powers to the south will be judged by

God and then finally in verses 13 to 15 the powers to the north the Assyrians will be judged and they were the most terrible enemy of the people of God they'd caused great distress to the people of Judah and God says in verse 13 that he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria and he will make Nineveh its capital city a desolation and verse 14 speaks of that desolation that there's just wild animals and birds left in the ruins and verse 15 speaks about the pride and arrogance of the Assyrians that they were exultant that they lived securely and safely that they said to themselves I am and there is no one else the words I am there are a pretension to deity that is what the gods and God himself in the Bible says of himself so in their pride and arrogance the Assyrians thought they were indestructible again this pride is the opposite to the humility that God's people are to have and God rightly scorns their pretensions to being indestructible and says how they'll be destroyed and says what a desolation Nineveh has become verse 15 a lair for wild animals everyone who passes by it hisses and shakes the fist and indeed before the end of the century only maybe 10 or 15 years after Zephaniah said this Assyria and Nineveh was destroyed never to be seen again 200 years later the great Greek general Xenophon passed through the side of

Nineveh and noted how there was nothing there so again what Zephaniah said came true and just as certainly the final judgment will come true well let's tie the threads together and conclude Zephaniah is reminding God's people here that God is the God of the nations and will judge the nations and first of all that God will judge the nations as we've just said for their pride and their arrogance people of the nations live as if God's not there they ignore him they get on with their lives without him they in effect do say I am and there is no one else people say I'm the God of my life I'm running my life rather than humbly submitting themselves to Jesus they run their own life their way they think they're safe and secure but the nations are not God will judge the nations and as we think we're safe and secure in Australia also we're not and the terrible floods in Queensland and they are terrible and we'll pray for them but they're a reminder that God will one day judge Australia as indeed I'm sure he will God will judge the nations for their pride and arrogance secondly God will judge the nations we've seen for their idolatry we saw in verse 11 that all false gods will be removed that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is

Lord and so it doesn't matter how sincerely somebody is following another religion it doesn't matter how sincerely somebody in one sense is following the Christian religion what matters is whether whatever background you're from whether you trust in Jesus because only Jesus death spares us from the wrath to come one day all false gods will be removed every knee will bow to Jesus God will judge the nations for their idolatry and thirdly God will judge the nations for how they've treated God's people God will indeed vindicate his people and those who have persecuted his people whether physically or even verbally will be judged for that in one sense we would want to see those who persecute Christians badly certainly in other nations not so much Australia we'd want to see them punished for their sins but in another sense we should really fear God's judgment that will fall on them and want them to repent of their sins and be saved and it should drive us to share the gospel with those people even with those who persecute Christians that they might be saved in one sense we might fear the nations we might fear the spread of

Islam but much more we should fear the judgment that those people will be facing it should drive us to seek God and repent but it should also drive us to share the gospel with them so that they can seek God and repent as well for God will judge the nations for how they have treated God's people fourthly and positively we're reminded in this passage that the meek will inherit the earth that those who do seek God and humble themselves before God will inherit the new heavens and the new earth and that's a positive encouragement and so finally the punch line of this passage surely is what Zephaniah says in verse 3 to seek God to seek righteousness to seek humility to humble ourselves before God that we're being reminded again that God's judgment is certain that we need to live now in the light of God's judgment to come not to have an each way better as I said last week of following God and following the ways of the world because what Zephaniah is saying is those things that you and I certainly I know I do want from the world that we want to be like the world around us that that will all be removed in judgment one day and the nations will be judged and so that we want to live for

[31 : 53] Jesus and Jesus alone now because the nations will be judged and so the punch line here is saying to us that we need to seek God and to humble ourselves before him so let's pray now that God will help us to do that our heavenly father we thank you so much that Jesus has taken the wrath that we deserve on himself and brought us forgiveness we thank you that we're assured that we'll be spared your wrath when judgment comes we thank you for this reminder that you will judge the nations it makes us think particularly of the floods in Queensland and Victoria and around Australia and northern New South Wales as well Lord God we pray for your mercy on those who are suffering we pray that it would help people to turn to you in repentance now to seek you before it is too late we pray for Christians who are suffering that they would trust you and bear witness to you we pray for non-Christians who are suffering that they would seek and find you we pray that you would help those who are helping with a cleanup and are giving aid to people we pray for those here today who do not yet know you that you would help them to seek you and find you and we pray for ourselves for those who do trust in Jesus that you would help us to keep seeking you earnestly and to keep humbling ourselves before you and to live in light of your coming we ask this in Jesus name

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