

Zephaniah 2 Sermon Draft

Main Point: Zephaniah 2 leaves us with a choice – where will we be on judgement day?

Intro (400 words)

Introduction to judgement day movie

Judgement day. I wonder what the first words are that pop into your mind when someone says “judgement day”. For me the opening credits of Terminator 2 that we just saw captures the essence of what many people believe judgment day will be like. Fire will be everywhere. The entire earth will be swept clean and nothing will be left but ash and ruins.

Just like this imaginary depiction of the world shown by Terminator, in the passage that was just read Zephaniah gives a very real and graphic description of what judgement day will actually be like when it arrives. He reveals to us the utter desolation of the Last day, the judgement of the people of the earth and terrifying consequences of not following God.

By the end of the chapter we are left with the distinct feeling that to be anywhere else but with God on the final day will be an eternally excruciating experience.

So let's launch into the 2nd Chapter of Zephaniah and have a look at the picture this prophet paints of the judgement day to come.

First though let me pray.

Point 1: Why and Who is God Judging? (300words)

To start off with let's take a look at who God is judging in chapter 2 of Zephaniah.

While the first chapter of Zephaniah deals with God's judgement on his own people, in Chapter 2 Zephaniah switches the focus of God's judgement. Instead of Judah being judged we see God condemning the nations who oppose both Himself and His people at the time that Zephaniah was writing. We see God giving out judgements against Philistia, Moab, the Ammonites, Cush and Assyria – but why? What crime had these nations committed that the only fitting punishment they deserved was that God's wrath would be levelled against them.

Illustrate Point

We'll listen to the reasons that God gives for his condemning of these nations: v8: “I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land” and again in v10 “This is what they will get in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking the people of the Lord Almighty” and again in v15 “She (that is the city of Nineveh) said to herself “I am, and there is none besides me”.

Notice that each time the nations are guilty of two sins – firstly they go against the people of God both by insulting them with words and attacking the borders of God’s people. Secondly the nations fail to acknowledge God and even go so far, as we read of Nineveh, to claim that there is no god.

I wonder if these sins sound familiar to you at all.

Explain Point

The nations that we read about symbolise the fact that God will judge all people, past present and future, on the judgement day. Those who resemble the Ancient nations, that is those who disobey God and go against his people will suffer the same fate reserved for Israel’s enemies.

So what are these judgements that God pronounces over the nations in the expectation of judgement day?

Point 2: Judgement on the Nations (300 words)

Make Point: There will be nothing left when God has finished

We return once again to see the judgement that will be brought upon God’s enemies by looking at the condemnation that is being pronounced on the Ancient enemies of Judah. In each case God’s judgement bears the same result – vs 4-5 (against the Philistines) “Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins.....I will destroy you, and none will be left”.

This initial judgement gives us an idea of the immense disaster that will come over those who disobey God. Zephaniah continues in vs 9 (in his judgement against Moab and Ammon) “surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah – a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever”.

Lastly Zephaniah looks at the judgement God is preparing for Assyria. In vs13 we read “He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh (the capitol of Assyria) utterly desolate and dry as the desert”.

The image that Zephaniah is trying to build in our minds is of the utter desolation that will remain after God’s judgement. Think of some of the words he uses – ‘Ashkelon left in ruins’ ‘none will be left’ ‘utterly desolate and dry’. When God’s judgement arrives, there will be nothing left and those who oppose God will be utterly destroyed.

Illustrate Point: Locust Hordes consume everything in their path, judgement will be the same

I wonder if you know what this little critter is. He is a locust. By himself he is more or less a grasshopper who could do no more harm to a human than a grasshopper. But the thing about locusts is they don’t travel alone. They travel in huge hordes and as the horde moves through areas they consume everything leaving the land desolate and empty. The picture that Zephaniah builds of Gods judgement day resembles the landscapes left by locusts. Bleak. Empty. Desolate. Lifeless.

Explain Point:

What Zephaniah is trying to tell us is that for those who disobey God, for those who insult and attack his people, the only thing they have to look forward to is God's wrath. From the vivid detail that Zephaniah gives us of what judgement will be like it is clear that to be anywhere else but with God will mean condemnation and an eternity away from God's love. An eternity of hell. All that will be left of the nations who opposed God is ruins and destruction.

Point 3: Who is God warning? (300 words)

Make Point:

Yet in all of this we are left with the question – who is it that God is warning in this book. Clearly the judgement being pronounced is against the nations that oppose Israel but it would certainly not of been Assyria who would of being reading Zephaniah's prophecies. Philistia would of just thought Zephaniah was a Jewish hopeful looking forward to the destruction of his enemies. No this warning must of been for Israel, the people of God. But why? The answer lies in what was going on in Israel at the time.

See Israel for the past three generations or so had been giving herself to the gods of these other nations. She had been worshipping idols and foreign gods instead of the one true God. What God is saying in this passage is that he is going to come and wipe these nations out along with anything that is connected to them. It doesn't matter if you're one of God's people, if you're worshipping idols you will be swept away just as quickly as the people of these foreign nations.

Illustrate Point:

The warning God is giving to the people of Israel looks like a Cyclone. The sheer violence and destruction that the cyclone brings has the power to leave places completely empty of life. It can leave buildings in ruins and sweep people away in the blink of an eye. Yet despite this violence in the eye of the storm there is complete calm. There is no destruction, no desolation. There is in fact peace.

Explain Point:

For God the eye of storm rests over his people. That is those who worship Him and Him alone. They don't go to the North or the south nor east or west to look for satisfaction from idols or foreign gods. On the judgement day those who are in the eye will live in peace with God for eternity.

For those outside the eye, for those who turn their lives to worship idols, God will bring his full wrath upon them. He will destroy them. He will destroy their cities leaving only ruins. He will completely wipe them out leaving only desolate landscapes. On Judgement day the people who are caught in the storm of God's wrath will be sentenced to an eternity in Hell. An eternity away from God's love.

Zephaniah's 2nd chapter then is a warning to God's people to get rid of the idols in their lives and turn back to him before it is too late.

Conclusion/Application (300 words)

The warning that God gave to his people all those years ago remains the same for us today. The storm that Zephaniah wrote about is still to come.

God wants us to be asking ourselves “What idols do I have in my life?” “What do I have in my life that drags me away from God?” “What in my life puts me outside the eye of God?”.

The world we live in offers many alternatives to God. So many things put themselves forward in our day to day lives as being better and sweeter than God.

Money, power, family, possessions, ourselves. When we let these things dominate our life, when they take centre stage we are placed outside the eye of God. When we follow the ways of the world God simply says to us “you will be judged with the world”.

Today we have the joy of knowing that Jesus Christ died for us so that we can live in the eye of God’s storm. By his death we are brought into God’s people when we give our lives to Him. What Zephaniah 2 is calling us to do then is trust in Christ as our one source of salvation from God’s storm. Zephaniah 2 is calling us to give all that we have to Christ. Every thought, every relationship, every possession, every dollar, everything that we have, we need to give it all too Christ. Then we can live as God’s people in the eye of storm and live with him forever.

Zephaniah 2 is warning to us. It is a warning to us that we need to be part of God’s people when judgement day comes around, or we will be swept away with the rest of world.