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C1140 – December 14, 2011 – Zephaniah 2.4-15
The Removal Of Usurping Nations

If you will turn to the Book of Zephaniah. This man Zephaniah, whose name may be derived from the Hebrew word translated “hidden” in 2:3, where he refers to the Lord perhaps hiding the remnant of Israel from His judgment in the future day of the Lord, we know very little about this man otherwise. His book is located at the end of your OT as one of the twelve smaller prophets that the Jews rolled into one scroll and simply called them the Twelve. It sits in the second section of the Tanach. The Jews divided their OT, which they call Tanach, into three sections; the Law or Torah, the first five books, these are technical legal literature, the Prophets or Nabiim, starting with Joshua and including such books as Kings, Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the Twelve, these books are historic analysis. Fundamentally the prophet is an analyst of history; and finally the Writings or Kethubim, books like Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, which contain wisdom, they teach about skill in living. Those are your three divisions of the OT and they are the same divisions recognized by Jesus in the NT so you might make note of them. That way when you come across expressions like “the Law and the Prophets” in the NT you immediately are attracted to these divisions.

We said Zephaniah as a part of the Twelve is a part of the second division, the Prophets; he wrote somewhere around 620BC. His name perhaps means “hidden,” he was a member of the royal house of David and his relative Josiah was the king. These two men tried to turn the nation around in that time but it wasn’t very successful. Josiah was a good king and he led the nation in many reforms but as far as the nation was concerned it was only an outward reform. Zephaniah was the prophet and he wrote to warn the nation that the day of the Lord judgment would come upon them if they didn’t have a genuine heartfelt repentance and come back to the Lord.

You need to understand how absurd it was to the people in Zephaniah's time that they could face any kind of day of the Lord judgment. The reason was because the prevalent thinking of the people was that we are of the house of David, we are of the Davidic line, we have promises that guarantee immunity, and we're just so special God will never spank us. So they reasoned that we can do whatever the hell we want and God won't do a thing. It's the same kind of thinking many Christians have, Oh, Jesus saved me, now I can go live however I want, they use salvation as a license to sin and go raise hell and have a good time. The problem with that is that God has figured this thing into His plan called the paddle. And you're free to go raise hell but you're not free from the consequences of raising hell. God will discipline you. God disciplines those whom He has chosen. So we have the doctrine of election. And the doctrine of election is not a doctrine that justifies running around saying, boy, look at me, I'm the elect and God so loved me that He chose me and therefore I can do whatever I want because I'm select, I'm grade A beef here. No, because a corollary truth to the doctrine of election is the doctrine of divine discipline. God disciplines those whom He has chosen. So Zephaniah's message that they, as the elect house of David, were going to face the ultimate discipline of the day of the Lord was a shock to them. And the tool of discipline was a new nation rising to power, the nation of Babylon. God had chosen Babylon to smash His own chosen people. So due east of the Promised Land in the Mesopotamian River Valley lay God's instrument of discipline, Babylon.

Let's review briefly how the nation got in such terrible spiritual condition because there are principles to learn from the nation Israel's spiritual decline. Four centuries earlier the kingdom was united during the time of King David. All twelve tribes came under the rule of David of the tribe of Judah. It took David seven years to unite the kingdom but once it was accomplished he ruled the kingdom with righteousness for 33 years. When I say righteousness I don't mean David didn't commit any sin, I just mean that the dominant pattern of David's rule was one of righteousness. He was a man after God's own heart. When he got out of fellowship and it came to his attention, he was convicted of his sin. David was a man very sensitive to his sin and so when he was convicted he confessed his sin and was restored to fellowship and he dealt with the consequences of his sin in the kingdom by grace. When his son Solomon came to the throne that generation really reaped the benefits of David's rule of righteousness; Israel enjoyed

tremendous prosperity and power during the Solomonic period but toward the end of Solomon's reign they began to accommodate to the surrounding pagan culture and a cultural rot set in. When Solomon's son Rehoboam came to the throne the kingdom split into two kingdoms, they almost had a civil war but that was avoided and ten tribes separated from the house of David in the north and the house of David along with some Benjamites stayed in the south. The ten tribes in the north were called Israel from that point on, sometimes Ephraim, and the two tribes in the south were called Judah since Judah was the most populous tribe. Both kingdoms went into decline but the northern went into decline more rapidly. Why was that? Because they didn't have any Davidic Covenant promise. It's that promise that gave the southern kingdom stability. It's always the covenant promises of God that bring stability. And the northern kingdom didn't have a covenant promise and so they went through nine dynasty changes. All their kings were losers, none of them could trust the Lord and the entire nation went into agricultural distress, political chaos, economic turmoil, all the curses and God finally said that's it and He judged them by the ultimate curse, Exile to Assyria in 721BC.

Meanwhile the southern kingdom of Judah did have a Davidic Covenant promise and the Davidic dynasty remained through the entirety of that kingdom's lifespan until God had had it with them and the shocking thing was that He was threatening through Zephaniah to send the kingdom with this great Davidic promise into Exile. It blew their minds that God would do that. But that's what God was threatening to do.

So you already have the northern portion of the Promised Land evacuated. Not that there weren't other people living there, non-Israelite people, but the Israelites were not living there, it was primarily Gentile dominated populations, and eventually it was a mixture and you had the Samaritans but the main point is the land was controlled by Gentiles. Now we have the southern kingdom on the brink of Exile and the implication is that if they do go into Exile then the southern portion of the Promised Land will be evacuated of Jews and Gentiles will come in and dominate that portion of the territory as well.

So the Exile is deeply related to the Land promise given to Israel. We call it the Promised Land because that land was set apart by God for Israel. What

covenant? The Abrahamic Covenant. God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob three basic things; a Land, a Seed and a Worldwide Blessing. God made those promises to that nation and that nation alone. God never promised anyone else any land. And God made that promise unilaterally, it's called a Royal Grant Covenant or unilateral covenant meaning that the nation didn't have to do a thing to receive those promises; they were all things the Royal King simply granted them. So it doesn't matter what Israel does, final possession of the land does not depend upon Israel, it depends upon God's promises. And at the heart of those promises is the nation Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jacob being the key, the seed or offspring that would come from the nation, the Messiah, and the specific real estate or land. Those three things are at the heart of what history is all about. How is God going to rescue His people Israel by means of a Messiah and establish them in this specific real estate to be a worldwide blessing to all nations?

Well, we already know from Zeph 2:1 the condition for God rescuing His people is that they Gather, and that's a condition that will be fulfilled. Notice verse 1, "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame," that is, without merit. That translation "shame" confuses but the Hebrew word is "silver." Silver is money or assets by which you could purchase something. He's saying gather without assets to purchase. And we'd say what Zephaniah is getting at is the concept of trying to merit salvation. At the core of Jewish religion is building merit with God, doing works of kindness, mitzveh's. Zephaniah is saying gather without mitzveh's, without works of kindness, I want you to gather before Me without merit. So the idea is "gather O nation without merit." And to be without merit before God is to be coming to Him in faith. Only faith is non-meritorious and faith is the only way to approach God, whether you're an unbeliever or a believer the only approach God accepts is faith which basically means trust, trusting Him. Whatsoever is not of faith is what? Sin. So the only way to approach God in a non-sinful fashion is by faith. That's why the only way of salvation is by faith, that's why the only way to walk as a saved person is by faith. It's always faith or trust in the infallible word of God. So in the statement gather without merit, we have a statement of the pre-condition for Messiah coming to rescue His people Israel, the faith and re-birth of the nation Israel. When, verse 2, "Before the decree takes effect," that's the decree of the day of the Lord. "The day passes like the chaff—" that is, the judgment phase of the day of the Lord

is a very short period of time, it passes like chaff, it's only slightly more than seven years long. "Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you." They will enjoy peace during the first half of the 70th Week of Daniel because the Antichrist will provide peace but at the mid-point of the 70th Week he will commit the abomination of desolation and turn to destroy the people of Israel. This is the time of the LORD'S anger coming upon them. The Antichrist will be the instrument of the Lord to destroy Israel. And again, this would have shocked the southern kingdom at the time of Zephaniah. How can the day of the Lord come upon us? We're the house of David. We're exempt from judgment. Well, oops, they were wrong about that.

So in response to verse 1, the command to "Gather without merit," which could apply to any generation of Israel, past or present, they need to do this. They didn't do this in Zephaniah's day and they have never done this; it's always we're going to work it up, but since this has never been fulfilled in history then this must be fulfilled in a future time period. At some point in the future a portion of the nation will gather without merit and a portion of the nation will not gather in this manner, but there will be a sufficient portion gather, so that the condition will be met for the rest of end-times events to unfold. The exact proportions will be 1/3 of the nation will be the remnant and 2/3 will be the non-remnant, those are the portions required by Zechariah 13:8-9; the remnant he says in verse 3 will "perhaps be hidden," that is, they may or may not survive to the end of the day of the Lord. If they do survive they will be taken into the kingdom in their mortal bodies to propagate the nation Israel, if they don't survive they will be resurrected along with Abraham, Moses, David and all the other OT Jewish saints and taken into the kingdom in immortal bodies. The non-remnant will be destroyed any way you cut it, either under the Antichrist's persecutions or when Christ returns He will take them to judgment where He will slay them and send their spirits to Sheol to await the Great White Throne Judgment after the kingdom.

So you have, notice, verse 3, some instructions for the believing remnant during the last half of the 70th week of Daniel, "Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth," it could be all the earth or it could be all the land, the land of Israel. The context indicates it's the land so this is the remnant of believing Jews in the land. They have believed in the Messiahship of Jesus

and they are being commanded here to “Seek the LORD...Seek righteousness...Seek humility.” “Perhaps you will hidden In the day of the LORD’S anger.” Maybe you will, maybe you won’t, but no matter what destiny God has for you, Seek Him, Seek righteousness, Seek humility. Of course this will be very hard to do because when the Antichrist commits the abomination of desolation at the mid-point of Daniel’s 70th Week he’s going to set out to destroy Israel and it will be a period of great distress. So it will be very difficult for Jewish believers to stay true to the Lord; there will be a great temptation to just go along with the Antichrist’s program with a view to the persecution lifting. But he says no, don’t do that, seek the Lord nonetheless, be a Daniel type believer and in the midst of a ruthless Gentile ruler seek the LORD. Jesus said in Matt 24, when you see the abomination of desolation flee to the mountains. And some of the Jews will heed these words and will escape to Petra where they will be hidden and miraculously fed and protected, others will stay in Jerusalem and be killed, but whatever destiny God has for them they should persevere in seeking Him in this time. So verse 3 then is a call to the future remnant of Israel to persevere in seeking the LORD despite the persecutions that they will face in the last half of the 70th week of Daniel, some of them will be hidden and enter the kingdom in mortal bodies, others will be killed and resurrected to enter the kingdom in immortal bodies. Either way persevere.

Now verse 4 shifts to deal with the surrounding nations during this same time period and in particular he points out the nations that have encroached on Israel’s promised real estate. This is very upsetting to God despite the fact that He sent them into Exile outside the land. In this section you are going to see that in all four directions of the compass nations have encroached on Israel’s Promised Land. If we were to outline it, vv 4-7 deal with the Philistines which lay to the West, in vv 8-11 the Moabites and Ammonites which lay to the East, in vv 12, Ethiopia to the south and in vv 13-15, Assyria to the North. The point is to say that encroachment on Israel’s Promised Real Estate has occurred from every direction of the compass and in the last days God is going to destroy all who encroached. They have to be removed because God promised this real estate to Israel and so anyone in the boundaries of the land are there illegally.

Now you have to understand that Israel has title deed to this land, actually, the Land is God’s land. He says in Leviticus, “The land is Mine!” so Israel is a

tenant in God's land, He gave them the rights of tenant possession just as in the original Garden, the Garden was God's but He gave tenant possession of the garden to Adam. What did Adam do with his tenant possession? He forfeited it. How did He forfeit it? Sin. Violation of God's righteous requirements for living peacefully in His garden. To whom did he forfeit it? Satan. Luke 4 tells us Adam, the first man and representative of all mankind, forfeited his rights over this domain to an angel Satan. What did Israel do with its tenant possession of the land? They also forfeited it. How did they forfeit it? Sin. Violation of God's righteous requirements for living peacefully in His land. Who did they forfeit it to? Gentile nations like Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and yet future, the final form of Rome, all Gentile kingdoms ruled by Satan and his demons. So we have this issue of forfeiture by Adam of this whole earth and we have this issue of forfeiture by Israel of their promised land. These are both very serious forfeitures. And sin is at the heart of these forfeitures so the question is, my goodness, is the entire created order going to be ruled forever by Satan? That really is the grand issue of history. Everything has been turned over to him. And is this going to be the eternal state of affairs?

So the Garden rebellion and Adam's Exile from the Garden as well as the Land rebellion and Israel's Exile from the land are very serious moments in history. Because they prompt the question, will a man ever re-take possession of the earth and will Israel ever re-take possession of the land they forfeited? How, if sin remains can man and Israel ever re-acquire these forfeited possessions?

Answer, there has to be a new humanity come into existence that is without sin. And that requires that a redemption price for sin be paid and applied to a certain group of humanity. So everything comes to rest on the Seed of the woman who would pay the redemption price. Everything rests on Him. This is why He's got to be a true sinless human, only a true sinless human being can pay the redemption price for sinful humans and yet He also has to be truly God so that the redemption price that He pays is of infinite value to cover all humans. And by paying this redemption price the earth will be restored to man and the land will be restored to Israel. The seed of the woman has to be related to both Adam and Israel. And scripturally He is both the second Adam and the ultimate Jew, so He will be the Redeemer of both Gentile and Jew and the leader of a new humanity who have been counted

righteous through faith in His payment for their sin. So He came to pay the redemption price for the entire earth as well as for the Promised Land as well as for human sin to generate a new group of people who will inherit the earth, Gentile believers and inhabit the land, Jewish believers.

Now if you turn to Rev 5. I don't know how familiar you are with the truths of redemption as they relate to title deeds and ownership but these are very important legal issues. The question in Rev 5 is who has title deed to the earth? It was forfeited to Satan at the Fall of Adam so it requires a kinsman of Adam to pay the redemption price and re-acquire the title deed. You see the Father seated on the throne, verse 1, "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. Now this is a title deed, the title deeds in the OT were written on both sides, inside and on the back. But there's a problem, verse 2, "And I saw a strong angel" not just any angel, a "strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" 3And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to unlock the scroll or to look into it." See, only the one who had title deed had the rights to open the title deed and look into it. And here we have a desperate moment. The whole book of Revelation is about this moment and this great question, because if there's no one able to open this scroll then Satan has conquered, Satan will forever rule this domain and all it contains forever and ever. John clearly understands this, verse 4, "I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it;" All is lost if there is no one to open the scroll. But then verse 5, "one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the scroll and it's seven seals." So there is One and He is the Messiah, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the One and the only who has paid the redemption price for all things. And He came, verse 7 "and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne," and they begin to worship - one has been found that is Worthy. In all the universe there is only One that is Worthy and it is the Lamb standing, as if slain, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah. And this is good news, this is fantastic news, this is what brings John's weeping to a halt and worship in heaven to begin. Why? Because the earth has been purchased and men have been purchased so all things will be restored to man, redeemed man that is, the new humanity. Notice the song they sing in verse 9, "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slain and redeemed for

God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the what? “the earth.” The redemption price has been paid and the earth will now be systematically cleansed of unbelievers. That’s what the scroll is all about, that’s what the Book of Revelation is all about. It is about Jesus Christ coming back to claim what He purchased on the cross, the entire earth and those men from every tribe, tongue and nation to inherit the earth and to reign upon the earth. And so what is inside the scroll but the seven seals and the seven trumpets and the seven bowls and these are the eviction measures, the steps the Lord Jesus Christ as owner of the entire earth takes to remove the usurpers, to destroy them all and to take what belongs rightfully to Him as the second Adam and as the ultimate Jew, to give the earth to redeemed men who it was originally given to but forfeited, now reclaimed and to give the land to redeemed Israel who it was originally given to but forfeited, now reclaimed.

Now turn back to Zephaniah 2:4 and you will understand why such measures are taken to remove and destroy them. They have all encroached on land that is not their rightful possession because the Messiah has paid the land redemption price and now He has returned to reclaim that which is rightfully His.

These people that are over there today, living on the land that belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate Israelite, and mocking the Jews, makes the Lord Jesus very angry. verse 3 calls it the day of His anger, verse 4, **For Gaza will be abandoned And Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be drive out at noon** (in broad daylight, signifying how easily He will defeat them. **And Ekron will be uprooted.** These are all cities along the Gaza strip today, what was anciently known as Philistia, and they’ve all encroached His property, the Promised Land. Verse 5, **Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast**, they’re all located along the Mediterranean Coast here, where various Flotilla’s try to dock, that seacoast. **The nation of the Cherethites!** These were people descended from the Cretans who made up a portion of the Philistines. **The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines;** They weren’t Canaanites, but they were idolaters like the Canaanites and they tried to take Israel’s land. **And I will destroy you So that there will be no inhabitant.** Complete desolation, the Conquest that was not completed by the first Jesus, Joshua, will be

completed by the second Joshua, Jesus. Verse 6, **So the seacoast will be pastures, With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷And the coast will be For the remnant of the house of Judah, They will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the LORD their God will care for them And restore their fortune.** Why? Because He has paid the redemption price for the Land. What Israel has forfeited Jesus Christ will restore. Today this area is inhabited by the people of Gaza and they're squatters, they never had any right to the land, they don't recognize Israel, they say Israel is an illegal occupier of the land, they house the terrorist groups Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. These people are a thorn in Israel's side that will be removed, not by Israel, but by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 8, and here we move East to the modern nation of Jordan. **"I have heard the taunting of Moab And the revilings of the sons of Ammon, With which they have taunted My people And become arrogant against their territory.** Now you can hear Satan talking right through these people. These are the descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, out of him came these two groups of people that taunted Israel, that became arrogant, notice, **against their territory.** So obviously the territory belongs to Israel. **"Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, The God of Israel, "Surely Moab will be like Sodom And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah— A place possessed by nettles and salt pits, And a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them And the remainder of My nation will inherit them."** ¹⁰This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of armies. ¹¹The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; their idols He'll destroy, which truly are the demons who they worship and which are worshipped throughout the earth, He will start with the demons of their worshippers by killing them, then they won't have anyone to worship them, **and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.** That is, in the kingdom everyone in the world, people of all nations will worship God and not demons. The demons will be locked away with Satan for 1,000 years and the worst part about it, from their perspective, is they won't be able to receive worship from

humans. Demons want to rule the world and receive worship, that's what they want, human worship. In the kingdom time they won't get it.

Alright, next section, verse 12, very short, **“You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.”** Ethiopia was to the south, and the point of citing these nations is to point to the four corners of the compass. In reality the expressions intend to extend globally in all directions. These aren't just local judgments though localities are mentioned, the point is to say all directions of nations which are on My turf, you're out of here, I'm coming to reclaim My land, My earth and give it to it's rightful possessors.

Finally in verse 13 he turns to the north, Assyria, modern Iraq and Iran, **And He will stretch out His hand against the north And destroy Assyria, And He will make Nineveh a desolation,** Nineveh stands for the ultimate in evil, we studied their destruction in 612BC and prophesied by Nahum. It will be **Parched like the wilderness.** ¹⁴**Flocks will lie down in her midst, All beasts which range in herds; Both the pelican and the hedgehog Will lodge in the tops of her pillars; Birds will sing in the window, Desolation will be on the threshold; For He has laid bare the cedar work.** ¹⁵**This is the exultant city Which dwells securely, Who says in her heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.”** Nineveh as you well know was well-fortified along the Tigris River and considered herself invincible. The prophet says, **How she has become a desolation, A resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss And wave his hand in contempt.** We could say a past destruction accomplished by the Medes and Babylonians in 612BC or we could say a yet future Nineveh that will rise in that region or both. The point is to say that ultimately those who are against Israel and encroach on Israel's land and mock Israel will be destroyed. This is a cleansing of the earth in preparation for the Kingdom, it is the day of the Lord's judgment, it is the day of cleansing the earth, this cleansing is imminent, it can unfold at any moment, believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved. For we are not destined for wrath but for obtaining salvation.

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