

Surrounded by Enemies

There is a concept we encounter in the Hebrew that is brought over into the New Testament that I find intriguing: poor/humble. In Hebrew there is a word that can mean either physically poor or humble depending upon the context. That the concept of being poor is associated with humility is what I find intriguing. While it is not always true, often when someone becomes poor, that person understands he or she is dependent upon others to sustain life. Sometimes that can lead to humility. And, sometimes not.

We encountered this concept last week in the “seek” passages of Zephaniah 2:3.

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the Lord, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger.

Alec Motyer translates this verse as:

Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the Lord, all you humble ones of the earth who are determined to do as he decides; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you may be covered in the day of the Lord’s anger.¹

This concept is evident in the New Testament among Jesus’ teachings. Let us read the narrative of “Lazarus and the Rich Man” in Luke chapter 16. Open your Bibles and let us read Luke 16:19-31. In this story, the

¹ Motyer, Alec, Zephaniah, in The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998, page 925

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rich man was self-centered to such a degree that he ignored the fact that his spiritual life depended upon someone else. Although he was rich in the physical world, he was bankrupt poor in the spiritual world. Whereas, Lazarus, not the Lazarus that was raised from the dead but a different one, understood that his physical life, and apparently also his spiritual life, depended upon someone else. In his case, a dog took more pity on him than the rich man. In this case, the assumption is that the poor man was humble before God and was a believer since he was in “Paradise” or in “Abraham’s bosom” after he died. The rich man was in “Torments” after he died and assumes his unsaved status.

Let us continue in the New Testament with Matthew 19:16-22, the narrative of the “Rich Young Ruler.”

The point of this excursion is that there is a prosperity test in life. Can you handle prosperity? The Apostle Paul passed the test:

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Philippians 4:12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

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You see that Paul understands that it is “Him” who strengthens me. We walk by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. With a doctrinal spiritual compass, we can pass the prosperity test.

Great leaders are usually humble.

Moses was humble:

Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

Jesus was humble:

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Philippians 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

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Philippians 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Philippians 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Even Paul was humble in his service.

Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

Humility is a mental attitude that directs your thinking and hence your actions. It is an orientation to the authority of God.

There is an interesting article from the New York Post that summarizes several lottery winners that failed the prosperity test. As it says, “The world of lottery winners is paved with former millionaires who’ve burned through fortunes and wound up broke.²”

We saw this failure to pass the prosperity test multiple times in the book of Judges. Here is the summary of that history from Judges chapter 2:

Judges 2:11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,

Judges 2:12 and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves

² <https://nypost.com/2022/07/29/these-lottery-winners-lost-it-all-after-hitting-the-jackpot/>

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down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

Judges 2:13 So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

Judges 2:14 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Judges 2:15 Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

Each one of us has a mission as unto the Lord. In order to serve we have to have humility toward God, understanding we are under authority to Him.

During the Tribulation, in the final years of the Jewish dispensation, many Jews will understand that Jesus is their Messiah and place their trust in Him for their salvation. They will have discovered this humility toward God. But not all.

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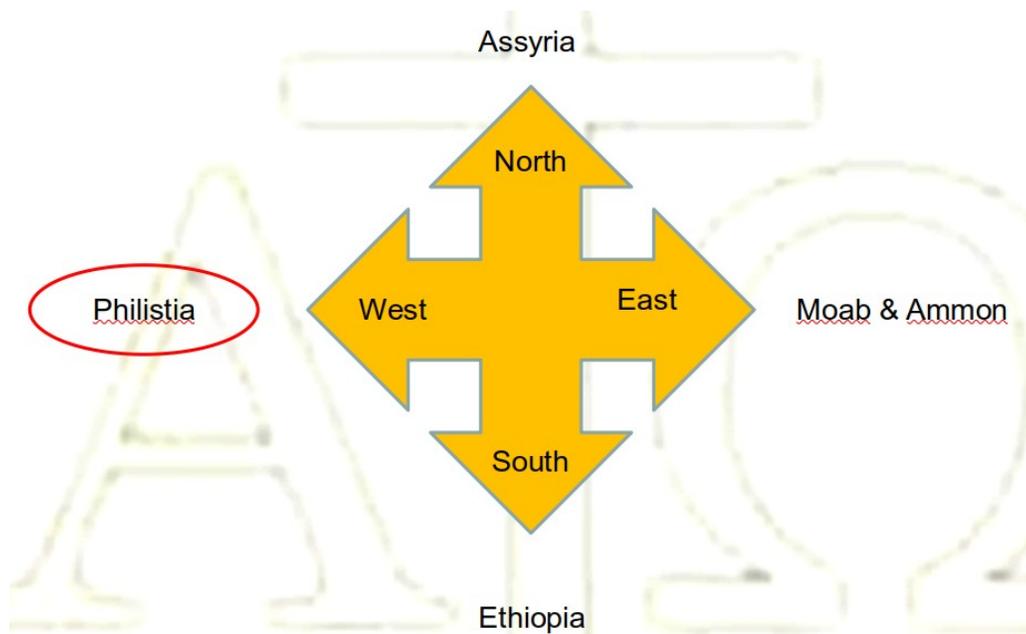
Previous to this week, the text of Zephaniah has been a prophesy against Israel because of her abandonment of the Messiah. Now, starting in chapter 2 verse 4 the prophesies are turned against Israel's hostile neighbors.

Verses 4-7 Philistia

Verses 8-11 Moab & Ammon

Verse 12 Cush

Verses 13-14 Assyria



The first prophesy is against the Philistine cities.

**Zephaniah 2:4 For Gaza will be abandoned
And Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be
driven out at noon And Ekron will be
uprooted.**

The context in the book of Zephaniah is “Day of the Lord” which is future. The judgments are part of the Tribulation. Gaza, Ashkelon,

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Ashdod, Ekron are viewed as non-Israel. But Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron are currently Israeli cities. Gaza was Israeli territory after the 1967 War. But Gaza was transferred to Palestinian National Authority in 1993.

Some recent history from Wikipedia:

“In June 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israel Defense Forces captured the Gaza Strip.” It was previously under the control of Egypt.

“Gaza became an Israeli possession as a result of the 1967 War.”

“On 26 March 1979, Israel and Egypt signed the Egypt–Israel peace treaty. Among other things, the treaty provided for the withdrawal by Israel of its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel had captured during the Six-Day War.”

“...in 1993, the city was transferred to the Palestinian National Authority.³”

Currently, many Palestinians reside and govern the Gaza strip. Most Jews living in that area were forcibly removed by the Israeli government as Wikipedia says:

“In February 2005, the Knesset approved a unilateral disengagement plan and began removing Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005. All Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and the joint Israeli-Palestinian Erez Industrial Zone were dismantled, and 9,000 Israelis, most living in Gush Katif, were forcibly evicted.⁴”

Question: Are we going to witness Ashkelon, Ashdod & Ekron being taken by the Palestinians? Although the text does not specifically say that these cities belong to the Philistines, the context suggests that they are. These cities, along with Gath, were the five Philistine cities. They are

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip

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named together. The very next verse, verse 5 identifies an enemy as “Chrethites” who are considered to be people from Crete like the Philistines. Also identified as enemy are the “Philistines.” So, it is natural to conclude we are talking about Philistines. The question becomes, who are the current day Philistines if they are to be brought back into history as a constant enemy and thorn in their side? The Palestinians fulfill that role now.

It is commonly taught that the Philistines were originally Greeks from the island of Crete.

“During the Late Bronze Age collapse, an apparent confederation of seafarers known as the Sea Peoples are recorded as attacking ancient Egypt and other Eastern Mediterranean civilizations. While their exact origins are a mystery, and probably diverse, it is generally agreed that the Sea Peoples had origins in the greater Southern European area, including western Asia Minor, the Aegean, and the islands of the Mediterranean.⁵”

Per Unger referring to the “Cherethites” in verse 5:

“Those tribes of the Philistines who dwelt in the southwest of Canaan (I Sam. 30:14) and treated by Ezekiel (25:16, “Cherethim”) and Zephaniah (2:5) as synonymous with Philistines. The LXX and Syria rendered the words in these passages by Cretans, from which it is now known that the Philistines sprang from Crete, (cuneiform Kaptara)⁶”

From the Bible’s “Table of Nations:”

**Genesis 10:13 Mizraim became the father of
Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and
Naphtuhim**

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philistines>

⁶ Unger, Merrill F., Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Chicago:Moody Press,1971, page 191

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Genesis 10:14 and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphtorim.

Amos 9:7 “Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?” declares the Lord. “Have I not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, And the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?”

Abraham and Isaac encountered what Moses called Philistines in a place south of Gaza called Gerar. (Genesis chapters 20 and 26).

Most commentators will focus on the Greek Sea Peoples and say those were the Philistines. But the truth is obviously more complicated, more nuanced than most think.

There is an interesting historical side note captured on a Wikipedia web page as a footnote:

“H.H. Ben-Sasson, A History of the Jewish People, Harvard University Press, 1976, ISBN 0-674-39731-2, page 334: "In an effort to wipe out all memory of the bond between the Jews and the land, Hadrian changed the name of the province from Judaea to Syria-Palestina, a name that became common in non-Jewish literature."”

Back to our text of Zephaniah 2:4

**Zephaniah 2:4 For Gaza will be abandoned
And Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be
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Judgment of the Philistine cities is rife with irony

An interesting note from Alec Motyer concerning the time frame of these judgments: “Zephaniah presents a stylized picture of Philistia, tracing the cities from north to south, for he is not thinking of Philistia as the historical entity of his own day but using it as an eschatological picture.”⁷”

For Gaza will be abandoned. Gaza in Hebrew means “stronghold” according to Merrill Unger⁸. It has been continuously inhabited for a very long time, being one of the most ancient cities.

Abandoned. There is a play on words with the names of the Philistine cities. In this case, the Hebrew word for “abandoned” has the same first two letters as the name of the city, Gaza. The verb is a passive participle. The Hebrew construction “emphasizes a continuing action or state.”⁹”

Amplified Translation: **Gaza [the stronghold which was continuously inhabited] will be continually abandoned...**

A question that comes to mind concerns the possibility that Palestinians could conquer Ashkelon and Ashdod. Up to this point, Israel has been able to repulse most of the rocket¹⁰ attacks. But, that is one way that the Palestinians could drive out Israel. We also know that the Tribulation officially starts when the Anti-Christ signs a peace treaty with Israel. Why would Israel do that unless they felt that was a necessity?

The Palestinians have continued to acquire rockets with greater and greater ranges such that all of Israel is now within range of rockets launched from Gaza. We are not talking a couple of dozen rockets. We

⁷ Motyer, Alec, Zephaniah, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998, page 931

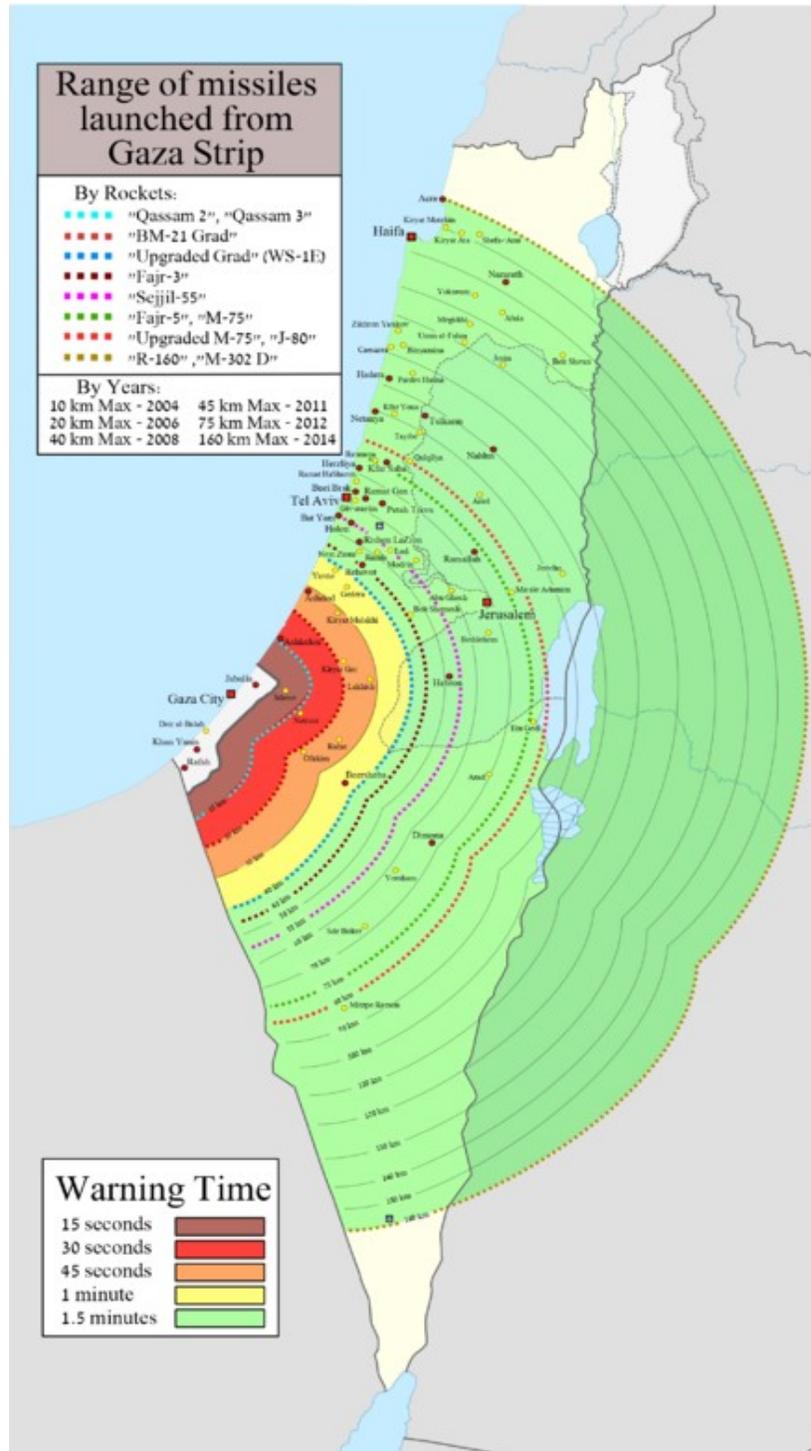
⁸ Unger, Merrill F., *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Chicago:Moody Press,1971, page 392

⁹ Motyer, Alec, Zephaniah, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998, page 931

¹⁰ I have used the term rocket since that is the term used by Wikipedia. Some may prefer the term “missile.”

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are talking thousands of rockets. Below is a graphic from Wikipedia that illustrates the problem of Palestinian rocket attacks.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel

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And Ashkelon a desolation. Ashkelon possibly means “migration, according to Gesenius¹¹.

“Ashkelon is a coastal city in the South District of Israel on the Mediterranean coast, 50 kilometres (31 mi) south of Tel Aviv, and 13 kilometres (8.1 mi) north of the border with the Gaza Strip.¹²”

Desolation. Means desolation, desert; root = silenced, astonished

Amplified text: **Ashkelon (migration) will become a desolation/silenced**

It is interesting to note that in the current era of history, the town at one point was named Al Migdal. According to Wikipedia, “Migdal was initially repopulated by Jewish immigrants and demobilized soldiers.” Repopulated by Jewish immigrants.

Ashdod will be driven out at noon.

“Ashdod is the sixth-largest city in Israel, located in the Southern District of the country, on the Mediterranean coast, located 32 kilometres (20 mi) south of Tel Aviv and 20 kilometres (12 mi) north of Ashkelon and 53 kilometres (33 mi) west of Jerusalem. Ashdod is an important regional industrial center. The Port of Ashdod is Israel's largest port accounting for 60% of the country's imported goods¹³.”

Ashdod. A fortified place, a castle [Gesenius]. Commanding position on a hill (Unger)

Driven out. To expel (as a people from a land)

Amplified text: **Ashdod [a fortification] at noon they will be expelled/driven out**

¹¹ Gesenius, translated by S. P. Tregelles, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans Publishing Co.1969. page 88

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkelon>

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashdod>

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And Ekron will be uprooted. Ekron means extermination (Unger)¹⁴/eradication (Gesenius)¹⁵.

Kiryat Ekron or Qiryath Eqron is an Israeli town located on the coastal plain in the Central Region of Israel. Kiryat Ekron is named after the biblical Ekron, a major Philistine city that once existed at nearby Tel Mikne.¹⁶

Uprooted. Comes from the same root as Ekron (extermination), to be over thrown (as a city)

Amplified text: **Ekron (extermination) will be uprooted (exterminated)**

Verse 4 Amplified translation:

Gaza [the stronghold which was continuously inhabited] will be continuously abandoned

Ashkelon (migration) will become desolation/silenced

Ashdod [a fortification] at noon they will be expelled/driven out

Ekron (extermination) will be uprooted (exterminated)

Zephaniah 2:5 Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; And I will destroy you So that there will be no inhabitant.

¹⁴ Unger, Merrill F., Unger's Bible Dictionary, Chicago:Moody Press,1971, page 293

¹⁵ Gesenius, translated by S. P. Tregelles, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans Publishing Co.1969. page651

¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekron>

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Zephaniah 2:6 So the seacoast will be pastures, With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks.

Zephaniah 2:7 And 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.

Zephaniah 2:8 “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.

Zephaniah 2:9 “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.”