

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2  
Zephaniah 2:4-11

## Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2

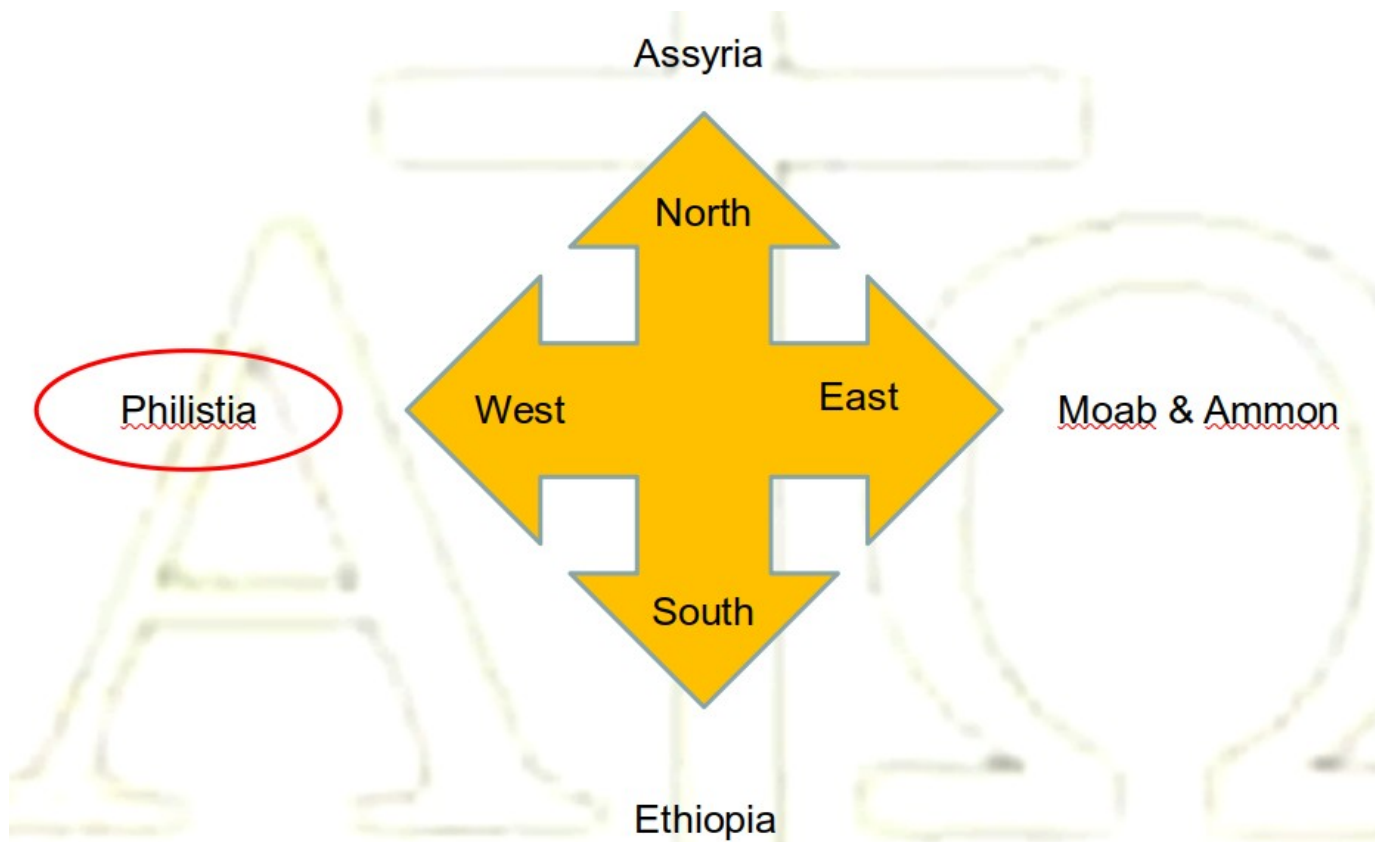
Last week we looked at the beginning of the prophecies against Israel's neighboring enemies. Starting in chapter 2 verse 4 the prophecies are turned against Israel's hostile neighbors.

Verses 4-7 Philistia

Verses 8-11 Moab & Ammon

Verse 12 Cush

Verses 13-14 Assyria



## **Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**

### **Zephaniah 2:4-11**

It is amazing to think that Israel's ancient enemies are being brought back to life for the Tribulation. There are many different perspectives on Bible prophecy. There are some called "preterists" who believe a majority if not all of the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled. So they would not believe there will be a Tribulation including a temple built in Jerusalem.

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."<sup>1</sup>"

Today, many call Israel, Palestine because of what a Roman emperor did almost 2,000 years ago. Others prefer to use a more neutral term, "Levant."

"The Levant (/lə'vænt/) is an approximate historical geographical term referring to a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean region of West Asia. In its narrowest sense, which is in use today in archaeology and other cultural contexts, it is equivalent to Cyprus and a stretch of land bordering the Mediterranean Sea in western Asia: i.e. the historical region of Syria ("Greater Syria"), which includes present-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian territories and most of Turkey southwest of the middle Euphrates. Its overwhelming characteristic is that it represents the land bridge between Africa and Eurasia. In its widest historical sense, the Levant included all of the Eastern Mediterranean with its islands; that is, it included all of the countries

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria\\_Palaestina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria_Palaestina)

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

along the Eastern Mediterranean shores, extending from Greece to Cyrenaica in eastern Libya.<sup>2</sup>”

Back to our text of Zephaniah 2:4

**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 first prophesy is against the Philistine cities. Judgment of the Philistine cities is rife with irony as we studied last week.

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)**

The more I study the Bible, the more I realize how little I know and how much more there is to learn. For today, let’s take the city of Ashkelon. In our discussion, it was one of the five cities of the Philistines during King David’s time.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levant>

## Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2 Zephaniah 2:4-11



<https://cdn.britannica.com/55/3355-050-CB05E0A7/UN-partition-plan-Palestine-1947.jpg> (Encyclopædia Britannica)

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

Note on the map that there is no Ashkelon, only Al Majdal, an Arab town in an area designated by the U.N. as belonging to the Arab state. No city named Ashkelon. Note some milestones from the Wikipedia article on Ashkelon:

“The Battle of Ascalon was the last action of the First Crusade. In 1270, the Mamluk sultan Baybars ordered the citadel and harbour at the site to be destroyed. As a result of this destruction, the city was abandoned by its inhabitants and fell into disuse.<sup>3</sup>”

“In 1596, Ottoman records showed Majdal to be a large village of 559 Muslim households, making it the 7th-most-populous locality in Palestine after Safad, Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, Hebron and Kafr Kanna.<sup>4</sup>”

“Majdal was occupied by the Egyptian army in the early stages of the 1948 war, along with the rest of the Gaza region that had been allocated to the Arab State in the United Nations plan.<sup>5</sup>”

“During 1949, the town was renamed Migdal Gaza, and then Migdal Gad. Soon afterwards it became Migdal Ashkelon. The city began to expand as the population grew. In 1951, the neighborhood of Afridar was established for Jewish immigrants from South Africa, and in 1953 it was incorporated into the city. The current name Ashkelon was adopted and the town was granted local council status in 1953.<sup>6</sup>”

Sometimes I have to “pinch myself” in order to verify I am in the present and not in some computer virtual reality sim. There was no Israel for nearly 2,000 years. Now, there is one. The leaders are actively encouraging Jews to return to the nation of Israel which for many years had been called Palestine. Then there are the ancient cities of the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkelon>

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkelon>

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkelon>

<sup>6</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkelon>

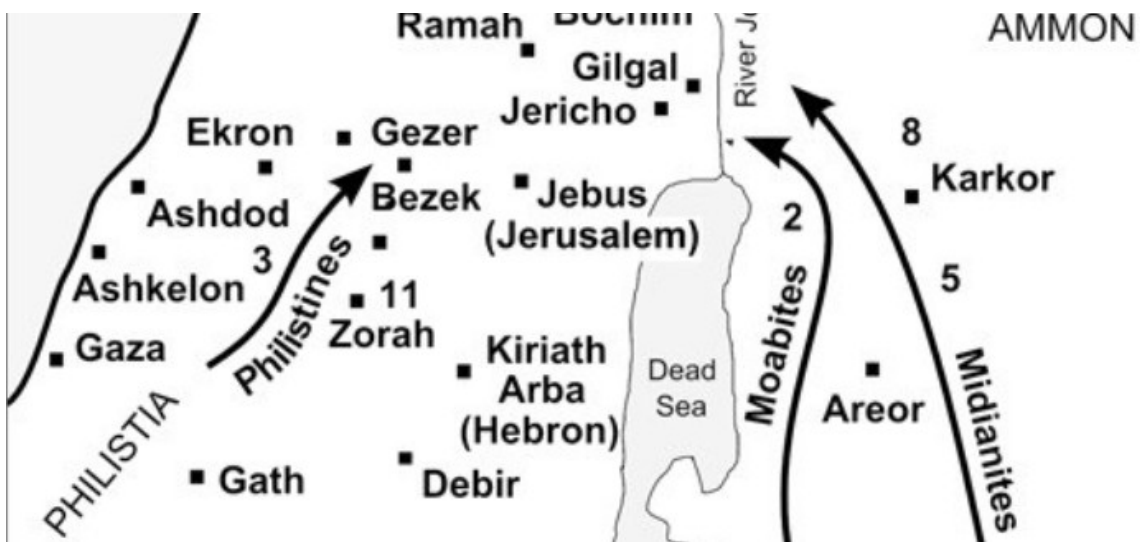
**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

Philistines. One of them, the one I am considering, Ashkelon, ceased to exist. But the Bible says there will be an Ashkelon in the Tribulation. Then it came back as Majdal, an Arab town. Then it was conquered by Israel and renamed Ashkelon. And if I am right, then it will be lost to the present day Philistines only to be regained by Israel in the Millennium.

**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.**

Verse 5 continues with a blanket judgment on the Philistines. They are described in four different ways so there is no misunderstanding:

1. **Inhabitants of the seacoast.** The Philistines occupied the area on the seacoast opposite Jerusalem. Part of this area should have belonged to the tribe of Dan. However the indigenous people repulsed Dan. The Philistines took over this land on the seacoast.



<https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/bj-maps-egypt-canaan/><sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> copyright: www.thebiblejourney.org. These maps are the copyright of Chris & Jenifer Taylor of the Bible Journey. They are made available for personal and teaching use under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license.

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

2. **The nation of the Cherethites.** “So, the Cherethites were a defined group within or closely associated with the Philistines.<sup>8</sup>”

3. **O Canaan.** Canaan, prior to the occupation by the sons of Israel was inhabited by a number of different people called in general, “Canaan.” The Philistines at some point dominated the sea coast. We saw they were a problem for the sons of Israel in the book of Judges.

**Deuteronomy 2:23 And the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and lived in their place.)**

**Caphtor.** This is usually understood to refer to Crete or Cyprus. So they apparently replaced the indigenous people called the Avvim.

4. **Land of the Philistines.** Self-explanatory – Land of the Philistines.

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

Apparently, after the judgment of the Philistines, the land will revert back to the sons of Israel in an agrarian environment.

**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.**

The Young’s Literal Translation says it a little differently:

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Cherethites.html>

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

**Zephaniah 2:7 (YLT) And the coast hath been for the remnant of the house of Judah, By them they have pleasure, In houses of Ashkelon at even they lie down, For inspect them doth Jehovah their God, And He hath turned back [to] their captivity.**

The coast, formerly occupied by Philistines will be for the remnant of the house of Judah.

Assuming this is a reference to the Millennial state, the “fortune” of Judah will be restored.

One commentator sums it up this way, “This concept of restoration is rooted in the legislation of the deuteronomic law book. The code of the covenant had indicated that after all the blessings and the curses of the covenant had come to pass, if the nation would return to the Lord, he would return their captivity (Deut. 30:1-3).<sup>9</sup>”

**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.**

Now the prophesy switches to the east against Moab and Ammon. They are often mentioned together. But who are Moab and Ammon?

Read Genesis 19:30-38. Moab was the son of Lot and his eldest daughter, i.e. by incest. Ammon was the son of Lot and his youngest daughter, also by incest. Over and over again in the Old Testament we encounter people who have a tendency to not trust the Lord and just do things that they think are right in their own eyes, like in the book of Judges. But were we

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<sup>9</sup> Robertson, O. Palmer, The books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, page 301



**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

to stop and think, and ask God, what is His plan; What is His will? Can we learn from their mistakes. All we have to do is walk by faith.

**Moab.** According to both Unger<sup>10</sup> and Gesenius<sup>11</sup>, this may mean “from father.” The issue is the relationship between father and mother. From the mother’s perspective, the child is “from father.” Perhaps one way of obscurely saying it was from incest.

**Ammon.** According to Unger<sup>12</sup>, Ammon is a form of Ben-ammi and means “from my kindred” or “inbred.” Gesenius<sup>13</sup> says the same. In other words, incest.

So the fact of incest was an open secret.

One commentator summarized the acrimony of Moab and Ammon against Israel:

“Both the Moabites and the Ammonites had a long history of acrid animosity against the people of God. Moab’s king Balak hired Balaam to curse a defenseless Israel as they came out of Egypt (Num. 22:3). He received in return only the prophetic assurance that a star and a scepter would rise out of Israel which would crush his own forehead (24:17). This ancient warning now receives prophetic reinforcement by the words of Zephaniah.

Documentation is found in the book of Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite  
shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of  
their descendants, even to the tenth**

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<sup>10</sup> Unger, Merrill F., Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Chicago:Moody Press,1971, page 753

<sup>11</sup> Gesenius, translated by S. P. Tregelles, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans Publishing Co.1969. Page 455

<sup>12</sup> Unger, Merrill F., Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Chicago:Moody Press,1971, pages 45 & 134

<sup>13</sup> Gesenius, translated by S. P. Tregelles, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans Publishing Co.1969. Page 638

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

**generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord,**

**Deuteronomy 23:4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.**

An example of the treachery of Moab against Israel when God brought the sons of Israel out of Egypt, from the book of Numbers.

**Numbers 22:1 Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho.**

**Numbers 22:2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.**

**Numbers 22:3 So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel.**

**Numbers 22:4 Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.” And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.**

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2  
Zephaniah 2:4-11

**Numbers 22:5** So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, “Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me.

**Numbers 22:6** Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

Balaam appears to be a righteous believer. First he says “the Lord my God.” Then he understands that God is in control of history.

**Numbers 22:18** Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God.”

Balaam is visited by “the Angel of the Lord,” the pre-Incarnate Christ.

I used to think of Balaam as a bad guy. But it would appear he is a good guy who was asked to curse the sons of Israel by a bad guy.

There are other passages that indicate Ammon and Moab were hostile to Israel from time to time. This was especially true during the Exodus journey into the promised land. You can read more about some of these

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

in Judges chapter 11 which we covered some time ago. Also in Deuteronomy chapter 2. Also see Judges chapter 3 where Ehud kills the “very fat” king of Moab.

The area of the Middle East occupied by Moab and Ammon encompasses what today is the nation of Jordan.

**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.”**

Here is a play not just on words, but on historical events. Lot and his daughters fled the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Subsequently, the daughters had children by their father. It was incest, which was forbidden by Leviticus 18:6-26. Now the nations descendant from these two sons will suffer the same judgment as those in the cities their ancestors fled. Not only that but there is a treachery here. Abraham took care of Lot. He prayed to God to save the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, likely focused on saving Lot’s family. During the rest of history, Moab and Ammon were thorns in the sides of the sons of Israel, i.e. descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

**Therefore, as I live.** The Young’s Literal Translation has “Therefore, I live, An affirmation of Jehovah of Hosts, God of Israel.” The text is referring to the essence of God. From God’s essence comes a declaration.

**Declares.** This is the noun that has the effect of saying “Proclamation.” This is a very strong statement that God is going to do this.

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

**Lord of hosts.** This is literally, Yahweh of the armies.

**The remnant of My people will plunder them.** Plunder is loot and booty. What was once the possessions of Ammon and Moab will now belong to Israel. Same thing happened when the sons of Israel left Egypt.

**Exodus 12:35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing;**

**Exodus 12:36 and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered (different word than our context) the Egyptians.**

**And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.** Normally an inheritance results when someone dies. In this case, the inhabitants of Ammon and Moab will die. Then the remainder of the Jews will inherit their territory. This has not happened yet.

**Zephaniah 2:10 This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the Lord of hosts.**

In all of this, please remember that the Jews are God's people. At present they have rejected their savior, but God will bless them in the future when they return to their God. We will get to that in Zephaniah chapter 3. But for now read the words of Genesis chapter 12.

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

**Genesis 12:1** Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you;

**Genesis 12:2** And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

**Genesis 12:3** And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

From time to time you may have an enemy that you would so very much like to have vengeance on. Do not get in God’s way. He doesn’t need your help in disciplining someone.

**Zephaniah 2:11** The Lord will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.

**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,

**Surrounded by Enemies – Part 2**  
**Zephaniah 2:4-11**

**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,

**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.