

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3

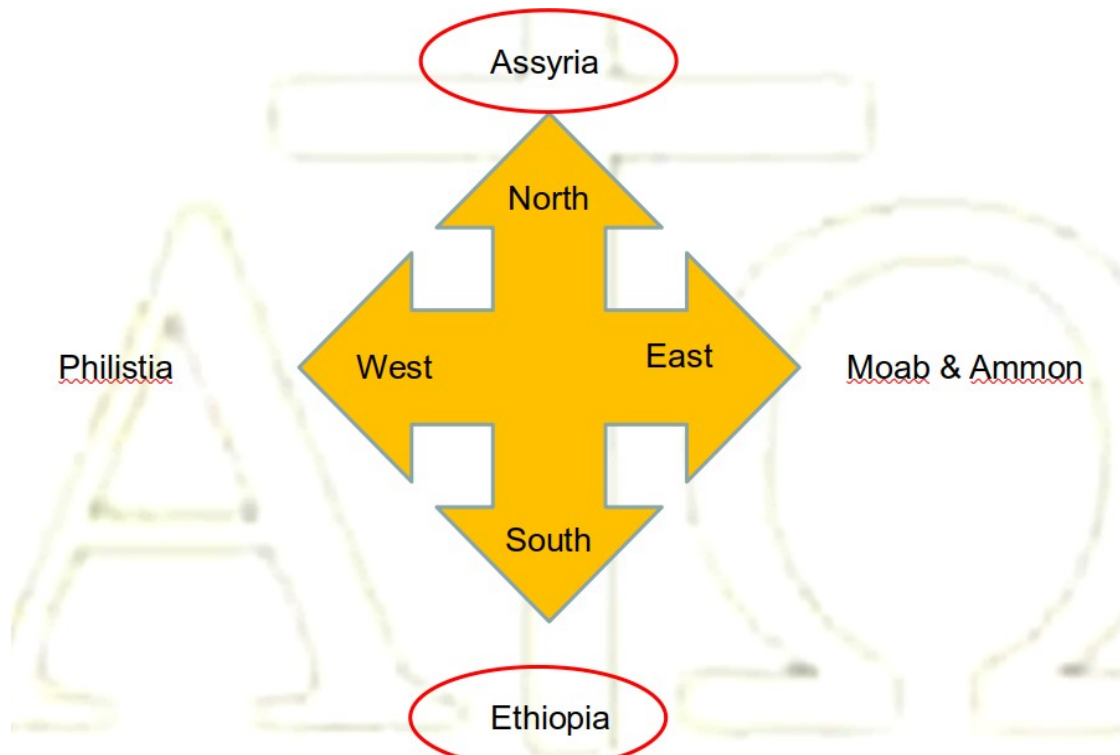
Two weeks ago we continued looking at Zephaniah’s prophecies against Israel’s neighboring enemies. This started in chapter 2 verse 4.

Verses 4-7 Philistia

Verses 8-11 Moab & Ammon

Verse 12 Cush

Verses 13-14 Assyria



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 prophesy. There are some called “preterists” who believe a majority if not all of the Old Testament prophecies have already been fulfilled. Because of their perspective they would not believe there will be a Tribulation including a temple built in Jerusalem. They might say

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3 Zephaniah 2:12-15

that the current nation of Israel is just a coincidence. They would discount the revival of Baal worship. And on and on. I suppose that when the Rapture takes place, they will have an explanation for that as well.

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.¹”

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.” This is repeated to bring to mind that “Palestine” is a name provided by a Roman emperor out of frustration against the Jews who wanted freedom from Rome.

“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 along the Eastern Mediterranean shores, extending from Greece to Cyrenaica in eastern Libya.²”

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria_Palaestina

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

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

This is reiterated because you will hear this term from time to time. This is a more politically neutral term than “Palestine.”

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. If memory serves, Herman as well as other pastors have said the same thing. Both Gaza and Ashkelon have been studied briefly in previous weeks. This week, let us look briefly at Ashdod from Wikipedia.

“The first documented urban settlement at Tel Ashdod / Isdud dates to the 17th century BCE, when it was a fortified Canaanite city. It was destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze Age. During the Iron Age, it was a prominent Philistine city, one of the five Philistine city-states. It is

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3 **Zephaniah 2:12-15**

mentioned 13 times in the Hebrew Bible. After being captured by Uzziah, it was briefly ruled by the Kingdom of Judah before it was taken by the Assyrians. During the Persian period, Nehemiah condemned the returning Jews for intermarrying Ashdod's residents. Under Hellenistic rule, the city was known as Azotus. It was later incorporated into the Hasmonean kingdom. During the 1st century BCE, Pompey removed the city from Judean rule and annexed it to the Roman province of Syria. Ashdod was a bishopric under Byzantine rule, but its importance gradually slipped and by the Middle Ages it was a village.”

“The modern city of Ashdod was founded in 1956. On May 1, 1956, then finance minister Levi Eshkol approved the establishment of the city of Ashdod.³”

Interesting that Israel consciously built a town and called it Ashdod.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashdod>

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3 Zephaniah 2:12-15



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

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

The map is presented a second time. The point is that the borders in the Middle East have been fluid depending on wars and treaties. It is my contention, based upon studying Bible prophesy that they will continue to change.

**Zephaniah 2:12 “You also, O Ethiopians, will
be slain by My sword.”**

There is a single prophetic verse against “Ethiopia.”

Ethiopia. First, this is not modern day Ethiopia. The Hebrew is “Cush.”

If there was no explanation of why Cush is not Ethiopia, there would be a lingering question. Why? So from Wikipedia:

“Ancient Aethiopia, (Greek: Αἰθιοπία, romanized: Aithiopia; also known as Ethiopia) first appears as a geographical term in classical documents in reference to the upper Nile region of Sudan, as well as certain areas south of the Sahara. Its earliest mention is in the works of Homer: twice in the Iliad, and three times in the Odyssey. The Greek historian Herodotus "specifically" uses the appellation to refer to such parts of sub-Saharan Africa as were then known within the inhabitable world.”

“The Greek name Aithiopia (Αἰθιοπία, from Αἰθίωψ, Aithíops, 'an Ethiopian') is a compound derived of two Greek words: αἶθω, aithō, 'I burn' + ὤψ, ōps, 'face'. According to the Perseus Project, this designation properly translates in noun form as burnt-face and in adjectival form as red-brown. As such, it was used as a vague term for darker skinned populations than the Greeks since the time of Homer. The term was applied to such peoples when within the range of observation of the ancient geographers, primarily in what was then Nubia (in ancient

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

Sudan). With the expansion of geographical knowledge, the exonym successively extended to certain other areas below the Sahara.⁴”

This name is the name of one of the sons of Ham.

Genesis 10:6 The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan.

Genesis 10:7 The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

Genesis 10:8 Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth.

Genesis 10:9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.”

“**Nimrod** in the Bible was the great-grandson of Noah through the line of Cush (Genesis 10:8). Nimrod is described as the first of the “mighty men” to appear on the earth after the great flood. Previous to the flood, there had been giants and mighty men on the earth, and “also afterward” (Genesis 6:4). From examination of the biblical texts and other ancient documents, it is clear that Nimrod was one of these mighty men, and there is also evidence that he was much larger than the average man—a giant, so to speak.⁵”

Keep in mind, the word for mighty does not mean the person is a good person. It just means he is strong and knows how to use that strength. We encountered such bad people in Zephaniah chapter 1:

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aethiopia>

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nimrod-in-the-Bible.html>

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

Zephaniah 1:14 Near is the great day of the Lord, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

The word “warrior” is actually the “mighty.” Those who are unbelievers will be destroyed. Nimrod was a “mighty” but not necessarily a “good” mighty man as some commentators would have you think.

Nimrod. From GotQuestions.org: “Nimrod appears as a character in the mythology of many ancient cultures; he shows up in Hungarian, Greek, Arabic, Syrian, and Armenian legends. There is evidence that the Epic of Gilgamesh and the myth of Hercules both find their origins in Nimrod’s life. Nimrod was undoubtedly a powerful, charismatic hero-figure of the ancient world who actually attempted to build a tower to heaven, hoping to thwart the plans of God. It isn’t hard to see why so many myths and legends would spring up in the wake of such a man. In the end, however, Nimrod’s power and glory came to nothing, because God is stronger than even the mightiest of men, and He cannot be thwarted. Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord, but humility before the Lord is the posture of the wise (Proverbs 3:34; 11:2; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).⁶”

One might surmise that Nimrod was not a grace oriented believer. From my ancient notes from R. B. Thieme Jr., he did not mince words. The Hebrew could make one think that Nimrod was a great person. The word is “before,” but it has a variety of meanings. Thieme went to the Septuagint (LXX) to get a better understanding of what the ancients thought of Nimrod. He translates the first half of Genesis 10:9 as “He became a mighty warrior, a hunter in opposition to the Lord.” That is where GotQuestions went, just not as bluntly. The Hebrew could be

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nimrod-in-the-Bible.html>

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

translated “Nimrod a mighty (one) before the Lord.” But the Septuagint (LXX) can be translated like “Nimrod a mighty (one) against the Lord.”

Here are some points from R. B. Thieme Jr.:

1. Nimrod (the word) means to rebel. This is what Gesenius says also.
2. Nimrod first rebelled in his own soul.
3. Emotional Revolt of the soul is one of the characteristics of the reversionist.
4. In his spiritual life at the point of God consciousness and Gospel hearing resulted in Satan domination of soul.
5. Became first revolutionist in history.
6. Nimrod hunted and destroyed men in opposition to the Lord! Organized murder. Nimrod used violence to overthrow establishment.
7. Here is Satan seeking to set aside prophecy of Noah in Genesis 9:26-27.⁷

Here is some additional background on Nimrod from Robby Dean. He is explaining the rejection of God by the people after the flood.

“What happened historically was that they knew God. They had the evidence from the flood. When they came off the ark and for the next few generations they were still seeing the reverberations of the flood in terms of both geology, earthquakes, and also in the weather. Those men who were eyewitnesses to the flood were able to give testimony to their great, great grandchildren. What those great grandchildren did was reject that testimony, they rebelled against God, and they tried to redefine what had happened in terms of these various mythologies. And that is what the

⁷ From my notes on R. B. Thieme’s Civilizations special.

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3 **Zephaniah 2:12-15**

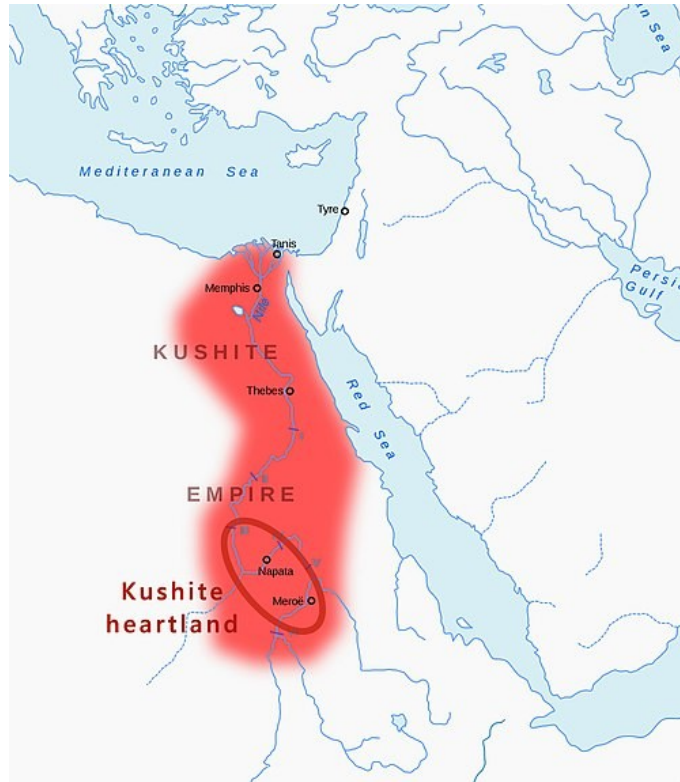
tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is really all about. Genesis 10 gives us a description of how the descendants of Noah scattered over the face of the earth. Then in Genesis 11:1-9 there is a description of the tower of Babel and the human race under the leadership of Nimrod and how they sought to build this tower to heaven, they sought to make a name, a reputation, for themselves that is superior to God's reputation. What the writer is indicating is that they are seeking to set themselves over against God. They are worshipping the creature instead of the creator. There was no gratefulness and grace orientation for what God has done in destroying the antediluvian situation, and after the flood antagonism sets in with the arrogance of man's soul, and they are reinterpreting the flood as God making war against man. So now they have to protect themselves from God, which is the reason for building the tower. That becomes the historical basis, even though it gets lost over time, throughout the ancient near east for why they established their worship sites in high places. They saw these as a place of refuge from the judgment of God.⁸”

Although Nimrod does not deal directly with our passage in Zephaniah, it does give some background to Cush. I had not planned on taking that detour, but it will be obvious to some in the Tribulation, that after the removal of all Christians at the Rapture, there will be incontrovertible evidence of the fulfillment of prophecy. But like the post-flood crowd, most people will ignore it.

What I have not done yet is identify where on the map Cush is. It is just below Egypt.

⁸ <https://deanbible.org/old-testament-menuitem/genesis-menuitem/message/2003-genesis-063a/read>

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3 Zephaniah 2:12-15



From Wikipedia⁹

Map shows the “Kushite Empire” when the Cushites ruled Egypt in the 25th Dynasty.

Per Wikipedia:

“The 25th dynasty was a line of pharaohs who originated in the Kingdom of Kush, located in present-day northern Sudan and Upper Egypt. Most of this dynasty's kings saw Napata as their spiritual homeland. They reigned in part or all of Ancient Egypt for nearly a century, from 744 to 656 BC.”¹⁰

The question becomes, will there be an Egypt/Sudan entity that will harass Israel in the years to come? Assuming that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, then the 25th dynasty was in a way a help to king Hezekiah being a distraction for the Assyrians. The 25th dynasty was

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Kush

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-fifth_Dynasty_of_Egypt

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

finished by Zephaniah's time. It was Pharaoh Necho II of the 26th dynasty that killed king Josiah in 609 B.C.

Now, after only a single verse Zephaniah turns to Assyria.

Zephaniah 2:13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north And destroy Assyria, And He will make Nineveh a desolation, Parched like the wilderness.

Stretch out His hand. This term was used against Judah in Zephaniah 1:4. Here in chapter 2 it is now used against an enemy of Judah.

Destroy. This is an intensive form of a verb that can mean annihilate, broken, destroyed, perish, obliterate.

Assyria. The Assyrians conquered Northern Israel and deported many from their homes to foreign lands. They then repopulated the land with foreigners. This led to the formation of a mixed population in Jesus' time. They were called Samaritans. Sometimes they considered themselves Jews when Judah was doing well and sometimes as not Jews when the Jews were not doing so well.

One note about the Assyrians, which R. B. Thieme Jr. brings out in his treatment of Isaiah 36 is that the Assyrians were very cruel in their tortures. There is an interesting article from 2018 in the Guardian which addresses this while commenting on a display of Assyrian artifacts from the time of Ashurbanipal (reigned from 669 BC to his death in 631 BC).

“You have to hand it to the ancient Assyrians – they were honest. Their artistic propaganda relishes every detail of torture, massacre, battlefield executions and human displacement that made Assyria the dominant power of the Middle East from about 900 to 612BC. Assyrian art contains some of the most appalling images ever created. In one scene,

Surrounded by Enemies – Part 3
Zephaniah 2:12-15

tongues are being ripped from the mouths of prisoners. That will mute their screams when, in the next stage of their torture, they are flayed alive. In another relief a surrendering general is about to be beheaded and in a third prisoners have to grind their fathers' bones before being executed in the streets of Nineveh.¹¹”

This is the result of sin natures. In the Tribulation, the Holy Spirit's restraining power will be removed when Christians are raptured. The sin nature of mankind will be on steroids.

Zephaniah 2:14 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.

Zephaniah 2:15 This is the exultant city Which dwells securely, Who says in her heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” How she has become a desolation, A resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss And wave his hand in contempt.

I am. Literally, “I” without a verb. Interesting phrase. In verse 9, God Himself says “I.” Here the city of Nineveh says once again, “I.” We know that is the point of contention between God and Satan. The Devil is not quoted as saying “I” in Isaiah chapter 14, he only uses the first person singular of the various verbs. But here the city says “I.”

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/nov/06/i-am-ashurbanipal-review-british-museum>