

# Zephaniah 2:8-11

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*The LORD pronounces judgment against Moab and Ammon for their arrogance against His covenant people. He will destroy them like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.*

After Zephaniah's indictment against Philistia (vv. 4-7), the LORD spoke in the first person, as He did previously (v. 5). This time, His indictment fell on other neighboring countries, namely Moab and Ammon. The Moabites were kinsmen to the Israelites, tracing their ancestry to the older daughter of Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Genesis 19:37). They were a pagan people who worshiped a god named Chemosh (Numbers 21:29; Jeremiah 48:7).

Likewise, the Ammonites were kinsmen to the Israelites. They traced their ancestry to the younger daughter of Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Genesis 19:38). These nations were Judah's neighbors on the east, across the Jordan ([See Map](#)). These two countries are within the border of modern day Jordan. The capital city of Jordan is Amman, which carries forward the ancient ancestry to the modern day.

Although these two nations of Moab and Ammon were closely related to Israel and Judah, they were often in conflict with them. Earlier in Israel's history, the LORD used the prophet Amos to denounce the sins of Moab and Ammon. He pronounced judgment against the Moabites because they burned the bones of the king of Edom to ash (Amos 2:1-3). He also pronounced judgment against the Ammonites because of their brutality; they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead to enlarge their territory northward (Amos 1:13-15).

In our passage, the LORD declared, *I have heard the taunting of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon* (vs 8). The words *taunting* and *revilings* are parallel to each other. The first refers to the act of slandering someone, which means uttering false charges against that person to damage her reputation. The second term *revilings* speaks of hurling insults. The LORD said that He had *heard*, meaning that He took notice of what *Moab* and *Ammon* were doing. He had heard their *taunting and revilings, with which they have taunted My people* (vs 8).

The LORD would punish the Moabites and the Ammonites because they had threatened and insulted the people of Judah. Their insulting words ascended to heaven, and the LORD heard them. Not only did the Moabites and Ammonites insult God's people, they also became *arrogant against their territory* (vs 8). That means that they boasted about how they would march over Judah's boundaries and seize her land. Because of this sin, the LORD pronounced judgment on Moab and Ammon. He took an oath to judge them, beginning with, *"Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts* (vs 9).

In the ancient world, it was a common practice for people to take an oath to demonstrate their intention to keep certain prescribed obligations. This oath-taking usually involved calling on the name of a deity to attest to the oath transactions. In Zephaniah, however, the LORD swore by

His own existence because He is the highest authority, the only Supreme being. He added the formula, *declares the LORD of hosts* to give more weight to His solemn oath.

The term *LORD* refers to Yahweh, the self-existent and eternal God (Exodus 3:14). The term *hosts* translates the Hebrew term “sabaoth,” meaning “armies.” This term refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). All in all, the phrase *the LORD of hosts* demonstrates God’s power. It emphasizes His character as a warrior leading His angelic army to fight against *Moab* and *Ammon*. After the phrase *the LORD of hosts*, the *LORD* added the phrase *the God of Israel*.

The *LORD* is *the God of Israel*. He had established a covenant relationship with them, taking them as His treasured possession and making them a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6). Because of that relationship, the *LORD* would fight against the Moabites and the Ammonites to avenge the people of Judah.

The Suzerain God of Judah then spelled out the judgment that would fall on Moab and Ammon: *Surely Moab will be like Sodom and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah* (vs 9). The word *surely* emphasizes the certainty of God’s actions. Sodom and Gomorrah were two wicked cities that the *LORD* destroyed in the days of Lot, the ancestor of Moab and Ammon. In the book of Genesis, we learn about their destruction due to the wickedness of the people:

“Then the Lord rained on *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.”  
(Genesis 19:24–25)

The point of comparison is that the *LORD* would destroy *Moab and Ammon* just as He destroyed *Sodom and Gomorrah*. He emphasized the extent of the destruction by saying they would become *a place possessed by nettles and salt pits* (vs 9).

The *nettles* are wild plants. Their leaves are armed with stings connected to a small bag of poison. Its presence betokens waste and neglected soil. *Salt* has two distinct and opposing qualities. On the one hand, it is edible, flavor imparting, and essential for life (Matthew 5:13). On the other hand, it is a disinfectant and in large quantities a poison (Ezekiel 16:4). Figuratively, *salt pits* pictures sterility or barrenness (Deuteronomy 29:23; Judges 9:45; Jeremiah 17:6).

The image in Zephaniah is that *Moab* and *Ammon* would become an infertile wasteland as the areas around the Dead Sea (Deuteronomy 3:17; Joshua 18:19). The two cities would become *a perpetual desolation* (vs 9), unable to produce any fruits.

Not only would Moab and Ammon become a permanent ruin, but also, their inhabitants would lose their land. As the *LORD* stated, *The remnant of My people will plunder them and the remainder of My nation will inherit them* (vs 9).

The phrases *My people* and *My nation* refer to the people of Judah. The *remnant of My people* would be the ones who would escape the coming disaster, likely those who were faithful (v. 3, v.

7). The verb *plunder* means to take something without having to work for it. The children of Israel are said to have plundered the Egyptians when they asked for and received great gifts before leaving the land (Exodus 12:36).

Thus the *remnant* of Judah would take the possessions of the Moabites and Ammonites without having to do anything other than receive it. This is likely because a foreign invader conquered the land and exiled its population, as is what also occurred with the coastal Philistine cities.

As Zephaniah heard the divine indictment, he commented on the LORD's declaration and said, *This they will have in return for their pride* (vs 10). The term *pride* in Scripture is presented as the opposite of living by faith (Habakkuk 2:4). Pride holds that we as humans know what is best, and are entitled to rule over and exploit others. But in reality, pride leads to our own destruction (Proverbs 11:2; 16:18; and 29:23).

The Moabites and Ammonites were proud *because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts* (vs 10). But the book of Proverbs makes clear that "the LORD will tear down the house of the proud" (Proverbs 15:25). Therefore, these two nations would fall under God's judgment and would become a wasteland like *Sodom and Gomorrah* (v. 9). The *LORD will be terrifying to them* (vs 11).

The word *terrifying* occurs in the book of Habakkuk, where it is translated as "fearful" (Habakkuk 1:7). The Suzerain God of Judah would make the Moabites and Ammonites afraid by His power and strength. He would strike fear and terror in their hearts, likely through the agent of a foreign invader.

God will be a terror to them *for He will starve all the gods of the earth* (vs 11).

The Hebrew word translated *starve* indicates being famished. The LORD would show that *all the pagan gods* were weak and powerless when He destroyed their worshippers. The defeat of the pagan gods would demonstrate that the LORD alone is the true God because *all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place* (vs 11).

That means that the pagan nations will worship the LORD one day. God would display His supreme power and superiority over the pagan gods, who are nothing but lifeless idols (Deuteronomy 32:21). Eventually, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10). But this prophecy seems to apply specifically to Judah. It is uncertain if/when this prophecy will be fulfilled. It could have been fulfilled in part a number of times already. It will likely be completely fulfilled during the thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth (Revelation 20:4-6).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>8</sup> "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.**

**<sup>9</sup> “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.”**

**<sup>10</sup> This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the Lord of hosts. <sup>11</sup> 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.**