

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH – THE FEARSOME DAY OF THE LORD’S ANGER

INTRODUCTION --THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Imagine waking up to a perfectly calm morning—blue skies, no wind, no clouds—only to discover later that day a hurricane was already forming offshore, invisible to the naked eye but absolutely certain in its arrival. That was the experience of my family back in 1989 when Hurricane Hugo was unleashing its devastating power. Karen and her Mom and our four kids drove down to Florida to stay at Patrick AFB right on the beach for their annual pre-homeschool vacation. The weather was beautiful. They stayed in SC in a nice motel along I-95 and enjoyed the outdoor pool. When they drove back a week later, Hugo had swept thru the region, snapped off all the trees like toothpicks; wiped out the motel and left the pool filled with tree limbs and debris. What a dramatic picture of powerful destruction seemingly coming out of nowhere.

That is the setting for the prophecy of Zephaniah. But in his case the nation had ample **warning**. Judah appears religiously active, politically stable, and morally indifferent. But beneath the surface, divine judgment is gathering momentum.

Zephaniah is the prophet who pulls back the curtain and says, “*The storm is not coming—it is already on the way.*”

Historical Background (1:1)

- **Date of Writing:** during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 BC)
 - Had to be before the Fall of Nineveh in 612 BC
 - Had to be prior to Josiah’s full reforms – so soon after he came to power at age 8 – following the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Ammon
 - Maybe about 630 BC
- **Prophet Zephaniah** himself is of royal lineage, giving him unique authority – 1:1 traces his ancestry back to his great-great-grandfather = King Hezekiah Name = “*Yahweh has hidden*” or “*Yahweh has treasured*,”
- **Situation in Judah:** Syncretistic, worshiping Yahweh alongside Baal

Theme of the Book = The Day of the Lord (saw same emphasis in book of Joel)

Oscillating Prophecy – Swings back and forth

- Prophecy bounces back and forth between near term judgment on apostate Judah – when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon will destroy Jerusalem in 586 BC; and the end times scenario when God’s wrath will be unleashed against the whole world
- The prophecy bounces back and forth between an emphasis on God judging the nations and on God judging His own people in Judah and Jerusalem.
- The Prophecy moves from judgment and wrath to salvation and blessing as **Chap. 3** finishes with a description of eventual salvation for the believing remnant.

Overview:

The book of Zephaniah focuses on the fearsome Day of the Lord which has both near term implications and eschatological fulfillment. Judah was in rough shape. King Manasseh had led

the nation into idolatry and even human sacrifice. His son continued the wicked course of God's elect nation. Judgment was imminent. The prophet called for the people to repent and return to holiness and purity as good King Josiah tried to redirect the people back to God. But Zephaniah had to bring the hard message that the terrible Day of the Lord is coming to Judah. Judgment will extend as well to the foreign nations that have oppressed Judah and demonstrated arrogant self-sufficiency. But the message of ultimate restoration is included as well. Not just blessing for Judah, but all the nations will eventually call on the name of the Lord and join in the blessing at the end times.

Structure of the Book:

Twofold Division:

- I. 1:2 – 3:7 THE DAY OF THE LORD UNLEASHES DIVINE JUDGMENT
- II. 3:8-20 THE DAY OF THE LORD CULMINATES IN MESSIANIC BLESSING

I. 1:2 – 3:7 THE DAY OF THE LORD UNLEASHES DIVINE JUDGMENT

A. (1:2-6) THE SCOPE OF JUDGMENT IN THE DAY OF THE LORD – GOD'S ACCOUNTABILITY CANNOT BE ESCAPED

1. (:2-3) Total (Universal) Scope in the End Times Judgment

a. (2) Summary Comprehensive Judgment (cf. Noah's Flood, **Gen. 6; 2 Pet. 3**)

“I will completely remove all things

From the face of the earth,’ declares the Lord.”

Cf. Matt. 24; Rev. 6-19

b. (3) Detailed Itemized Judgment – Reversing the order of creation

“I will remove man and beast;

I will remove the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea,

And the ruins along with the wicked;

And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,’

Declares the Lord.”

The judgment is not limited to land but extends to the skies and seas, showing the pervasive nature of sin.

Illustration: Like pulling the plug in a bathtub, God announces that He will drain a corrupted world system that has rejected Him.

[John MacArthur: The prophet began by noting the far fulfillment of the Day of the Lord, when even animal and physical creation will be affected by His judgment of the earth (cf. **Ge 3:17-19; Ex 12:29; Jos 7:24,25; Ro 8:22**.)]

David Baker: These two verses are united by the concept of “*sweeping away*”, which occurs four times in the Hebrew, showing the emphatic and comprehensive nature of the action (cf. **Est. 9:28; Ps. 73:19; Je. 8:13**). This emphasis is reinforced by the objects of the verbs: *everything, men and animals*, including *birds and fish*, will be done away with. This judgment by God will be the undoing of his creation, as all of these words are found in Genesis.

2. (:4-6) Targeted Scope against Judah in the Immediate Future

a. (4a) Judah / Jerusalem Targeted for God's Wrath

*"So I will stretch out My hand against Judah
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem."*

Biblehub.com: The imagery of God **stretching out His hand** is a common biblical metaphor for divine action, often associated with judgment or deliverance (**Exodus 7:5, Isaiah 5:25**).

b. (4b-6) **Three Main Categories of Transgression**

1) (:4B-5) **Religious Idolatry** / Adultery is the Primary Issue

a) Baal Worshipers targeted (In-your- face Idolatry)

"And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place"

Biblehub.com: Baal was a Canaanite deity associated with **fertility and storms**, and his worship often involved immoral practices.

b) Idolatrous Religious Leaders targeted (Blind Leading the Blind)

"And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests."

c) Astrology Worshipers targeted (Worshiping the Creation rather than the Creator)

"And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven,"

Charles Lee Feinberg: Another class designated in Judah for judgment were those that worshiped the host of heaven upon the housetops. It was carried out on the flat housetops to afford a clearer view of the sky and chiefly by altars for burning incense. (Cp. **Jer 8:2; 19:13; and 32:29.**) This worship was called Sabeanism, and prevailed quite early in the East. Moses warned against it in **Deuteronomy 4:19**. Nevertheless, it was widely practiced in Israel, thus virtually making every home an idol sanctuary.

d) Syncretistic Worshipers targeted (Split Allegiance = No Allegiance)

"And those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom,"

Biblehub.com: Milcom, also known as **Molech**, was the god of the Ammonites, and his worship often involved detestable practices, including child sacrifice (**Leviticus 18:21**).

David Baker: what is strongly condemned is mixing worship of the true, covenant God of Israel with that of another deity (cf. **Ex. 20:3; Dt. 5:7**). Swearing by another god meant acknowledging his authority, something which was denied to Israel.

2) (:6a) **Religious Apostasy**

"And those who have turned back from following the Lord,"

Biblehub.com: The act of **turning back** implies a deliberate choice to abandon the covenant relationship with God, which was central to Israel's identity.

3) (:6b) **Neglectful, Self-Sufficient Transgressors** (even atheists)

"And those who have not sought the Lord or inquired of Him."

KEY TAKEAWAY #1 – What is involved in seeking the Lord?

Seeking the Lord is the ongoing journey of knowing and loving God more deeply, through worship, obedience, and dependence on Him. Those who seek the Lord with sincerity and perseverance experience renewal and transformation—both in their own hearts and in the world around them.

Biblehub.com: **Seeking the LORD** involves actively pursuing a relationship with Him through prayer, worship, and obedience. In the cultural context of ancient Judah, seeking God was often associated with going to the temple, offering sacrifices, and adhering to the Law. The failure to seek God indicates a neglect of these practices and a lack of desire for His presence and guidance. This neglect is condemned in other prophetic writings, such as **Isaiah 55:6**, which urges people to seek the LORD while He may be found. The call to seek God is a recurring theme throughout Scripture, emphasizing the importance of a personal and communal relationship with Him.

B. (1:7-13) THE SPECIFIC SINS REQUIRING JUDGMENT – GOD'S HOLINESS CANNOT TOLERATE SIN

1. (:7) Preparations Have Been Made

*“Be silent before the Lord God!
For the day of the Lord is near,
For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice,
He has consecrated His guests.”*

John MacArthur: God's judgment on Israel was viewed as His sacrifice. The guests were the dreaded Babylonians, who as “priests” were invited to slay the sacrifice, i.e., Judah (cf. **Is 13:3; 34:6; Jer 46:10; Eze 39:17; Hab 1:6; Rev 19:17, 18**).

2. (:8-9) Punishment Will Begin With the Leaders

*“Then it will come about on the day of the Lord's sacrifice
That I will punish the princes, the king's sons
And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.
And I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold,
Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.”*

Biblehub.com: **and all who are dressed in foreign apparel**

This phrase indicates a cultural and religious assimilation that was contrary to the covenant identity of Israel. Wearing “*foreign apparel*” symbolizes adopting the customs and practices of surrounding pagan nations, which often included idolatry and moral corruption. This was a significant issue in ancient Israel, as God had called His people to be distinct and separate (**Leviticus 20:26**). The adoption of foreign attire could also imply allegiance to foreign powers or gods, which was a direct violation of the first commandment. This theme of **separation** and **holiness** is reiterated in the New Testament, where believers are called to be in the world but not of it..

[John Hannah: *All who avoid stepping on the threshold* refers either to people who followed

the Philistines' superstition about not stepping on a threshold (**1 Sam. 5:5**) or perhaps more likely to those who suddenly leaped into others' homes to pillage and steal. This is paralleled by the words *violence and deceit*. The gain of such robbery was then offered to pagan deities as objects of sacred worship. It was strange that pagan religious leaders condoned such violence and plundering.]

3. (:10-11) People Will Cry Out in Anguish and Be Silenced

*“On that day,’ declares the Lord,
‘There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate,
A wail from the Second Quarter,
And a loud crash from the hills.
Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar,
For all the people of Canaan will be silenced;
All who weigh out silver will be cut off.”*

Biblehub.com: Historically, the **Fish Gate** was a site of significant activity and commerce, making it a strategic target during sieges. The cry from the Fish Gate symbolizes the beginning of calamity and the vulnerability of the city.

4. (:12-13) Payback Will Hit People Where It Hurts the Most

a. Retribution Will be Unavoidable – since the Judge Sees All

*“It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps”*

b. Apathy Will be Condemned – Exposed for the Lazy Lie that it is

*“And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,
Who say in their hearts,
‘The Lord will not do good or evil!’”*

John MacArthur: With this term [*stagnant in spirit*] referring to a thickened crust which forms on wine when left undisturbed for a long period of time, the prophet described the people's indifference and slothfulness toward God. Their indifference led them to regard God as morally indifferent.

Biblehub.com: This phrase captures the skepticism and disbelief among the people regarding God's active involvement in the world. It reflects a **deistic view**, where God is perceived as distant and uninvolved.

c. Riches and Material Possessions Will be Stripped Away – Enjoyed by Others

*“Moreover, their wealth will become plunder
And their houses desolate;
Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit them,
And plant vineyards but not drink their wine.”*

Biblehub.com: This phrase underscores the futility of human efforts when they are not aligned with God's will. It reflects the curse of unfulfilled labor found in **Deuteronomy 28:30**, where the

Israelites are warned that disobedience will lead to others enjoying the fruits of their labor. This serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of turning away from God.

C. (1:14-18) THE SEVERITY OF JUDGMENT IN THE DAY OF THE LORD – GOD'S WRATH IS TERRIFYING

What will it be like? What is the nature of the soon coming Day of the Lord?

1. (:14A) Fast Approaching

*“Near is the great day of the Lord,
Near and coming very quickly;”*

2. (:14B) Fear It

*“Listen, the day of the Lord!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.”*

3. (:15-16) Darkest Doomsday Imaginable

*“A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
A day of trumpet and battle cry
Against the fortified cities
And the high corner towers.”*

4. (:17) Destruction Attributable to Sin

*“I will bring distress on men
So that they will walk like the blind,
Because they have sinned against the Lord;
And their blood will be poured out like dust
And their flesh like dung.”*

Biblehub.com: **Walking like the blind** symbolizes confusion, helplessness, and a lack of direction. In biblical times, blindness was often associated with spiritual ignorance or moral failure. This imagery suggests that those under judgment will be unable to find their way, both physically and spiritually.

5. (:18) Complete Devastation

*“Neither their silver nor their gold
Will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord’s wrath;
And all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one,
Of all the inhabitants of the earth.”*

KEY TAKEAWAY #2 – The Day of the Lord will be terrifying and it is fast approaching.

Application: Day of the Lord even closer today; look at the things the prophets condemned and look at how all of those things are coming back now

- Should move us to a closer relationship to the Lord – look at the appeal to the righteous remnant to stay close to the Lord and appeals to holy living
- Should lead us to proclaim the message of God's coming judgment to others

D. (2:1-3) THE SUMMONS TO REPENTANCE – GOD'S JUDGMENT IS NEAR

1. (:1-2) Make Haste to Get Right With God

*“Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame.
Before the decree takes effect –
The day passes like the chaff –
Before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you,
Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you.”*

2. (:3) Urgently Seek the Lord – Repetition of Key Lesson #1 = Seek the Lord

*“Seek the Lord,
All you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness and seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.”*

Biblehub.com: Righteousness and humility are central themes in the Bible, often linked to God's favor and blessing. Righteousness involves living in accordance with God's laws and moral standards, while humility involves recognizing one's dependence on God. This dual call to seek both righteousness and humility suggests a holistic approach to faith, where internal attitudes and external actions align with God's will. It is reminiscent of Jesus' teachings in the Beatitudes (**Matthew 5:3-10**), where the blessed are those who hunger for righteousness and are meek.

E. (2:4-15) THE SURROUNDING NATIONS JUDGED – GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS GLOBAL

1. (2:4-7) Judgment against Philistia – West of Israel

a. (:4) Major Cities Destroyed

Gaza –	<i>“For Gaza will be abandoned”</i>
Ashkelon –	<i>“And Ashkelon a desolation”</i>
Ashdod –	<i>“Ashdod will be driven out at noon”</i>
Ekron –	<i>“And Ekron will be uprooted”</i>

David Baker: The four principal Philistine cities are warned of impending destruction. The presentation of the first and last involves alliteration, word play based on the consonantal sounds used. The four city-states are presented progressively from south to north.

b. (:5-7) Land Reserved for Remnant of Judah

1) (:5) Enemy Wiped Out

*“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.”*

[**H.A. Hanke**: A people occupying the southern coast of the Philistine country (see **I Sam 30:14; Ezk 25:16**). The LXX renders this word *Cretans* (**Amos 9:7; Deut 2:23**). The Cherethites were probably related to the Philistines and were immigrants from Crete. All of the Philistine coast would feel the wrath of God. No inhabitants would be left; all would be killed or carried into captivity. The invader would be no respecter of persons.]

2) (:6-7) Remnant Restored to the Land

*“So the seacoast will be pastures,
With caves for shepherds and folds for flocks.
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.”*

[**Biblehub.com**: This phrase refers to the transformation of the Philistine coastal region, which was known for its bustling cities and trade. Historically, the Philistines were a significant adversary of Israel, often engaging in conflicts with them. The prophecy indicates a dramatic change from a populated, fortified area to a rural, pastoral landscape. This transformation symbolizes God's judgment and the desolation that follows divine retribution. The seacoast, once a place of commerce and power, will be reduced to simplicity and humility, reflecting the broader theme of God's sovereignty over nations.]

David Baker: The **remnant** here (cf. **1:4; 2:9; 3:13**), the refugees from God's punishment, are a symbol of **hope for Israel**, since the promised judgment will not be total. The motif of the remnant is common in the prophets (cf. **Je. 23:3; Am. 5:15; Mi. 2:12; 5:7-8**), exemplifying both the severity of God's punishment and also the graciousness of his mercy. **Destruction will come, but not annihilation**.

2. (2:8-11) Judgment against Moabites and Ammonites – East of Israel

a. (:8) Arrogance Denounced As Offensive to God

1) Arrogance of Moabites and Ammonites Noted

*“I have heard the taunting of Moab
and the revilings of the sons of Ammon,“*

2) Arrogance Directed Against God's People and God's Land

*“With which they have taunted My people
And become arrogant against their territory.”*

b. (:9) Judgment Described in Impressive Terms

1) Guaranteed by God Himself

*“Therefore, as I live,
declares the Lord of hosts,
The God of Israel”*

2) Compared to Devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah

“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.”*

Charles Lee Feinberg: Salt is used in the Old Testament as a figure for sterility and ruin (**Job 39:6**). This portion of shame and reproach shall they have because of their pride which led them to reproach Israel and magnify themselves against the chosen of the Lord. The nations are exceedingly dull in learning how greatly they displease the Lord when they deal in pride against the nation whom He has chosen as His medium for worldwide blessing.

3) Heightened by the Reversal of Fortunes for God's People

*“The remnant of My people will plunder them
And the remainder of My nation will inherit them.”*

c. (:10) Payment Deserved for Pride and Arrogance

*“This they will have in return for their pride,
because they have taunted and become arrogant
against the people of the Lord of hosts.”*

Biblehub.com: The taunting of God's people is ultimately an affront to God Himself, as they are His chosen nation.

d. (:11) Dominion Demanded via Universal Worship

*“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.”*

Hobart Freeman: the meaning here seems to be that one day worshipers will no longer be found to offer sacrifices unto the heathen gods, who will, from lack of devotees, pass away. . . In the day of the Lord idolatry will be abolished, and the true God of Israel will be universally acknowledged and worshiped.

3. (2:12) Judgment against Ethiopia – South of Israel

“You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.”

Biblehub.com: The mention of the **Cushites** refers to the people from the region of Cush, which is often associated with the area **south of Egypt**, including parts of modern-day Sudan and Ethiopia. In biblical times, Cush was known for its powerful warriors and was a significant kingdom. The inclusion of the Cushites in this prophecy indicates the widespread nature of God's judgment, extending beyond the immediate neighbors of Israel to more distant nations. This reflects the universal scope of God's sovereignty and justice.

4. (2:13-15) Judgment against Assyria – North of Israel

a. (:13) Fruitful Irrigation Replaced with Parched Desolation

*“And He will stretch out His hand against the north
And destroy Assyria,
And He will make Nineveh a desolation,*

Parched like the wilderness.”

b. (14) Dominion of Assyrians Replaced with Refuge for Beasts and Birds

*“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.”*

Biblehub.com: Cedar beams were a sign of wealth and grandeur, often used in the construction of palaces and temples (**1 Kings 7:2-3**). The exposure of these beams signifies the stripping away of luxury and the vulnerability of what was once considered strong and enduring.

c. (15) Self Confidence Replaced with Contempt

*“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.”*

F. (3:1-7) THE STUBBORNNESS OF JERUSALEM – GOD’S PEOPLE REFUSE CORRECTION

1. (1-4) Indictment Against Jerusalem – Total Failure and Spiritual Bankruptcy

a. Summary Indictment – for Rebellion, Impurity and Exploitation

*“Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled,
The tyrannical city!”*

KEY TAKEAWAY #3 – Listen to the Lord and Trust in Him

b. Failure to Walk With God

1) Failure to Listen to and Obey God

*“She heeded no voice,
She accepted no instruction.”*

- Voice of Conscience – Are we cultivating a sensitive conscience?
- Voice of God’s Word – Look at all the access we have to God’s Word
- Voice of Bible Preachers and Teachers (Judah rejected the message of the prophets)
- Voice of faithful counselors & friends – Do we have ears only for what we want to hear?
- Voice of reproof and correction – How do we respond when our sins are exposed?
- Voice of trials and difficulties – What do we learn from life’s situations?

John MacArthur: Jerusalem was soon to learn that to reject God’s correction leads to destruction (**Pr 5:23**). She did not draw near to her God. The Lord had taken up residence in that city, making Him easily accessible (**Dt 4:7**), yet they had refused to draw near to Him in proper worship.

2) Failure to Trust and Cling to God

*“She did not trust in the Lord,
She did not draw near to her God.”*

James 4:8 “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

c. Failure of Political and Judicial Leaders

1) Political Leaders Devour the People

*“Her **princes** within her are roaring lions”*

Biblehub.com: This metaphor suggests that the princes, or leaders, are oppressive and predatory, exploiting their power for personal gain.

2) Judicial Leaders Devour the People

*“Her **judges** are wolves at evening;”*

Exploiting instead of defending the helpless

Biblehub.com: the judges are corrupt, seeking to devour and exploit the people under the cover of darkness.

3) Summary

“They leave nothing for the morning.”

Biblehub.com: The imagery of leaving nothing behind is reminiscent of the locusts in **Joel 1:4**, which leave the land barren.

David Baker: Rather than protecting and leading the flock which is entrusted to them, the leaders devour the people for their own gain (cf. **Is. 56:11; Je. 23:1; Ezk. 34:2**). They do their work so well that there are not even bones left to ‘gnaw’ (AV; **Nu. 24:8**; cf. **Gn. 49:14; Pr. 17:22**) by morning, a time associated with legal judgment and justice (v. 5; cf. **2 Sa. 15:2; Ps. 101:8; Je. 21:12**).

d. Failure of Religious Leaders

1) Prophets Cannot Be Trusted – Lacking Conviction and Integrity

*“Her **prophets** are reckless, treacherous men”*

Will speak whatever serves their own agenda

2) Priests Promote Impurity

*“Her **priests** have profaned the sanctuary.”*

No regard for the Lord’s holiness and majesty

3) Summary

“They have done violence to the law.”

Shows the importance of God’s unchanging Law

[Thomas Constable: The prophets were reckless in the way they announced their own advice as divine revelation and treacherous in deceiving the people into thinking that their words were authoritative. The priests did not observe the laws of holiness that God had prescribed for worship, and they twisted the meaning of the Mosaic Law to suit their purposes (cf. **1:4-5**).]

KEY TAKEAWAY #4 – God remains righteous and just

2. (5-7) No Failure on the Part of God – Who Remains Righteous and Just

- a. (5) Remains True to His Righteous Standards
 - 1) Righteous – despite corrupt surroundings
“The Lord is righteous within her”
 - 2) Right / Just – Consistently and Manifestly Just
“He will do no injustice.”
Every morning He brings His justice to light”
regularity and consistency of God's justice
 - 3) Reliable – He will follow through on Promised Judgments
“He does not fail.”
reliability and steadfastness of God's justice.

b. (6) Ruins the Rebellious Nations as a Warning to Jerusalem

*“I have cut off nations; Their corner towers are in ruins.
I have made their streets desolate, With no one passing by;
Their cities are laid waste, Without a man, without an inhabitant.”*

John MacArthur: The desolations brought by the Lord on surrounding nations were to serve as **warnings to Judah**, meant to turn His people back to Him. But instead, enticed by the fruits of corruption, the people rose early to zealously and deliberately pursue the way of sin.

c. (7) Reaches Out One Last Time With Plea for Repentance

- 1) Worship Commanded – Repentance Required
“I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.’”
- 2) Wrath Impending – Repentance Rewarded
*“So her dwelling will not be cut off
according to all that I have appointed concerning her.”*
- 3) Wickedness Embraced – Repentance Rejected
“But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.”

[Biblehub.com: This phrase [“*they rose early*”] indicates the people's eagerness and determination to pursue sinful behavior, highlighting their stubbornness and rebellion. The imagery of rising early suggests a deliberate and proactive commitment to wrongdoing, contrasting with the call to seek God early (Psalm 63:1). The corruption of their deeds points to widespread moral decay, including idolatry, injustice, and social oppression, which were prevalent in Judah at the time (**Zephaniah 1:4-6**). This persistent disobedience ultimately led to the Babylonian exile, fulfilling the prophetic warnings of judgment.]

II. (3:8-20) THE DAY OF THE LORD CULMINATES IN MESSIANIC BLESSING

A. (3:8-11) THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD WILL BRING BOTH JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS AND PURIFICATION OF GOD'S REMNANT

1. (8) Wait for the Day of the Lord's Wrath and Judgment Against the Nations
 - a. Command to Wait for the Coming of the Lord
 “*Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the Lord*”

KEY TAKEAWAY #5 – What is involved in waiting for the Lord?

Waiting on the Lord is *active faith* (not passive inactivity) —a life centered on trusting that God sees, knows, and cares, even when His hand is not yet visible. It's the confident expectation that His promises will come to pass “*in the fullness of time*” (**Galatians 4:4**), and that those who wait on Him will never be put to shame (**Isaiah 49:23**).

1. (8) Wait for the Day of the Lord's Wrath and Judgment Against the Nations
 - a. Command to Wait for the Coming of the Lord
 “*Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the Lord*”
 - b. Court Room Scene Anticipated
 “*For the day when I rise up as a witness*”
 - c. Condemnation and Execution in Accordance with God's Wrath
 “*Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,
To assemble kingdoms;
To pour out on them My indignation,
All my burning anger;*”
 - d. Complete Destruction Decreed
 “*For all the earth will be devoured.*”
2. (9-11) Anticipate the Day of the Lord's Restoration of His Remnant
 - a. (9) Purified for the Purpose of Service
 - 1) Grace of Purification
 “*For then I will give to the peoples purified lips,*”
 Pure lips can only come from a purified heart
 - 2) Privilege of Dependence on the One True God
 “*That all of them may call on the name of the Lord,*”
 - 3) Fellowship of Service
 “*To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.*”
 - b. (10) Regathered for the Purpose of Worship
 “*From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,
My worshipers, My dispersed ones,
Will bring My offerings.*”
 - c. (11) Humbled and Forgiven for the Purpose of Holy Submission

Biblehub.com: The imagery of serving "shoulder to shoulder" conveys unity and cooperation among the peoples in their worship and service to God. It suggests a harmonious community working together in God's service, reflecting the ideal of the body of Christ as described in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**. This unity is a foretaste of the eschatological hope where divisions are healed, and all believers are united in their devotion to God. The phrase also implies a return to the intended order of creation, where humanity works together in stewardship and worship.

*“In that day you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds
By which you have rebelled against Me;
For then I will remove from your midst
Your proud, exulting ones,
And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain.”*

B. (3:12-20) THE REMNANT WILL EXPERIENCE TREMENDOUS BLESSINGS WHEN HER KING RETURNS TO REIGN IN HER MIDST

KEY TAKEAWAY #6 – Reflect on Promised Millennial Blessings

1. (12-13) Six Fundamental Blessings Promised to the Purified Remnant

a. Blessing of Humility

*“But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people”*

b. Blessing of Refuge

“And they will take refuge in the name of the Lord”

c. Blessing of Integrity

*“The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths;”*

d. Blessing of Provision

“For they will feed”

e. Blessing of Peaceful Rest

“and lie down”

f. Blessing of Security

“With no one to make them tremble.”

Biblehub.com: The absence of fear indicates a time of safety and divine protection. Historically, Israel faced threats from surrounding nations, leading to fear and instability. The promise of no longer trembling suggests a future where God's people are secure from external threats. This assurance is seen in prophecies of the Messianic kingdom, where Christ reigns as the Prince of Peace, ensuring the safety and well-being of His people.

2. (14-17) Mindset of Rejoicing and Confidence because the Lord Reigns

a. (14) Mindset of Triumphant Rejoicing

*“Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!”*

[John MacArthur: The basis for rejoicing in v. 14 is that Israel's day of judgment is past and her King is residing in her midst. His departure just prior to Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple is graphically depicted in Eze 8-11; but He will return as Lord and Messiah, a fact so glorious that it is repeated in v. 17.]

[David Baker: In a tripartite example of synonymous parallelism, where the same idea is repeated three times in different words, God's people are called to *sing, shout* and *joyfully exult.*]

b. (:15) Refrain: The Lord Reigns As Victorious Warrior

1) No Condemnation

“The Lord has taken away His judgments against you,”

2) No Opposition

“He has cleared away your enemies.”

3) The Lord Reigns

“The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;”

4) No Future Calamities

“You will fear disaster no more.”

c. (:16) Mindset of No Fear – but Confidence and Courage

“In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:

‘Do not be afraid, O Zion;

Do not let your hands fall limp.’” [cf. slumped shoulders]

d. (:17) Refrain: The Lord Reigns As Victorious Warrior

1) The Lord Reigns

“The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior.”

2) The Joy of the Lord

“He will exult over you with joy,”

H.A. Hanke: After saving them, the Messiah will find in the redeemed Israel his ground of rejoicing (cf. **Jn. 15:11**)..

3) The Love of the Lord

“He will be quiet in His love,”

Biblehub.com: This phrase suggests a calming, reassuring presence, akin to a parent soothing a child. God's love is portrayed as protective and nurturing, providing peace amidst turmoil. This echoes **Psalm 23**, where the Lord is depicted as a shepherd who leads His sheep beside still waters. Theologically, it points to the peace of Christ, who offers rest for the weary (**Matthew 11:28-30**) and the peace that surpasses all understanding (**Philippians 4:7**).

4) The Joy of the Lord

“He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

KEY TAKEAWAY #7 – Count on the Lord’s Gracious Initiative and Sovereign Working

2. **(:18-20) Six Sovereign Acts of the Lord’s Initiative in Blessing His People**

Note emphasis on the **divine initiative** – repetition of phrase “*I will*” do this and this ...

a. Removing all Reproach and Sorrow

“I WILL GATHER those who grieve about the appointed feasts –

They came from you, O Zion;

The reproach of exile is a burden on them.”

John Hannah: Many Jews, scattered from their homeland, had sorrows because they were unable to take part in the appointed feasts. But the Lord will remove those sorrows when He regathers His people to Jerusalem where they will enjoy His blessings. No longer will their feasts be a burden, something they hate to do, and a reproach, a cause for God's displeasure because of their sinful ways.

b. Punishing all Oppressors

*"Behold, I AM GOING TO DEAL at that time
With all your oppressors"*

c. Reversing the Shame of the Helpless

*"I WILL SAVE the lame
And GATHER the outcast,
And I WILL TURN their shame into praise and renown in all the earth."*

d. Restoring the People to Their Promised Land

*"At that time I WILL BRING you in,
Even at that time when I GATHER you together"*
- Book begins 1:2 with God's declaration "I will destroy ..."
- Ends with this promise: "At that time I will bring you back ..." 3:20

e. Bestowing Honor

*"Indeed, I WILL GIVE you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth"*

f. Restoring Fortunes

*"When I RESTORE your fortunes before your eyes,'
Says the Lord."*

REVIEW OF 7 KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- 1) What is involved in seeking the Lord?
- 2) The Day of the Lord will be terrifying and it is fast approaching.
- 3) Listen to the Lord and Trust in Him
- 4) God remains righteous and just
- 5) What is involved in waiting for the Lord?
- 6) Reflect on Promised Millennial Blessings
- 7) Count on the Lord's Gracious Initiative and Sovereign Working

Bob Deffinbaugh: These reasons for divine judgment can best be summarized in this way:

- God will judge those in Judah who practice pure paganism (1:4).
- God will judge those in Judah who mix the worship of God with the worship of other deities (1:5a).
- God will judge those in Judah who completely reject and turn away from the faith of their fathers (1:6).
- God will judge those who choose to identify with the heathen (rather than the people of God) by their dress (1:8).

- God will judge those who practice violence and deceit (**1:9**).
- God will judge those who refuse divine instruction, and who have ignored His warnings (**3:1-2**). Judah should have learned from God's judgment of others, but she did not (**3:6-7**).
- God will judge those in leadership, who have abused their authority and forsaken their stewardship (**3:3-4**).
- God will judge those who presume that God is indifferent about their sin (**1:12**).
- God will judge those who put their trust in anything but Him (**1:18**).