

# **THE FEARSOME DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH**

by Paul G. Apple, February 2007

## **THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS JUDGMENT, PURIFICATION AND BLESSING**

*“Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.”*  
(Zephaniah 2:3)

For each section in the Book of Zephaniah:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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## BACKGROUND OF BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

**Malick:** Even though Judah's refusal to repent of her evil in the face of the imminent, terrifying judgment of the Lord upon the nations will result in her own judgment, she is encouraged to wait for that time when after judgment the Lord will purify His people, save them, protect them, restore them, and bless them.

**Constable:** God sent a prophetic word to Zephaniah because the Judeans of his day still needed to get right with Him in their hearts. The prophet announced that God was going to send judgment on Judah for her wickedness. He also assured the godly few in the nation, the remnant, that the Lord would preserve them and remain true to His promises concerning ultimate worldwide blessing for Israel in the future. Perhaps 1:7 summarizes what the book is all about better than any other single verse: "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the LORD is near."

**Copeland:** The prophet is Zephaniah, whose name means "*Jehovah Hides*"

a. Concerning the MAN

- 1) King Hezekiah was his great-great-grandfather - Zeph 1:1
- 2) This has prompted some to call him "the royal prophet"
- 3) He was contemporary with Jeremiah, as were Nahum and Habakkuk

b. Concerning his MESSAGE

- 1) Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah, king of Judah
  - a) Josiah ruled from 640-609 B.C.
  - b) He was a good king, a great reformer - 2 Chr 34:1-3,29-34; 35:1-19
  - c) Josiah's reforms were short-lived, however, and the nation soon apostasized after his death
- 2) Zephaniah proclaimed the coming "*day of the Lord*" - cf. Zeph 1:7,14-16
  - a) So vivid are his descriptions that George Adam Smith wrote:  
"No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament."
  - b) And yet it ends on an encouraging note concerning the future  
-- Therefore its overall message is: "Through Judgment To Blessing"

**Keathley:**

### Key Principles:

(1) God is full of grace, gladness and tenderness, but also justice.

Judgment 1:8-9	Grace 3:9-20
Wrath 1:15, 18	Gladness 3:17
Terror	Tenderness 2:7, 3:17

(2) God deals in grace. In the midst of the troubles that are coming God will

**REMOVE**

**RESTORE**

Idolatry 1:4-6	Safety 2:3, 3:13
Pride 3:11-12	Prosperity 2:7, 3:20
Deceit 3:13	Purity 3:9
Fear 3:13, 15-16	Worship 3:9-10
Enemies 3:15, 19	Trust 3:12
Reproach 3:18-19	Joy 3:14
Shame 3:11	Remnant 3:10, 18-20
	His presence 3:15, 17

Therefore I should trust God to work out his plan.

What do I need to do?

- I need to wait on God (3:8). He will right the wrongs and restore the righteous. I just want to be sure I'm counted among the righteous. Therefore....
- I need to "Seek the Lord" (2:3) This means that my number one goal in life is to know God - to have an intimate relationship with him.
- I need to be humble (2:3b). This involves self denial. Vertical and horizontal - which leads to the next requirement.
- I need to obey God's ordinances (2:3) = love my neighbor.

**Deffinbaugh:** As I understand the book, there are two dominant themes in Zephaniah: judgment and deliverance.

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).

There are several things that set the righteous remnant apart from the corrupt world in which they live:

- Those who are a part of the righteous remnant seek God, and they obey His commandments:
- Those who are a part of the righteous remnant are humble:
- Those who are a part of the righteous remnant are righteous in their actions toward others:
- Their sins are forgiven and they are cleansed from their sin (3:9, 11, 13).
- They will be delivered from or through divine judgment (2:1-3).289
- They will eventually be rescued from the hand of their oppressors (2:4-15; 3:15).
- They have the hope of future blessings (2:6-9).
- They will be given fame and honor (3:19-20).
- They will enjoy security and peace (3:13).
- They will enjoy being in God's presence, as He rejoices over them as the objects of His love (3:15-17).

**Jim Van Dine:** Through the judgment of the Day of the Lord Yahweh will prepare Judah to realize her ultimate blessing by producing a purified remnant and removing hostile kingdoms. . .

It is apparent that the conditions described in the Zephaniah's blessings of the Day of the Lord did not come to pass upon Israel's return from captivity, and that, in-deed, they have not yet been realized. This is because the Day of the Lord has not seen its last manifestation. Someday Israel will experience Yahweh's wrath for the last time. In that day the Lord will give Israel "fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth" (3:20) and "the King of Israel, Yahweh, [will be] in [their] midst" (3:15) for the Day of the Lord will have accomplished its work.

**Stedman:** One of the shortest of the books is that by the prophet Zephaniah. Yet it is a book which is almost overwhelming in its darkness and gloom. The theme of this book is "*the day of the Lord.*" It is a view of the back side of God's love -- in other words, his wrath. It is a book which sets forth the burning jealousy of God. The Bible frequently says that God is a jealous God. That doesn't mean jealousy as we usually think of it -- being suspicious all the time and looking for expected violations of love. It simply means that God loves so thoroughly, so completely, that he cannot brook a rival to his love. God will destroy anything which hurts his loved one. This is why he is sometimes so ruthless with us. When he sees us loving and clinging to things which are damaging and hurting us, God's jealousy comes in and says, "No, you can't have them." We plead with him and say, "Lord, let me keep them. Why, this friend I have -- I enjoy him so, or love her so! Let me keep her; let me have him." And God says, "No, you can't." So we have to give these things up. This book sets forth the jealousy of God. There could be no love on God's part if there were not the ultimate exercise of wrath. You say you can't accept a God of wrath? Then you can't believe in a God of love, because a God who can't get angry at what injures the person he loves is not capable of love. Zephaniah is the great prophet of God's jealousy. . .

Zephaniah means "hidden of the Lord" and the prophet is speaking as if he were a representative of the remnant of faith -- those relatively few people who will remain true

to God and be faithful to his word through the time of trouble that is to come upon the earth. They will be hidden, as it were, by God himself among the nations of the earth and God will watch over them to keep them in faith during this time. And it is about these people that the book of Zephaniah is written, and especially of that coming day, the day of the Lord, which is vividly described by the prophet.

**Baxter:** Outline: Through Judgment to Blessing

- I. Look Within! – Wrath Coming on Judah (i.1 – ii.3)
  - The Purpose of Jehovah to Judge (1-6)
  - The “Day” of Jehovah “at hand” (7-18)
  - And so – plea to Jerusalem (ii.1-3)*
  
- II. Look Around! – Wrath on All Nations (ii.4 – iii.8)
  - West, East – Philistia, Moab, Ammon (4-11)
  - South, North – Ethiopia and Assyria (12-15)
  - And so – “Woe” to Jerusalem (iii.1-8)*
  
- III. Look Beyond! – After Wrath, Healing (iii.9-20)
  - Conversion of Gentile Peoples (9)
  - Restoring of Covenant People (10-15)
  - And so – the new Jerusalem (verses 16-20)*

**Hannah:** Outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. The Day of Yahweh’s Judgment (1:2 – 3:8)
  - A. Judgment on all the earth (1:2-3)
  - B. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4 – 2:3)
  - C. Judgment on the surrounding nations (2: 4-15)
  - D. Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7)
  - E. Judgment on all the earth (3:8)
- III. The Day of Yahweh’s Restoration (3:9-20)
  - A. The restoration of the nations (3:9-10)
  - B. The restoration of Israel (3:11-20)

**Freeman:** Outline:

- I. The day of the Lord as judgment, 1:1 – 3:8
  - A. Judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, 1:1 – 2:3
    1. The destruction of all things, 1:2-3
    2. The causes of judgment, 1:4-9
    3. The nature of the day of the Lord, 1:10-18
    4. Exhortation to repentance, 2:1-3
  - B. Judgment upon the nations, 2:4-15
    1. Judgment against Philistia, 2:4-7
    2. Judgment against Moab and Ammon, 2:8-11
    3. Judgment against Ethiopia, 2:12
    4. Judgment against Assyria, 2:13-15

- C. Announcement of universal judgment, 3:1-8
  - 1. Woe to Jerusalem, 3:1-7
  - 2. All nations summoned to judgment, 3:8
- II. The day of the Lord as salvation, 3:9-20
  - A. Salvation of a remnant among the nations, 3:9-10
  - B. The purging and salvation of a remnant in Israel, 3:11-13
  - C. The restoration of Israel and establishment of the kingdom, 3:14-20

**Morgan:** What then is the message that Zephaniah delivered to his own day? It is a message of the unity of the divine method. We see God's absolute refusal to excuse sin because of His love, and we see His love acting in consuming wrath in order to secure the final realization of its most tender purpose. If you cut out that last part of Zephaniah, then he has no distinctive message. It is not the first part, but the second part, of the prophecy that is the message of Zephaniah. It is that peculiar union formed by the denunciation of sin that is so severe, and the annunciation of love that is so tender. These two together give us the great message that Zephaniah delivered to his people: love cannot excuse sin, but love will at last find a way to realize its purpose in spite of all the sin of the people.

**Baker:** The fact that this day [of the Lord] is like a two-sided coin, comprising two separate yet related facets, is more fully developed here than in other prophets, where usually one element is stressed to the deprivation or exclusion of the other. The two facets of the same Day of the Lord are judgment and blessing. The day is characterized by both; each affects the same people and occupies a similar time-frame, but each has a different cause.

**Piper:** I think the book falls naturally into five parts. First, chapter one announces the coming judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. Verse 4, "I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Second, chapter two verses 1-3 calls the nation back to God and specifically (as it says in verse 3) to "seek righteousness and seek humility." Third, in chapter 2 verses 4-15 Zephaniah announces the judgment that is also coming on the lands that surround Judah: the Philistines to the east (vv. 4-7), Moab and Ammon to the west (vv. 8-11), the Ethiopians to the south (v. 12), and Assyria to the north (vv. 13-15). The fourth section of the book is chapter 3 verses 1-7. Here Zephaniah turns his attention to Jerusalem again and lengthens the catalogue of God's accusations against her. Finally, chapter 3 verses 8-20 proclaims the conversion of the peoples (v. 9), the conversion and regathering of Israel (v. 10) and the glorious future of all the godly as God rejoices over them with gladness.

I think the main point of the book is 2:3, "Seek the Lord all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility." The rest of the book is mainly made up of warnings that judgment is coming upon the proud and promises that the humble and righteous who seek refuge in the Lord will be saved (3:12,13). So there are three things: commands, warnings and promises. Obedience to the command in 2:3 is Zephaniah's main goal, and the warnings and promises are incentives for the people to repent and obey.

# OUTLINE OF ZEPHANIAH

## THE FEARSOME DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER

### THE DAY OF THE LORD BRINGS JUDGMENT, PURIFICATION AND BLESSING

*"Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."*

- Zephaniah 2:3

*"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee"*

## (1:1-6) INTRODUCTION: JUDGMENT IS COMING FOR JUDAH . . . FOR THE WORLD

### **BIG IDEA:**

### **TWO PRONOUNCEMENTS OF JUDGMENT MERGED TOGETHER IN A DENUNCIATION OF IDOLATROUS TRANSGRESSIONS**

#### **(:1) INTRODUCTION: PROPHECY OF THE DAY OF THE LORD**

- A. The Message
- B. The Messenger
- C. The Setting

#### **I. (:2-3) PRONOUNCEMENT OF END-TIMES GLOBAL JUDGMENT**

- A. (:2) Summary Comprehensive Judgment (cf. Noah's Flood, Gen. 6; 2 Pet. 3)
- B. (:3) Detailed Targeted Judgment

#### **II. (:4-6) PRONOUNCEMENT OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT ON JUDAH FOR PARTICULAR TRANSGRESSIONS**

- A. (:4a) Judah / Jerusalem Targeted for God's Wrath
- B. (:4b-6) Three Main Categories of Transgression
  - 1. (:4B-5) Religious Idolatry / Adultery is the Primary Issue
  - 2. (:6a) Religious Apostasy
  - 3. (:6b) Neglectful, Self-Sufficient Transgressors (even atheists)

## (1:7 – 2:3) JUDAH WARNED TO PREPARE FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD

### **BIG IDEA:**

**SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE THE TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD (WHICH IS NEAR AND COMING VERY QUICKLY) BRINGS DEVASTATION**

### **I. (1:7-13) THE PROSPECT OF THE TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD SHOULD SHOCK PEOPLE INTO SILENCE**

- A. (:7) Preparations Have Been Made
- B. (:8-9) Punishment Will Begin With the Leaders
- C. (:10-11) People Will Cry Out in Anguish and Be Silenced
- D. (:12-13) Payback Will Hit People Where It Hurts the Most
  - 1. Retribution Will be Unavoidable – since the Judge Sees All
  - 2. Apathy Will be Castigated – Exposed for the Lazy Lie that it is
  - 3. Riches and Material Possessions Will be Stripped Away – Enjoyed by Others

### **II. (1:14-18) THE PREVIEW OF THE IMMINENT DAY OF THE LORD IS ONE OF WRATH AND DEVASTATION**

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

- A. (:14A) Fast Approaching
- B. (:14B) Fear It
- C. (:15-16) Darkest Doomsday Imaginable
- D. (:17) Destruction Attributable to Sin
- E. (:18) Complete Devastation

### **III. (2:1-3) THE PREPARATION FOR THE ANGRY DAY OF THE LORD SHOULD BE TO URGENTLY SEEK GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PROTECTION**

- A. (:1-2) Make Haste to Get Right With God
- B. (:3) Urgently Seek the Lord

## (2:4-15) JUDAH'S ENEMIES ALL TARGETED FOR JUDGMENT

### **BIG IDEA:**

**THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE COMPASS ALL DESTINED FOR JUDGMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR ARROGANCE AGAINST THE ONE TRUE GOD AND HIS BELOVED PEOPLE**

### **I. (2:4-7) JUDGMENT AGAINST PHILISTIA – WEST OF ISRAEL**

- A. (:4) Major Cities Destroyed
  - 1. Gaza – *“For Gaza will be abandoned”*
  - 2. Ashkelon – *“And Ashkelon a desolation”*



3. Ashdod – “*Ashdod will be driven out at noon*”
- B. (:5-7) Land Reserved for Remnant of Judah
  1. (:5) Enemy Wiped Out
  2. (:6-7) Remnant Restored to the Land

## **II. (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
  2. Arrogance Directed Against God’s People and God’s Land
- B. (:9) Judgment Described in Impressive Terms
  1. Guaranteed by God Himself
  2. Compared to Devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah
  3. Heightened by the Reversal of Fortunes for God’s People
- C. (:10) Payment Deserved for Pride and Arrogance
- D. (:11) Dominion Demanded via Universal Worship

## **III. (2:12) JUDGMENT AGAINST ETHIOPIA – SOUTH OF ISRAEL**

## **IV. (2:13-15) JUDGMENT AGAINST ASSYRIA – NORTH OF ISRAEL**

- A. (:13) Fruitful Irrigation Replaced with Parched Desolation
- B. (:14) Dominion of Assyrians Replaced with Refuge for Beasts and Birds
- C. (:15) Self Confidence Replaced with Contempt

## **(3:1-20) PURIFICATION LEADS TO REMNANT BLESSINGS**

### **BIG IDEA:**

### **WHEN THE LORD RETURNS TO REIGN**

**- THE NATIONS WILL BE JUDGED AND DESTROYED**

**- AND THE REMNANT WILL BE PURIFIED AND BLESSED**

## **I. (:1-7) JERUSALEM FACES IMMINENT JUDGMENT FOR HER SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY**

- A. (:1-4) Indictment Against Jerusalem – Total Failure and Spiritual Bankruptcy
  1. Summary Indictment – for Rebellion, Impurity and Exploitation
  2. Failure of People to Walk With God
  3. Failure of Political and Judicial Leaders
  4. Failure of Religious Leaders
- B. (:5-7) No Failure on the Part of God – Who Remains Righteous and Just
  1. (:5) Remains True to His Righteous Standards
  2. (:6) Ruins the Rebellious Nations as a Warning to Jerusalem
  3. (:7) Reaches Out One Last Time With Plea for Repentance

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

- A. (:8) Wait for the Day of the Lord's Wrath and Judgment Against the Nations
  - 1. Command to Wait for the Coming of the Lord
  - 2. Court Room Scene Anticipated
  - 3. Condemnation and Execution in Accordance with the Lord's Wrath
  - 4. Complete Destruction Decreed
  
- B. (:9-11) Anticipate the Day of the Lord's Restoration of His Remnant
  - 1. (:9) Purified for the Purpose of Service
  - 2. (:10) Regathered for the Purpose of Worship
  - 3. (:11) Humbled and Forgiven for the Purpose of Holy Submission

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

- A. (:12-13) Six Fundamental Blessings Promised to the Purified Remnant
  - 1. Blessing of Humility
  - 2. Blessing of Refuge
  - 3. Blessing of Integrity
  - 4. Blessing of Provision
  - 5. Blessing of Peaceful Rest
  - 6. Blessing of Security
  
- B. (:14-17) Mindset of Rejoicing and Confidence because the Lord Reigns
  - 1. (:14) Mindset of Triumphant Rejoicing
  - 2. (:15) Refrain: The Lord Reigns As Victorious Warrior
  - 3. (:16) Mindset of No Fear – but Confidence and Courage
  - 4. (:17) Refrain: The Lord Reigns As Victorious Warrior
  
- C. (:18-20) Six Sovereign Acts of the Lord's Initiative in Blessing His People
  - 1. Removing all Reproach and Sorrow
  - 2. Punishing all Oppressors
  - 3. Reversing the Shame of the Helpless
  - 4. Restoring the People to Their Promised Land
  - 5. Bestowing Honor
  - 6. Restoring Fortunes

TEXT: Zephaniah 1:1-6

TITLE: INTRODUCTION: JUDGMENT IS COMING FOR JUDAH . . . FOR THE WORLD

**BIG IDEA:**

**TWO PRONOUNCEMENTS OF JUDGMENT MERGED TOGETHER IN A DENUNCIATION OF IDOLATROUS TRANSGRESSIONS**

**(:1) INTRODUCTION: PROPHECY OF THE DAY OF THE LORD**

A. The Message

*“The word of the Lord”*

B. The Messenger

*“which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah”*

name means *“the Lord hides”* (cf. 2:3) – cf. Passover motif

C. The Setting

*“in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah”*

**I. (:2-3) PRONOUNCEMENT OF END-TIMES GLOBAL 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.”*

B. (:3) Detailed Targeted Judgment

*“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.”*

**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).

**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.

**Keathley:** God is angry. Everyone is so wicked that He vows to totally destroy the earth. The mention of man and beast, birds and fish, etc. emphasize how thorough the destruction will be. It will be like in the days of Noah. Notice that this is the reversal of creation. The order of creation was fish, birds, beasts and man. Here we have the opposite order.

## **II. (:4-6) PRONOUNCEMENT OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT ON JUDAH FOR PARTICULAR TRANSGRESSIONS**

### 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."*

**Freeman:** Sin on the part of those professing to be worshipers of God is always more heinous than that of the world, and is, therefore, judged more severely. Therefore, judgment always begins at the house of God (1 Pe 4:17; cf. Lev 10:1-3; Eze 8-9).

### 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"*

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

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

##### c. Astrology Worshipers targeted (Worshipping the Creation rather than the Creator)

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

**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,"*

**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,”*

3. (:6b) Neglectful, Self-Sufficient Transgressors (even atheists)  
*“And those who have not sought the Lord or inquired of Him.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Compare the language used here to that used in Genesis 2-3 to refer to Creation and Genesis 6 to refer to Noah’s Flood. Could this have been completely fulfilled through Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion? (cf. 2 Pet. 3)
- 2) How does the OT present both near and far fulfillments of prophecy as co-mingled – almost like two mountain tops without any glimpse of the intervening valley? How does this increase the level of difficulty of interpretation? Why do so many people choose to spiritualize certain aspects of such OT prophecy and make them allegorical?
- 3) What areas or categories of transgression have been a source of temptation for us? How have we maintained our faith and dependence and loyalty to our Lord?
- 4) How does the jealousy of God harmonize with His love for His people?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**MacArthur:** Zephaniah’s message on the Day of the Lord warned Judah that the final days were near, through divine judgment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, ca. 605-586 B.C. (1:4-13). Yet, it also looks beyond to the far fulfillment in the judgments of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (1:18; 3:8). . . The book presents an unambiguous denunciation of sin and warning of imminent judgment on Judah.

**Freeman:** *“In the days of Josiah”*: about a century before Zephaniah’s prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians and its inhabitants carried captive. The lesson of God’s punishment upon Israel for her sins and idolatry had been wasted upon Judah, who had, by this time, become more corrupt and idolatrous than Samaria (Eze 23). It was in the midst of such wickedness and apostasy that God raised up Zephaniah to warn Judah that a similar fate awaited her as had befallen Israel, unless she repented. Although King Josiah instituted certain moral and religious reforms, Judah’s apostasy and corruption were too deeply impressed upon her for any permanent reformation of character, and she too went into captivity when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians about 35 years later. . .

The term *Baal* in Hebrew means “husband,” “lord,” or “owner,” and was also used to

designate the god of the Canaanites, whom they believed controlled nature, fertility, and the elements. In their worship of this heathen deity, the Canaanites in Palestine indulged in human sacrifice and licentious rites, as well as other pagan practices. In Israel's transition from the nomadic shepherd to the resident farmer upon her settlement in Palestine, God was aware of the strong attraction that Baalism, a fertility cult, could have upon the nation; hence, His uncompromising decree that the heathen, together with their idolatrous worship, were to be destroyed lest Israel herself become corrupted.

**Morgan:** There can be little doubt, I think, that Zephaniah was of the royal house, and of about the same age as Josiah, if not a little younger. Probably, therefore, he uttered his prophecy at about the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, or just when the reformation under Josiah was in progress; and yet the remarkable thing is that Zephaniah makes no reference to the reformation. He speaks only of the sin of the people and the swift judgment of God that is coming upon the sin. . . . The reforms were not lasting, and consequently Zephaniah, speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit and perfectly understanding that the outward appearance of reform was not indicative of a true change of heart toward God took no notice of the reform; he dealt only with the sin and with the corruption. He therefore more definitely perhaps than any other prophet declared the terrors of the divine judgment against sin, and the larger part of his message is given to the announcement of the judgment of God upon the sin of His own people.

**Baker:** God's first words are judgment, initially directed towards all animate creatures (vv. 2-3), and then narrowing down to his own people, Judah, and more specifically the inhabitants of Jerusalem (vv. 4-6). Not only are those to be punished identified, but also some of their sins are indicated. Yahweh presents himself as being personally involved in his judgment, which will be devastating in its totality. . . .

There is in these verses, therefore, a range of religious response – from the desired total commitment to Yahweh alone, through a syncretistic mixture of Yahwistic and pagan worship, to absolute paganism and practical atheism towards Yahweh, who is completely abandoned. The people were to have kept themselves from all of these paganizing practices and remained a holy people to Yahweh alone, but since they have failed to do so, God himself will effect their purification.

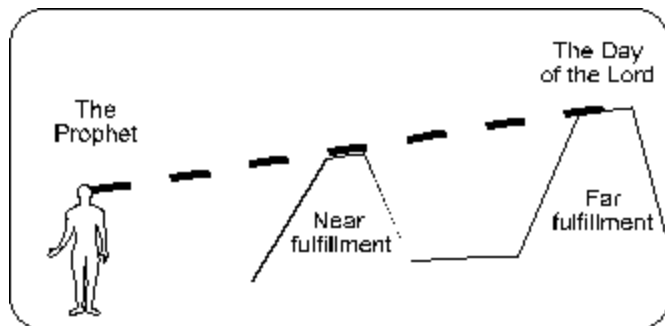
**Boice:** [speaking of the extreme language used in this passage] Does this mean that Zephaniah is not thinking of the Babylonian invasion? Not necessarily. For one thing, the prophet indicates that he is using hyperbole . . . . Besides, the rest of the prophecy shows that Zephaniah is actually thinking of specific historical judgments upon certain specific cities and countries, including Jerusalem. This is precisely what occurred.

At the same time the extreme language of these opening verses is not without purpose in warning the Jews of his day as well as all subsequent readers of the book that a greater, final judgment is still pending.

**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).

**Keathley:** We have mentioned this several times in our study of the prophets, but I will point it out in case someone has not heard the explanation. Several of the things Zephaniah says will happen, could have been fulfilled by the Babylonians when they destroyed Judah and took them into captivity. But many of the prophecies concerning the destruction of the nations and the earth have obviously not been fulfilled. This is where it helps to understand what the prophet saw in his visions.



Thus, many of these prophecies will not be fulfilled until the tribulation.

TEXT: Zephaniah 1:7 – 2:3

TITLE: JUDAH WARNED TO PREPARE FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD

**BIG IDEA:**

**SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE THE TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD  
(WHICH IS NEAR AND COMING VERY QUICKLY) BRINGS  
DEVASTATION**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Imagine the most devastating storm that nature can produce and you have not even begun to scratch the surface of the terror that will surround the coming day of the Lord. If ever there were warnings that could shake people from their spiritual stupor and complacency, the message of Zephaniah should strike a chord. Seek the Lord before it is too late and there is no escape from the awesome wrath and the burning anger of the Lord God.

**I. (1:7-13) THE PROSPECT OF THE TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD  
SHOULD SHOCK PEOPLE INTO SILENCE**

A. (: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.”*

**Baker:** The irony here is that it is apparently the guests invited to the sacrificial celebrations who are themselves going to serve as the sacrifice (cf. Gn. 22, esp. vv. 7, 9). A sacrifice to please Yahweh is made by the offering up to his judgment of those who displeased him.

**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).

B. (: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.”*

**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.

**Hanke:** They [the bandits] may have leaped over the threshold to avoid provoking the gods who were thought to guard the entrances to the houses.

C. (: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.’”*

**Freeman:** Zephaniah warns the Jews that from various parts of the city, from the fish gate (the gate through which the enemy would enter), from the second quarter (the lower part of the city), and from the hills (the upper part), will come the cry of distress and alarm, when walls and buildings begin to crash down, and the inhabitants are attacked by the enemy forces. . .

*“The people of Canaan”* refers not to the Canaanites themselves but to the Jewish merchants whom God elsewhere derisively calls “Canaanites” because of their greed and deceit in merchandising (cf. Ho 12:7 margin). The term *Canaan* in the Hebrew also means “merchant,” because the Canaanites, especially the Phoenicians, were merchants and traders.

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

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

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

2. Apathy Will be Castigated – 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!’”*

**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.

3. 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.”*

## **II. (1:14-18) THE PREVIEW OF THE IMMINENT DAY OF THE LORD IS ONE OF WRATH AND DEVASTATION**

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

A. (:14A) Fast Approaching

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

B. (:14B) Fear It

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

C. (: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.”*

**Hanke:** The alarm would be sounded, and couriers would dispatch the terrible news, but to no avail.

D. (: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.”*

E. (: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.”*

## **III. (2:1-3) THE PREPARATION FOR THE ANGRY DAY OF THE LORD SHOULD BE TO URGENTLY SEEK GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PROTECTION**

A. (: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.”*

National repentance was called for here

B. (:3) Urgently 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.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is any of our security vested in areas like material possessions which will ultimately not be able to assist us?
- 2) How would you describe the intensity of the anger of the Lord in this day of judgment?
- 3) How do people make the claim today that the Lord will neither do good nor evil?
- 4) Why do people continue to resist the pleas of the Lord to repent before inevitable destruction overtakes them? Are we delaying in any area to repent of our sin and seek after the Lord?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Baker:** [vs 12] This view of the non-involvement of God in national life is a serious heresy for Israel, flying in the face of the Israelite view of God as continually and actively involved in history, from the creation through the call of Abram, the Exodus, his meeting with Israel at Sinai, the Conquest, and his constant attention to the affairs of the Israelite state. The lack of an actual, historical intervention of God in the events of the world for both blessing and punishment would render their faith as meaningless as the Christian faith would be if Jesus had not actually, historically risen from the dead.

**Freeman:** Thus, before resuming his message of judgment against the nations, the prophet entreats estranged Judah to consider her ways and repent before it is too late. Such is the condescending grace of the Lord. He might have left them to suffer the consequences of their sins; nevertheless, as in every age, God’s love first seeks

restoration of the erring transgressor before judgment comes. But there must be no delay, the prophet cautions them, as the day of the Lord is at hand. . .

**Feinberg:** Unable to find a way of escape out of their distressing calamity, the people of Judah will walk like blind men (Deu 28:29). As though worthless, their blood and flesh will be poured out as dust and refuse. In that hour of catastrophe neither silver nor gold will avail to preserve from the wrath of the holy God. God's fiery judgment will consume the whole land and bring to a sad end all who dwell in the land. The judgments of God are terrible, but how ineffably sweet is His grace which He has manifested to guilty sinners.

**Hannah:** vs. 12 The Lord declared that He would make a diligent, comprehensive search throughout Jerusalem so that none would go unpunished. Josephus wrote about a later invasion in which the city's aristocracy were literally dragged from the sewer system where they hid for fear of death.

TEXT: Zephaniah 2:4 – 2:15

TITLE: JUDAH'S ENEMIES ALL TARGETED FOR JUDGMENT

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE COMPASS ALL DESTINED FOR JUDGMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR ARROGANCE AGAINST THE ONE TRUE GOD AND HIS BELOVED PEOPLE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

People think that basketball guru Coach Dean Smith of the University of North Carolina invented the four corner offense. But the Lord was way ahead of him. Here we see the Divine Judgment Decreed Against All of Judah's Enemies – encompassing the Four Corners of the Earth

**MacArthur:** God used the heathen nations to punish His people, but He would not permit those nations to go unpunished. To illustrate this, 4 representative nations were chosen from the 4 points of the compass.

**I. (2:4-7) JUDGMENT AGAINST PHILISTIA – WEST OF ISRAEL**

A. (:4) Major Cities Destroyed

1. Gaza – *“For Gaza will be abandoned”*
2. Ashkelon – *“And Ashkelon a desolation”*
3. Ashdod – *“Ashdod will be driven out at noon”*

**Baker:** possibly referring to the sudden unexpectedness of its defeat in the soporific heat of the day . . . or to the force of the attack which would prevail in only half a day.

4. Ekron – *“And Ekron will be uprooted”*

**MacArthur:** Judgment was to come swiftly and unexpectedly, even at noonday when it was least expected. Of the 5 Philistine cities, only Gath was omitted (cf. Am 1:6-8).

**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.”*

**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.”*

**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.

## **II. (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

a. Of Moabites

*“I have heard the taunting of Moab”*

b. Of Ammonites

*“and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, “*

2. Arrogance Directed Against God’s People and God’s Land

a. Against God’s People

*“With which they have taunted My people”*

b. Against God’s Land

*“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.”*

**Baker:** The comparison is deliberately chosen, since the progenitors of the Moabite and Ammonite peoples were incestuously conceived in the next biblical episode after that of the destruction of the two cities (Gn. 19:30-38).

**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.”*

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.”*

**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.

**Baker:** There is a structural parallel at the close of each half of the verse (see AV, RSV), in which the totality (“all”) of the doomed gods are in contrast with the universal (“all”) extent of the worship of the true God.

**III. (2:12) JUDGMENT AGAINST ETHIOPIA – SOUTH OF ISRAEL**

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

#### IV. (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.”*

**Baker:** This sort of abandonment to nature is not uncommon for those who oppose God (cf. Is. 13:19-22; 34:11-15; Je. 50:39).

##### 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.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which parts of this prophecy had direct near term fulfillment and which parts could only be fulfilled in the last days?
- 2) What do we learn from the contrast between the severity of the Lord’s judgment and His tender care and provision for His own?
- 3) Why is the indictment against the Ethiopians so short compared to the other three areas?
- 4) Where do we see pride and arrogance in our own lives?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:



**Freeman:** The names of these cities become symbolic and prophetic of the nature of their punishment. The meaning and sometimes the sound of their names in Hebrew becomes the basis for the prophet's play on words, which is lost in the English translation. . . . "*Gaza shall be forsaken*": in the Hebrew there is a play both upon sound – *Azzah* shall be *Azubah* – as well as sense. The Hebrew term *Gaza* (*Azzah*) means "strong" or "mighty," while *Azubah* signifies "forsaken" or "desolation." The prophet thus indicates by the use of the latter term that the "strong" and "mighty" city would be overcome, and that she would be "forsaken" and "deserted." "*Ashkelon a desolation*": if its name is derived from the escallot (scallion) which grew abundantly there as some suppose, then the prophet intended a play upon that meaning; namely, the site which was noted for its fertility shall become a desolation. Moreover, Ashkelon, located as it was on the Mediterranean Sea, was noted for its commerce and lucrative trade; nevertheless, she was to become barren and desolate in contrast to her present prosperity. "*They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday*." The paronomasia here stems from the meaning of the term *Ashdod*, which signifies in the Hebrew "stronghold" or "fortress." The stronghold of the Philistines, a fortress in strength, would become so defenseless that there will be no need for a surprise attack after dark by the enemy forces, but she can be overthrown at noon, in broad daylight. An attack at noon implies contempt for Ashdod's reputation as formidable city. "*Ekron shall be rooted up*": in the Hebrew *Ekron* means "to root up," the play upon meaning being obvious in this instance.

**Feinberg:** The greatness and glory of Assyria were known the world over. About 225 years before this, Israel felt the iron hand of Assyria in the Battle of Karkar (854-853 BC). More than one hundred years before this her armies overran Palestine and for more than a half-century dominated Judah. Now she herself was ripe for the most appropriate punishment. In her godless self-sufficient boasting, she had claimed that there was none beside her. This was the claim of Babylon also, as recorded in Isaiah 47:8. (See Laodicea in Rev 3:17.) Such self-sufficiency is the very attribute of God (Is 45:21-22). For this arrogance she is brought down to the basest desolation, a place for beasts only. The magnitude and suddenness of her destruction will make her the object of the scorn and contempt of all that pass by. They will wag their hand, implying that she has brought her judgment on herself.

**Carson:** (:13-15) It is certain that nothing seemed more improbable when it was first uttered; but so it happened even as the prophet foretold. The nation which ruled the world was brought to nothing. The place which was once the centre of pride and glory became nothing more than "a few mounds and monuments in a wilderness, at which the traveler shakes his head". So fickle is earthly glory and uncertain her rewards.

**Cook:** The survivors of the day of wrath would become shepherders, would occupy the land of their once-hated enemy, and would derive sustenance from it. The explanation for this gracious provision for God's remnant is given in the last sentence of verse 7. The remnant is the object of the love and providential concern of *the Lord their God* who cares for and restores His people.

TEXT: Zephaniah 3:1 – 3:20

TITLE: PURIFICATION LEADS TO REMNANT BLESSINGS

**BIG IDEA:**

**WHEN THE LORD RETURNS TO REIGN**

- THE NATIONS WILL BE JUDGED AND DESTROYED
- AND THE REMNANT WILL BE PURIFIED AND BLESSED

**INTRODUCTION:**

The love of the Lord for His people is amazing when set against the backdrop of unfaithfulness and rebellion. The history of Jerusalem in the OT is not a pretty one. There are only patches of obedience and faithfulness amidst extended periods of spiritual adultery and defilement. Yet the covenant-keeping God remains righteous and just while working out His kingdom program. There will be the need for purification; but there will be tremendous blessing when the King returns to triumphantly reign from her midst.

**I. (:1-7) JERUSALEM FACES IMMINENT JUDGMENT FOR HER SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY**

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

1. Summary Indictment – for Rebellion, Impurity and Exploitation

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

2. Failure of People to Walk With God

a. Failure to Obey God

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

**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.

b. Failure to Cling to God

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

3. Failure of Political and Judicial Leaders

a. Political Leaders Devour the People

*“Her princes within her are roaring lions”*

Not exactly civil servants, meeting the needs of the people

b. Judicial Leaders Devour the People

*“Her judges are wolves at evening;”*  
Exploiting instead of defending the helpless

c. Summary

*“They leave nothing for the morning.”*

**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).

4. Failure of Religious Leaders

a. Prophets Cannot Be Trusted – Lacking Conviction and Integrity

*“Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men”*

Will speak whatever serves their own agenda

b. Priests Promote Impurity

*“Her priests have profaned the sanctuary.”*

No regard for the Lord’s holiness and majesty

c. Summary

*“They have done violence to the law.”*

Shows the importance of God’s unchanging Law

**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).

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

1. (:5) Remains True to His Righteous Standards

a. Righteous – despite corrupt surroundings

*“The Lord is righteous within her”*

b. Right / Just – Consistently and Manifestly Just

*“He will do no injustice.”*

*Every morning He brings His justice to light”*

c. Reliable – He will follow through on Promised Judgments

*“He does not fail.”*

**Baker:** Yahweh is also within the city (cf. v. 3), but his character and actions are in contradistinction to its leaders’ (vv. 1-4). In particular, his righteousness, which is explained as a lack of ‘wrongdoing’ (v. 13; cf. Mi. 3:10; Hab. 2:12; Mal. 2:6), is

contrasted with their misbehaviour. His justice, too, is continually and dependably disclosed (cf. La. 3:22-23; Ho. 6:3). Yahweh himself is infallible and lacks nothing (cf. 2 Sa. 17:22; Is. 40:26), never guilty of a miscarriage of justice, as opposed to the ‘wrongdoer’ (Jb. 18:21; 27:7; 31:3) who never experiences shame (v. 19; cf. Is. 30:3, 5; Je. 2:26; Hab. 2:10). In all of the points where the city’s appointed leaders were derelict in character or in fulfilling their duty, Yahweh, their overlord, is faithful in his being and actions. In spite of Israel’s disregard of their promise to maintain a monogamous relationship with God alone (see 1:4-6), Yahweh remains committed to his people. He is there in their very capital city, even though they no longer acknowledge him.

2. (: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.”*

**Hanke:** Evidently Syria and Israel are meant here. This was prophetic of what the Lord was in the process of doing.

**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.

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

a. Worship Commanded – Repentance Required

*“I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.’”*

b. Wrath Impending – Repentance Rewarded

*“So her dwelling will not be cut off  
according to all that I have appointed concerning her.”*

c. Wickedness Embraced – Repentance Rejected

*“But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.”*

## **II. (:8-11) THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD WILL BRING BOTH JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS AND PURIFICATION OF GOD’S REMNANT**

A. (:8) Wait for the Day of the Lord’s Wrath and Judgment Against the Nations

1. Command to Wait for the Coming of the Lord

*“‘Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the Lord”*

2. Court Room Scene Anticipated

*“For the day when I rise up as a witness”*

3. Condemnation and Execution in Accordance with the Lord's Wrath

*"Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,  
To assemble kingdoms;  
To pour out on them My indignation,  
All my burning anger;"*

4. Complete Destruction Decreed

*"For all the earth will be devoured."*

**MacArthur:** The prophet transitions from the historical invasion of Judah by Babylon to the future day of the Lord. He speaks of the Great Tribulation, when the Lord will gather all the nations for judgment (cf Joel 3:1, 2, 12-17; Zec 12:2, 3; 14:2; Mt 24:21). The faithful remnant, presumably the meek of 2:1-3, are exhorted to wait in trust for Him to carry out His judgment.

B. (:9-11) Anticipate the Day of the Lord's Restoration of His Remnant

1. (:9) Purified for the Purpose of Service

a. Grace of Purification

*"For then I will give to the peoples purified lips,"*

Not just speaking of the Jews, but all peoples; context here speaks to the nations as well (**Baxter**)

b. Privilege of Dependence on the One True God

*"That all of them may call on the name of the Lord,"*

c. Fellowship of Service

*"To serve Him shoulder to shoulder."*

2. (:10) Regathered for the Purpose of Worship

*"From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,  
My worshipers, My dispersed ones,  
Will bring My offerings."*

3. (:11) Humbled and Forgiven for the Purpose of Holy Submission

*"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."*

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

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

1. Blessing of Humility

*"But I will leave among you*

*A humble and lowly people”*

2. Blessing of Refuge  
*“And they will take refuge in the name of the Lord”*
3. 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;”*
4. Blessing of Provision  
*“For they will feed*
5. Blessing of Peaceful Rest  
*“and lie down”*
6. Blessing of Security  
*“With no one to make them tremble.”*

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

1. (: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!”*

**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.

**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*.

2. (:15) Refrain: The Lord Reigns As Victorious Warrior
  - a. No Condemnation  
*“The Lord has taken away His judgments against you,”*
  - b. No Opposition  
*“He has cleared away your enemies.”*
  - c. The Lord Reigns  
*“The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;”*
  - d. No Future Calamities  
*“You will fear disaster no more.”*

3. (: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.’”*

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

a. The Lord Reigns

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

b. The Joy of the Lord

*“He will exult over you with joy,”*

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

**Piper:** When I think of the voice of God singing I hear the booming of Niagara Falls mingled with the trickle of a mossy mountain stream. I hear the blast of Mt. St. Helens mingled with the a kitten's purr. I hear the power of an East coast hurricane and the barely audible puff of a night snow in the woods. And I hear the unimaginable roar of the sun 865,000 miles thick, one million three hundred thousand times bigger than the earth, and nothing but fire, 1,000,000 degrees centigrade on the cooler surface of the corona. But I hear this unimaginable roar mingled with the tender, warm crackling of the living room logs on a cozy winter's night.

c. The Love of the Lord

*“He will be quiet in His love,”*

d. The Joy of the Lord

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

**Pastor Fred (Church of Christ – Hilton Head message – vs. 17) –**

The Lord's Attitude Towards You (God's View of Us)

- Presence – grow in awareness
- Power – rely on it
- Peace – be calmed by his love
- Pleasure – delights in us
- Praise – celebrates us with dancing and singing

C. (:18-20) Six Sovereign Acts of the Lord's Initiative in Blessing His People

1. 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.”*

**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.

2. Punishing all Oppressors

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

3. 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.”*

4. Restoring the People to Their Promised Land

*“At that time I WILL BRING you in,  
Even at that time when I GATHER you together”*

5. Bestowing Honor

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

6. Restoring Fortunes

*“When I RESTORE your fortunes before your eyes,’  
Says the Lord.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) What are some of the steps and safeguards to listening to the voice of the Lord and heeding His correction and walking closely with Him?
- 2) How does the Lord defend His own justice and vindicate His own judgments?
- 3) Which of these blessings apply right now to the Lord's people?
- 4) How does the Lord express His great joy over His redeemed flock?

\* \* \* \* \*

**QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:**

**Baker:** Jerusalem, rather than being God's faithful, covenant city in contrast to her pagan neighbours, is in fact one with them in her sinfulness and unfaithfulness (cf. Is. 1:21). She is addressed in a lament (cf. Je. 22:18; 34:5) as her fate is sealed because of



her rebelliousness (cf. Je. 4:17; 5:23; Ho. 14:1), defilement (cf. Is. 59:3; 63:3; Mal. 1:7, 12) and oppressive brutality (cf. Je. 25:38; 46:16; 50:16).

**Kenneth Trent:** The spiritual shortcomings of Jerusalem were evident over an extended period. Except for occasional revival and rededication, the city, loved so greatly by God, was a continuing disappointment to Him. Our text tells us of one such period, cir. 625 B.C.

**Feinberg:** Zephaniah's message centers about judgment and especially that of the fearful Day of the Lord. No nation is exempt. But we do him an injustice if we think of him only in the light of chastisement. He concludes his prophecy with words of blessing and promise for the nations and Israel. But these promises to the nations can only be realized when the blessings of God are upon the nation Israel. The King of Israel in the midst of Israel is the Lord God Himself. Would God that were already fulfilled! Every day that the salvation of Israel draws nearer, that of the world's salvation draws nearer also (Ps 67).

**Hannah:** The word "*then*" in verse 9 signifies a major pivot in the prophet's message both in tone and in content; he shifted from frightful predictions of destruction to prophecies of blessing and peace. After destroying the nations' armies, God will restore the nations to His favor. Instead of horrifying threats, here are comforting promises of love, mercy, and restoration. These promises look forward to the Millennium when Christ will rule as King on the earth.

**Guzik:** We often underestimate the joy God has in His people, and too often think God is annoyed or irritated with us. "Faulty as the church is, the Lord rejoices in her. While we mourn, as well we may, yet we do not sorrow as those that are without hope; for God does not sorrow, his heart is glad, and he is said to rejoice with joy - a highly emphatic expression." (**Spurgeon**)

**Constable** (quoting **Alex Motyer**): (vv. 16-17) "Most often the Lord's love is expressed by the Hebrew word *hesed*. This is the love that issues in commitment, the 'ever-unfailing' fidelity of love, love that lives in the will as much as in the heart. Here, however, the word is *'ahaba*, the passionate love of Jacob for Rachel (Gen. 29:20) and of Michal for David (1 Sam. 18:28), the fond love of Jacob for Joseph (Gen. 37:3), Uzziah's devotion to gardening (2 Chron. 26:10), Jonathan's deep friendship with David (1 Sam. 18:3), the devotee's delight in the Lord's law (Ps. 119:97). This too is the Lord's love for his people (Hos. 3:1), a love that delights him (Zeph. 3:17c), makes him contemplate his beloved with wordless adoration (v. 17d), a love that cannot be contained but bursts into elated singing (v. 17e)."

**Piper:** The first thing to notice here is that even though the amazing promises of this section relate most directly to the converted and restored people of Israel (v. 10), nevertheless it is a necessary implication of the prophecy that the blessings promised flow out beyond the bounds of Israel and include us who through faith in Christ become Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:29). Verse 9 shows that God intends to save more than just Jews: "Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to

a pure speech that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord."

**Piper:** We must banish from our minds forever any thought that God admits us begrudgingly into his Kingdom, as though Christ found a loophole in the law, did some fancy plea-bargaining and squeaked us by the Judge. No way! God himself, the Judge, put Christ forward as our substitutionary sacrifice, and when we trust him God welcomes us with bells on. He puts a ring on our finger, kills the fatted calf, throws a party, shouts a shout that shakes the ends of creation and leads in the festal dance.

Someone may ask: Isn't that a bit unseemly and undignified of God to get so excited and shout and carry on this way? But I answer: Remember David's wife, Michal. When David danced with joy before the Lord with all his might, Michal despised this immoderate display of emotion. And the Lord struck her barren for the rest of her life! For he intends to be mightily enjoyed, and one day he will show us how to rejoice with all his might.

Another may ask: But doesn't it belittle God to have him rejoicing over us? Not necessarily. It would be unrighteous if he made us his god -- if we and not he himself were the ultimate spring of his joy. But we aren't. We are not his god. He is his own God. And when we stand before him redeemed in Christ Jesus he will behold his own handiwork. "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus." According to 3:12 it is God himself who will see to it that there is in the midst of Zion a humble and lowly people who take refuge in his name. Does it belittle the designer of the IDS tower to exult over the beauty of that building at dawn in September? Does it belittle Michelangelo to rejoice with tears as he looks at the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel? Nor does it belittle God when the divine work of your redemption is done and all the millions are gathered before his throne, the humble and lowly, that God should break forth in singing and rejoice over you with all his heart and with all his soul.

**Michael Goodfellow:** There is a sense in Zephaniah that the new people of God are a very separate and holy people. That is in fact what the word holy means, separate. And that becomes a very difficult concept in our world, where we all seek to fit in. Where we seek to be as similar to everyone else as is possible. But Zephaniah speaks of the wall of division that God will bring down, ejecting the proud and rising up the humble and meek. "On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

The church has obliterated the line of separation that exists between righteousness and unrighteousness. No longer do we have higher moral expectations for our clergy. We no longer expect Christians to act and speak any differently from their neighbors. They

watch the same TV programs, listen to the same music, go to the same movies. We have a higher calling. We are called to be holy and separate not out of negativity. Not because we are against the world, but because we are for our God. It is to God that we make our first priority. It is to God that we pledge our lives in this fellowship.

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