

Session 4 The Forerunner Message in Zephaniah 3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Zephaniah 3

3:1-5	God's judgment on Jerusalem
3:6-7	God's judgment on the nations in the past
3:8	God's judgment on all nations in the future
3:9-10	The transformation of the nations
3:11-13	The transformation of Israel
3:14-15	A call to faith in God's promises
3:16-17	God's indescribable love
3:18-20	God's love in action

- B. Hezekiah is mentioned as Zephaniah's great-grandfather (1:1). Most see this as a reference to King Hezekiah. Zephaniah was probably in the royal family and shared a great-grandfather with Josiah.

II. GOD'S JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM (ZEPH. 3:1-5)

- A. The Lord has and will again judge Jerusalem for being rebellious to God, morally polluted, and oppressive in their use of power (3:1-5). Although the city is not explicitly named Jerusalem, it is clearly indicated as it is the only city where the Lord's sanctuary or temple is (3:4) and is the place on earth where the Lord is "in her midst" (3:5) and where prophets and priest polluted the temple.

¹Woe to her [Jerusalem] who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city...³Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves...⁴Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary [Jerusalem], they have done violence to the law. ⁵The LORD is righteous in her midst [the temple]. He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame. (Zeph. 3:1-5)

- B. Her leaders (princes, judges, prophets, priests) were greedy, immoral, and treacherous people.
- C. ***Her princes and judges:*** Her political leaders and judges are compared to lions and wolves devouring their prey. Their greed was insatiable. They used their authority to gain personal wealth and to secure more power, even when it destroyed the lives of the people under them.
- D. ***Her prophets:*** They were treacherous in boldly claiming to speak "prophetic" words that the people desired to hear, even though the words were contrary to what the Lord was truly saying
- E. ***Her priests:*** They hurt God's people by twisting the meaning of the Scriptures, thus, doing violence to the Word of God.
- F. ***They knew no shame:*** They were calloused in their continued resistance of God's leadership.
- G. ***Morning by morning:*** This phrase emphasizes the constancy of God's good leadership each day.

III. GOD’S JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS IN THE PAST (ZEPH. 3:6-7)

- A. Lord reminded His people of how He acted in history in judging the nations, including how He judged wicked cities and nations at the exodus from Egypt and in Israel’s conquest of Canaan.
- ⁶“I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate... Their cities are destroyed; there is no one, no inhabitant. ⁷I said, ‘Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction’—so that her dwelling [Jerusalem] would not be cut off, despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.” (Zeph. 3:6-7)***
- B. ***Fear Me***: The historical examples of God’s judgment should have persuaded Israel to fear Him and accept His instruction and punishment (divine discipline).
- C. ***That Jerusalem would not be cut off***: The Lord’s purpose in reminding Jerusalem of His past judgments was so that she would repent and avoid being cut off in God’s judgment in the future.
- D. ***They corrupted all their deeds***: Israel ignored the Lord’s warning and continued to refuse the lessons from salvation history. To *rise early* to do something speaks of doing it energetically, with zeal, and without consideration of doing anything else.

IV. GOD’S JUDGMENT ON ALL NATIONS IN THE FUTURE (ZEPH. 3:8)

- A. The Lord has determined to gather wicked nations to Jerusalem to destroy them (3:8).
- ⁸“Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.” (Zeph. 3:8)***
- B. ***Wait for Me***: The Lord exhorted the godly remnant in 2:3 to wait expectantly on His promises to fully restore Israel (3:11-20) and to intervene to stop wickedness (3:8) even as they saw sin escalate among their people in Israel shamelessly (3:5) and energetically (3:7).
- C. ***My assembly of kingdoms***: The Lord’s “assembly of kingdoms” speaks of the time when He calls them to Jerusalem in the end times to destroy them (3:8). He spoke of “the day” that He rises up to plunder wicked nations. He is determined to gather all the nations to Jerusalem to judge them.
- D. Joel and other prophets declare that God will bring the nations to battle in Jerusalem (Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3; 14:2, 12; cf. Zeph. 3:8; Ezek. 38:4). Satan and the Antichrist will gather the nations to Israel (Rev. 16:13-14; 19:19). Men will come motivated by anger and envy (Ezek. 35:11).
- ²“I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken...” (Zech. 14:2)***
- ¹“...when I bring back the captives...²I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat [Jerusalem]; I will enter into judgment with them...” (Joel 3:1-2)***
- E. ***All the earth***: This is not speaking of every single human being in every nation—it is not a gathering of the *whole population of the earth*. It refers to the armies of the earth or the military personnel *representing* each nation. Thus, millions of military people will gather to Jerusalem.

V. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NATIONS (ZEPH. 3:9-10)

- A. The result of God’s end-time judgments in 3:8 is the transformation of the “peoples” (the nations) so that they call on the Lord together with pure hearts and speech and with unprecedented unity (3:9). “Then” indicates a time after the Great Tribulation judgments. The Lord described aspects of how He will bless His people in the Millennium. This will be new start for the human family.
- ⁹“For then I will restore to the peoples [the nations] a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord. ¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshippers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering [to Jerusalem]. (Zeph. 3:9-10)*
- B. *A pure language*: The Lord will “restore” to the peoples or the Gentile nations a pure language to enable them all to call on His name and serve Him in unity. The Lord judged the people at the tower of Babel by confusing their languages and removing their one common language (Gen. 11).
- ¹Now the whole earth had one language and one speech...⁴And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves”...⁶The LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language...now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. ⁷Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech”...⁹Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth... (Gen. 11:1-9)*
- C. Some see the pure language as speaking of pure speech from a transformed life, while others see it as one universal language—presumably Hebrew. The significance of this promise is clarified—that all may call on the Lord in one accord, fulfilling Jesus’ prayer for unity (Jn. 17:21-23). The nations will serve the Lord in one accord so that all worship Him as one united family of nations.
- ²¹“...that they all may be one...that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one²³...they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know You...loved them as You have loved Me.” (Jn. 17:21-23)*
- ¹⁴He Himself is our peace, who has made both one...¹⁵so as to create in Himself one new man from the two [Jews and Gentiles]...¹⁶that He might reconcile them both to God in one body... (Eph. 2:14-16)*
- D. *My worshippers, My dispersed ones*: The Lord’s worshippers in this context speak of the dispersed Jewish people who—as unsaved survivors of the Tribulation—will receive grace unto salvation. Converted Gentiles will be used to bring the gospel to Jews who were dispersed in the nations. They will bring these new Jewish believers to Jerusalem to present them as a gift to the Lord.
- ¹⁸“...I will gather all nations...and they [Gentiles] shall come and see My glory ...¹⁹they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. ²⁰Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations...to My holy mountain Jerusalem...” (Isa. 66:18-20)*

VI. THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAEL (ZEPH. 3:11-13)

- A. Israel will be transformed so that they walk in humility, honesty, and confidence in God (3:11-13). The leadership and people in Jerusalem will no longer be characterized by pride and deception.

¹¹“In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress...for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride...¹²I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD...¹³[and] shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth...”
(Zeph. 3:11-13)

- B. **No shame:** They will be confident in the grace of God without condemnation and shame.
- C. **Humility:** The Lord will take away from their midst any who rejoice in pride and will leave the meek and humble people who trust in His name.
- D. **Trust:** To trust in the Lord is to recognize their great need and Lord’s authority and resources.
- E. **No unrighteousness or deceit:** The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness.
- F. **Deceitful tongue:** There shall be no lying political leaders, merchants, prophets, etc.

VII. A CALL TO FAITH IN GOD’S PROMISES (ZEPH. 3:14-15)

- A. Zephaniah concludes with great joy for the faithful who will pass through the fires of judgment. They were called to sing with confidence in the Lord’s promised blessings.

¹⁴Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵The LORD has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. (Zeph. 3:14-15)

- B. **Sing, shout, be glad, rejoice:** The humble of 2:3 are commanded to sing and rejoice because their King will one day live in their midst. Zion is called to respond by believing God’s promises. The Lord’s messengers must say and sing what the Scripture declares about Israel in the end times. Zion is to sing *before* her national salvation occurs (Isa. 54:1). In the Tribulation, many in Israel will not believe God’s promises for them.

¹“Sing, O barren...break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child ...³You shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations...”
(Isa. 54:1-3)

- C. **Taken away your judgments:** The Lord will remove all of His judgments and all their enemies.
- D. **The King is in your midst:** Jesus will set up His permanent residence in Jerusalem.

²⁸“Assuredly...in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Mt. 19:28)

VIII. GOD'S INDESCRIBABLE LOVE (ZEPH. 3:16-17)

- A. The Lord delights, enjoys, sings, and rejoices over His people (3:16-17). Thus His people are exhorted to sing (3:14). Zion speaks of Jerusalem and, more specifically, the temple mount.
- ¹⁶In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak.*
¹⁷The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”
(Zeph. 3:16-17)
- B. **Do not fear:** People in the Tribulation will need encouragement to overcome fear (Lk. 21:26).
- C. **Let not your hands be weak:** Hands symbolized strength, so when one's hands were weak or limp, it spoke of being overcome with feelings of despair, hopelessness, and powerlessness. Strength comes from hearing and believing God's plans and promises to save them.
- D. **The Mighty One will save:** Mighty God shall save you—the Lord is a military hero and champion (Ps. 24:8; Isa. 10:21; Jer. 14:9; 32:18; cf. Ps. 45:3; 89:19; Isa. 9:6).
- E. **He will rejoice over you with gladness and with singing:** The emphasis in this verse—God delights in His people. He calms the fears of His people by expressing His love through His songs.
- ¹¹...He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”* (Heb. 2:11-12)
- F. God rejoices over His people (Deut. 30:9; Isa. 62:4-5; 65:19; Jer. 32:40-41).
- ⁴...you shall be called Hephzibah...for the LORD delights in you...⁵As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.* (Isa. 62:4-5)
- ¹⁹“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people...”* (Isa. 65:19)
- ⁴⁰“And I will make an everlasting covenant...⁴¹Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.”* (Jer. 32:40-41)
- ⁹For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers...*
Deut. 30:9)
- G. **He will quiet you with His love:** God's people can have rest in their heart by rejoicing in the Lord because He rejoices over them; the banner of His leadership over their life is His love (Song 2:4). The secret of rest lies in grasping how He feels about us. May we never lose the wonder of His love and mercy. Sadness and anxiety lose their grip on us when we rejoice in the Lord.
1. Our lives will be changing in seeing a “glad God” who delights in His people. God's love delights in expression and rejoices with singing. He delights in us and we in Him; thus He and we delight in expressing and receiving love.
 2. Zion is to rejoice in God because God rejoices in her. She is to sing with joy because God sings with joy. We are to be glad because He is glad.
 3. What makes a people holy will make them happy.

IX. GOD'S LOVE IN ACTION (ZEPH. 3:18-20)

- A. God's love (3:17) always results in action in His perfect timing. His actions include liberating captives, removing their oppressors, healing those who are lame, and greatly honoring them.
- ¹⁸"I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly...¹⁹Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. ²⁰At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes"... (Zeph. 3:18-20)*
- B. *Those who sorrow over the appointed assembly*: The Lord will gather the Jews who were forced to live far from Jerusalem and felt great sorrow over not participating in Israel's annual feasts.
- C. *All who afflict you*: The Lord will deal with the people and nations who afflicted them.
- D. *I will save the lame*: The lame and outcasts are two groups greatly disadvantaged in the Tribulation, lacking the ability to obtain resources and strength to walk to Israel after the Antichrist is destroyed.
- ⁶In that day...I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast...⁷I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcast a strong nation; so the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion... (Mic. 4:6-7)*
- E. *I will gather and appoint for fame*: The Lord will regather and appoint His people for praise and fame in every land where they afflicted. The great God created His people for greatness, and He will answer this cry in the human spirit when He returns. Here we see the Lord's generosity in honoring the unsaved survivors of the Tribulation who will receive salvation after Jesus returns. This will deeply humble Israel with gratitude and love.
- ¹⁸...the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people...[and] keep all His commandments,
¹⁹and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people... (Deut. 26:18-19)*
- ¹¹"...I have caused the whole house of Israel...to cling to Me," says the LORD, "that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory..." (Jer. 13:11)*
- ⁵...the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Cor. 4:5)*
- F. *When I return your captives*: Zechariah prophesied that half the city of Jerusalem will be taken into captivity. Jesus will gather Israel as He opens prison doors and liberates some Jews in prison camps (Ps. 102:20; Isa. 27:12-13; 40:11; 42:7, 16, 22; 49:9-12, 21, 24-26; 61:1; Jer. 30:3, 8, 10, 17; 31:16, 23; Ezek. 39:23-29; Joel 3:1-2; Amos 9:14; Mic 2:12-13; 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:19-20; Zech. 9:11-12; 10:10; 13:8; 14:2; Mt. 25:43; Lk. 21:24).
- ²For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem...Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (Zech. 14:2)*
- In those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah... (Joel 3:1)*