

“The Future ‘Sounds’ Great!”

Zephaniah 3:8-20

The Book of Zephaniah hints that there should have been good things coming. We are told Zephaniah ministered in the days when Josiah was king. Josiah was a godly king – in spite of a godless father who only reigned for two years because he was assassinated by his own officials. And we have to wonder, did they kill his father Amnon because they were tired of wickedness in Israel? Josiah then, was next in line and he was named king at age 8.

Josiah had a spiritual awakening early in life. At age 16 we read in 2 Chron. 34:3 he began to seek the God of his father David. At the age of 20 he began to lead as a godly king and ordered the removal of all altars and idols and high places of anything worshipped other than God Himself. With the help of Jeremiah as well, Josiah led Judah with major spiritual reforms, repairing the temple, restoring it to its central place in the life of Judah, seeking to live by the Word of God, trying to lead the people back to God and Lord-willing get Israel back on track so that God might just restore Israel to her prior greatness. After all, didn't God tell Solomon back in 2 Chron. 7:13-14

¹³ "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Israel experienced droughts when the prophet Joel came to call. The 10 Northern tribes were taken captive by Assyria and commandeered their land. Manasseh was humiliated by the Assyrians when he was captured, but he had a spiritual awakening late in life. And now Zephaniah, a great-great grandson of Hezekiah himself was on the scene helping Judah return to God. Surely now under Josiah and Zephaniah, God would bless Israel one again as He promised way back in Deut. 29 to Moses.

But that's not what we have found so far. Zephaniah calls down God's judgments against their continued idolatry, pride and indifference to the Word of God itself. And not just small judgments but Zephaniah warns Judah of the final Day of the Lord wrath is coming when God will purge His people Israel of their sinfulness, allowing her enemies to be His punishing tool until only a remnant (1/3 of the nation according to Zech. 13:8-9) of Israel is left. However, God will also deal with Israel's oppressors once for all when He sends Jesus back to fulfil all the promises God made to establish Israel as the head of the nations, Jerusalem as the capital of the world and Jesus as King. This is the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God promises.

Which is what these last 13 verses of Ch. 3 are all about. The main point of what God's going to do in the future is that God is the One who will do it! No matter how good a king or leader you have (Josiah, Hezekiah, David), no matter many prophets are around (Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) the world will not ultimately change until God steps in and brings in the Kingdom. If we put our hope in a politician or a political party or even a godly figure, we will be disappointed because even the good they can do is limited and can't do what only God can do; fill the world with the knowledge of His glory.

The first 2 ½ chapters were mostly rebuking but now Zephaniah ends on rejoicing. This rejoicing centers on God's future promises to deal with His enemies and bring in His kingdom when the Day of the Lord comes. The Day of the Lord is when God Himself sets into play His end time

plans to deal with godlessness and bless Israel and the world through the return of Jesus Christ. So, what should we do until God finishes His work on the world?

^{3:8} Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them— all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.

It hasn't happened yet but it will happen one day. God can't lie. Therefore, God's people can

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Wait Confidently for God to Remove His Persecutors **(3:8)**

God's wrath will one day be poured out in its fullness during the seven-year tribulation period (also known as the Day of the Lord) as Revelation describes through 3 sets of judgments; first the 7 seals, then 7 trumpets and then 7 bowls. Each series of judgments increases in severity. God is justified in this because the reaction of those people is not repentance of their sins but anger towards God. They refuse to repent of their sins. Rev. 9:20-21 describes this well,

²⁰ The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The final judgments are clearly beyond any human explanation; they are clear evidence of the hand of God and yet many of these people refuse to acknowledge Him. But God's people are called to wait confidently since God spares us from that and we will finally be avenged of all the persecution we have experienced. Which is important and relevant when you see the news about persecution against God's people, of flagrant sinful choices being praised as tolerance or governments killing innocent people for personal gain or laws being passed that ignore the rights of the marginalized and those who can't speak. When we hear and see this all the time, it can get discouraging. But God says, 'Wait, trust Me. A day of reckoning is coming. Believe what My Word says even if you can't see it yet. That's called faith.'

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

What else can we do while we wait confidently for God's justice? We can ...

Look Expectantly to Unhindered Worship of God **(3:9-13)**

We looked briefly at vv.9-10 which speak of some of the nations coming to Jerusalem to join the faithful remnant of Israel to worship God and His Son Jesus together. We see them do it

In unity (vv.9-10)

⁹ "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings.

Remember from last week, Cush is the southern most known point of the world at that time. So, Zephaniah was saying people will come from all over the world to worship with the Israelites the One true God and His Son Jesus Christ, Son of David. The purifying of lips is quite possibly an allusion to the reversal of Babel where God 'scattered' the world by confusing their language and now brings them back as one; not so much speaking the same linguistic language but united in voice for worship. Many languages singing praises in their own tongue to the One true God.

They will also worship

In humility (vv.11-13a)

There will be no denominational battles, no music wars, no hierarchal disputes because we read in vv.11-13a),

¹¹ 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.

¹² But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD. ¹³ The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths.

When they see Jesus, all pride will be removed. Those who worship, are the meek and humble who have now inherited the earth. Because they are so wise and powerful? Not at all. Because they realize outside of God's promises and the presence of Jesus they would be destroyed. The remnant of Israel will never worship idols again. They will stay true to God. This is the time the apostle Paul wrote about in Rom. 11:25-27

Rom. 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶ and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

The 'all Israel' that will be saved will be the remnant at the end of the tribulation/Day of the Lord's wrath and they will never desert Jesus again. And we will all worship together

Without fear (v.13b)

They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

Jesus will have defeated all their enemies. He will reign from Jerusalem. The threats will have been removed. They can enjoy life not worrying that their door will be broken down during a meal or in the middle of the night because they are worshipping God in secret because it is illegal in many places today, and will be completely illegal in the tribulation because God's people won't take the mark of the beast.

When we have glimpses of this now – when we worship with people of different cultural and language backgrounds who are united through faith in Christ – it should whet our appetites for the future reign of Christ. So, to prepare for that day we should be striving for unity through obedience to Scripture and faith in Jesus alone. We should be humbling ourselves before others and seeking to

serve and not be served. We should worship without fear, not worrying what others think, so we can experience as close as possible now, this unhindered worship of God.

Of course, the best thing about the Day of the Lord, Jesus returns. We will then

Sing Enthusiastically in God's Presence **(3:14-17)**

There's a common misconception out there among some evangelical Christians that God is dour and waiting to pounce on us should we misbehave. So then why do we have the parable of the prodigal son in our bibles? Who's the father? God. Who's the wayward son? Repentant sinners. Who's the dour older brother who wants to pounce on his brother for his past sins in spite of his repentant heart? The legalistic, self-righteous lost person who trusts in his own deeds and not the grace of the Father.

What do the angels in heaven do when one person puts their trust in Jesus? Rejoice. Have a party. When Jesus returns to rescue His own people from annihilation, does He scowl at our lack of faith, our doubting of His return? No. Instead we read about a party!

¹⁴ *Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!* ¹⁵ *The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.*

¹⁶ *On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp."* ¹⁷ *The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."*

When Jesus returns to rescue remnant Israel from annihilation it will a time of rejoicing,

Because of God's forgiveness (vv.14-15)

Israel as a nation rejected Jesus as their Messiah. God will use the Day of the Lord to purge the unbelieving from Israel. When Jesus returns all surviving Israelites will turn to Him as Saviour and rejoice that God has completed His wrath and discipline. *"The Lord has taken away their punishment"* is not a reference to the cross – Jesus' sacrifice is always available to any who want to repent – but refers to the punishment due them for rejecting Jesus and breaking God's covenant. But now they are restored to Him and want to shout with praise and joy because now God is with them in Jesus. The glory of God left the temple just before the temple was destroyed in 586 BC. Then Jesus – the glory of God – made His home in Israel for 33 years, came to his own but His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11) and the glory departed again. But in this day, the glorious presence of God in Jesus returns to dwell with His people. He will turn back their enemy. Their hands will no longer hang limp in powerlessness because God is in their midst. And He will take delight in them, quieting them with His love and singing over them.

We should sing enthusiastically in God's presence now ...

Because of His love for us (vv.16-17)

The quieting with His 'love' is not the word *hesed* which we might expect but a different word for love, *ahava*, which is a word used to express the love of wife to husband or deep friendship. It is relational love because this is a reunion. It is a celebration of the reality of our relationship with God

when we are finally in His presence and the presence of His Son. This is how God really feels about all of His people and looks forward to the day when we will be together.

All these things we can do today even as we wait for Jesus to return. We can wait confidently now knowing He's coming. We can look expectantly towards future unhindered worship of God by experiencing it now at smaller levels right here and with believers in different settings. These are tastes of what's to come. We can even sing enthusiastically now because He is spiritually present within us and around us. These are all ways we show we believe God's Word. And because we believe in His Word we can

Live Joyfully, Trusting in God's Promises **(3:18-20)**

As Zephaniah wraps up his prophecy, he repeats some of the things he's already said but he lists them with this fierce rapidity emphasizing it's God who does all this:

¹⁸ *"The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you.*

¹⁹ *At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. ²⁰ At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,"*

Some Christians think that it's our job to bring in the Kingdom. That we've got to save the world and bring about political and social change so that the world is ready for Jesus to return. But that's not what we've been reading here. The Bible teaches that the world will get worse prior to Jesus' return and that Jesus will return to a world bent on destruction unless He steps in and makes the changes.

These last few verses affirm that. It is all the work of God. God will restore Israel's fortunes one day. He will bring believing Jew and Gentile together into Jesus' kingdom to serve and enjoy for 1000 years. He who began a good work in us will complete it (Phil. 1:6). Only if the sun and moon refuse to shine will His promises not come true for Israel (Jer. 33:25-26). God wants us to live joyfully – have the inner peace of contentment in God – even if the news continues to emphasize the sinfulness and lostness of mankind.

If God's promises about the future are not true then we have no hope. Our theme this year is 'eternal life'. Eternal life begins at salvation. It is the new perspective on our present life and our future that changes when God opened our hearts to receive Jesus. We now see things differently. We can now see all of life through God's perspective but because we can't visibly see these things yet or literally hear God singing over us, He is and He will.

Perhaps you are discouraged because of life's circumstances or people are giving you a hard time for your faith. Go over these verses again. See what God has in store for you. Commit Zeph. 3:17 to your memory and recite it when you doubt God's love and presence. Let's stop looking down and around and start looking up.

Col. 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly

things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net