

THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD: A CALL TO REPENTANCE ZEPHANIAH 02:01–03

Introduction

The great day of the LORD will be a terrifying day of judgment, a day of fierce wrath. Yet, terror is not the goal or purpose of God's judgment. Rather, through judgment, the LORD will remove all evil and corruption from the earth. He will execute justice on behalf of His people. Then God's people — all who have truly trusted Him — will be free to serve the LORD in peace and security through all eternity. God must execute perfect justice and judgment in order to cleanse the earth of all sin and sinners so that wickedness will reign no more.

However, the LORD desires that no one would perish, but that all would live (see Isa 30:18; Eph 2:3-5). This is why He so clearly and patiently calls the human race to repentance (Isa 55:7). All who turn away from their sins and seek the LORD will be saved. Scripture declares that in the midst of every past judgment, the LORD preserved a faithful remnant who survived and lived to serve Him. So it will be in the final judgment to come. Given this awesome truth, each of us — every man, woman and child — must decide whether to join the faithful remnant, those who will live to serve and enjoy God forever, or to side with the condemned. This is, *The Great Day of the LORD: A Call to Repentance*, Zephaniah 2:1-3:8.

I. The call to repent (vv. 1:1-3).

II. The reason to repent: God's judgment is coming on the nations (vv. 1:4-3:8).

Zephaniah 02:01–03 The Call to Repentance

The LORD issued a summons to the human race — a call to repent. God first issued this summons to His rebellious people in ancient Israel. However, God's call to repentance has been and will be to every person who has ever lived. It is the most critical message a person can receive.

1. Zephaniah issued a strong summons to the people: they were to gather together and pray, to fervently repent (vv. 1-2). Note that he repeated God's call for emphasis: the people were to gather together, yes, gather together to repent. Perhaps if the people repented, they would be spared the wrath of God (see 2 Chr 7:14). In summoning the nation, Zephaniah stunned the people by calling them, O nation. This particular Greek word used for nation (*goy*) was used most often to refer to heathen nations, those that did not know the LORD or follow His ways. In other words, God's people had become so sinful they were no different from the pagan nations around them. They were, in the prophet's mind, no longer fit to be called the people of God. By calling them heathens, Zephaniah sought to cut their hearts to the core and shock them to attention.
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Chiding them further, he called them a shameless or shameful nation. The people had shown no remorse for their sins whatsoever. They had become so callous that they felt no disgrace over their corruption. Thus, they were both shameful and shameless.

So urgent was the people's need for repentance that the prophet warned them to repent three times:

- a. Repent before the appointed judgment arrives.
- b. Repent before the LORD's fierce anger falls on you.
- c. Repent before the LORD's day of wrath comes upon you.

The people were to gather together to repent. They were to humble themselves, pray and seek God's mercy before God's judgment came upon them. Repentance was needed immediately, before it was too late.

2. Zephaniah issued another strong summons to the people: they were to seek the LORD (v. 3). Note to whom this call was given and what they were to seek:
 - a. Who are to seek: the humble and obedient. Humility and obedience go hand in hand. The humble were those who feared the LORD and depended on Him for their needs. They worshipped the LORD and trusted Him. Because they feared and trusted the LORD, they obeyed Him. God's Word was their strength and the most important thing in their lives. For this reason, they sought to keep His commandments and to live righteously. God's Word declares that the prayers of a righteous man avail or profit much (Jas 5:16). Therefore, Zephaniah summoned the righteous — the humble and obedient — to seek the LORD on behalf of the nation. But he was also calling those who had backslidden to a renewed humility and obedience so they might have a chance of surviving the terrible judgment to come. A renewed commitment to the LORD was their only hope for survival.

- b. What the humble and obedient are to seek:

=> to be righteous and humble

=> to be sheltered from the LORD's day of anger

The humble and obedient in Judah were to seek even greater humility and obedience. They were to be even more righteous and to live with greater humility than ever before. In the prophet's mind, their only hope for survival depended on the nation's complete turnaround. The few faithful who remained in the nation must initiate this change. Perhaps their fervent prayers and their collective acts of repentance could spark revival among the people, turning away God's judgment.

Keep in mind that God always preserves a remnant in the midst of judgment, a group of people who are faithful to Him and who obey His Word. This remnant would be protected by the LORD throughout the coming judgment, and it would be they whom God would use to rebuild the nation. Zephaniah was calling this remnant to action,

to prayer and repentance on behalf of the nation (see Dan 9, esp. 4-19). He was also calling those who had backslidden — those living in sin and rebellion against the LORD — to join this remnant by humbling themselves and repenting. He summoned them to renew their commitment, to rededicate their lives to the LORD.

Thought 1. Humble believers are not perfect or sinless. However, when they do sin, they immediately confess their sin and ask the LORD for forgiveness. This is an essential part of what it means to be a humble believer. Then again, there are many believers who are not humble before the LORD. They accepted Christ as Saviour at some point in the past and committed their lives to Him, but now they no longer walk with Him or seek to serve Him. They live more for themselves than for God. Some are even bound by a life of sin and selfishness. But God's Word offers great hope to the backslidden. Our merciful Father promises forgiveness, even complete restoration, to those who turn back to Him — all who will humble themselves, repent and seek His forgiveness. Listen to what Scripture says about humbling ourselves, confessing our sins and turning back to the LORD.

Thought 2. The LORD calls believers to gather together and to seek Him *together*. In fact, God's Word counsels the church, the whole body of believers, to gather together to seek Him. Great power awaits those who pray and repent as a unit, be it two people, a congregation, or a nation of believers. If we will genuinely humble ourselves as a body and together seek renewal and forgiveness from the LORD — for our own sins and the sins of our nation, He will pour out His Spirit upon us. He will hear and answer our prayers.

Mat 18:19-20 *“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”*

Heb 10:25 *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the day approaching.*

2 Chr 7:14 *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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ■*

THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD: GOD'S PROMISE OF AN ASTOUNDING DAY OF JOY AND BLESSINGS IN THE FUTURE ZEPHANIAH 03: 09–20

Introduction

The LORD is holy and just; therefore, He must judge sin. As pointed out in the preceding chapters, God's judgments will be terrible and fierce, but the LORD will also be merciful. In fact, His judgments will one day cease, but His mercy will endure forever. This is the great hope of His people — all who have ever lived and trusted in Him. Zephaniah proclaimed this great hope to Judah. Believers today can cling to the same hope: the great day of the LORD will bring not only judgment will also joy and astounding blessings. It is through God's judgments that the earth will be purged of all sin and, as a result, God's people will live in perfect peace and prosperity. They and the whole earth will be purified — all creation will be cleansed and freed from corruption at last. Then creation will cease from its groans, for the weight of sin will have been lifted. All of God's people will be free to worship the LORD, unhindered, and to share His abundant joy forever. This is, *The Great Day of the LORD: God's Promise of an Astounding Day of Joy and Blessings in the Future*, Zephaniah 3:9-20.

- I. The lips of all people will be made pure: cleansed morally and unified by one language (vv. 9-10).
- II. The people will no longer be put to shame because of sin (vv. 11-12).
- III. The true believers (remnant) of Israel will live righteously (v. 13).
- IV. The people will live in prosperity, peace and security (v. 13).
- V. The people will sing and rejoice with all of their hearts (vv. 14-16).
- VI. The LORD will be with His people and save them (v. 17).
- VII. The LORD will gather His people for worship and remove their sorrow over missing the appointed feasts (v. 18).
- VIII. The LORD will deal severely with all who oppress His people (v. 19).
- IX. The LORD will restore His people to the promised land (vv. 19-20).

I. Zephaniah 03:09–10 The Lips of All People will be Made Pure: Cleansed Morally and Unified by One Language

On the great *day of the LORD* the lips of all people will be cleansed — their speech and hearts will be made pure, and they will speak one language. Astoundingly, all nations and peoples of the earth will join together in pure worship of the LORD and in service to Him. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. All people will call on the LORD and serve Him together. What comes from a person's lips, his or her speech, is an indication of what lies in the individual's heart (see Mat 15:18-19, Jas 3:1 -9). The prophet Isaiah, when called by God declared:

Isa 6:5 *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

Isaiah's response to God's glory reminds us that no one has ever spoken from clean lips, not from a perfectly pure heart. No one on earth is perfect — not in an absolute sense — not when compared to God's holy presence. For this reason, all people must be cleansed by the LORD, for out of a person's heart the mouth speaks (Mat 12:34-35; 15:10-11, 18-19).

Scripture's reference to the people's *pure language* or *lips* probably also means that they will speak one language when Christ returns to set up God's kingdom on earth.

The LORD has a very specific purpose for cleansing the lips and unifying the language of the people: so they can join together shoulder to shoulder in the worship and service of the LORD. The human race has always worshipped and served the Lord with impure, imperfect hearts, speaking different languages not understood by most other people. But the glorious *day of the LORD* is coming when the human race will worship and serve the LORD with perfectly pure hearts and a unified language. This is God's wonderful promise to His people in this Scripture.

2. All true worshippers — both near and far — will bring their offerings to the LORD, even those from beyond the known world (Cush or Ethiopia). Ethiopia was probably the most distant nation known to Judah. Her mention reinforced the fact that God's cleansing would reach to the ends of the earth. People from every nation would worship and serve the LORD together. Therefore, Christ's Kingdom will be all-inclusive, embracing all nations and people, who have been purified by the LORD, that is, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

John 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Rom 14:11-12 *It is written: 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee shall bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

Phil 2:9-11 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Rev 5:9-10 *And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."*

Rev 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Psa 22:27-28 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.

Isa 45:22-23 “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”

Isa 66:23 “From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD.

II. Zephaniah 03:11–12 The People Will No Longer Be Put to Shame Because of Sin

The people of Judah had been brought to shame because of their sins; but in Christ's coming Kingdom, they will no longer be put to shame. Christ will wipe sin and shame off the face of the earth. Through judgment, the LORD will remove the proud and arrogant from the world. Only the meek and humble — those who trust in the LORD — will remain. They will be secured by the LORD and will sin no more:

1. The LORD will remove the proud and arrogant (v. 11a). Sin always brings shame, and Judah was guilty of the most horrendous sins, sins that brought the nation down. The people's sin and corruption were a grievous insult to the holy presence of God — the LORD who dwelled in their midst. In fact, their wicked behaviour brought shame both to themselves and to God. However, those who were proud and haughty, who had brought the nation (city) to ruin, would be purged from the land by God's judgment. This was not only a historical fact but also a foreshadowing of what will happen in the last days. On the great *day of the LORD*, the proud and arrogant — all who have rejected the LORD and refused His gift of salvation — will be removed from the earth. With the proud and rebellious absent from our midst, God's people will never again be shamed. In fact, they will be honoured among all nations (see also vv. 19-20).
2. The LORD will preserve the meek and humble, all who sincerely trust the LORD (v. 11b). Because the proud and arrogant will be gone, there will be no more sin. No longer will anyone rebel against God, for all who remain will know the LORD personally and walk in His ways. The LORD will secure His people by His Holy presence; therefore, they will sin no more. Sin will be wiped out along with the proud and vanquished from the earth forever. What a glorious day that will be when Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth!

When the LORD judged Judah, He preserved a faithful remnant. He protected and cared for them Himself. These were the meek and humble, those who trusted in and walked with the LORD.

Thought 1. God has promised to always protect and restore a remnant of His people — those who are loyal and obedient to Him. In the closing days of human history when God's final judgment and justice come to earth, He will preserve all who trust and remain faithful to Him. These are the people who will live forever and inherit the Kingdom of God.

Mat 13:30, 40 *“Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.... This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.”*

Mat 25:31-33, 41 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

2 Th 1:7-10 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

Deut 4:40 *Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.*

III. Zephaniah 03:13a The True Believers (Remnant) of Israel will Live Righteously

The true believers of Israel, the remnant, will live righteously in Christ's kingdom. In fact, perfect righteousness will be a chief characteristic of the Kingdom of God.

1. True believers will do no wrong. As noted above, God will eliminate all the proud and arrogant from the earth. As a result, all *iniquity* or *wrongdoing* (awlah) and injustice will be removed from earth. At last, people will live righteously and live together in a perfectly just and harmonious society.
2. True believers will not lie or deceive. The people of the earth will no longer attempt to fool God by professing to be His followers while disobeying His Word and

living wickedly. Previously, priests and prophets had defiled the holy temple and the sacredness of their positions. Rulers and leaders had oppressed the people and led them into idolatry. When Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth, however, all hypocritical behaviour, all lies and deception, will be erased from the earth. His people will be made perfect.

As the LORD promised above (v. 9), He will purify the lips of His people. Therefore, they will no longer be capable of speaking lies. Deception will have no place in Christ's Kingdom. Replacing lies will be the truth of God's Word and His constant presence. Christ's rule will annihilate all sin, and only His righteousness and blessings will remain. Sin will rule no more.

1 Pet 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Psa 98:9 Let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Psa 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Jer 3:19 "I myself said, 'How gladly would I treat you like my children and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me."

Jer 23:5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land."

Jer 33:15 "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land."

Zep 3:11 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.

IV. Zephaniah 03:13b The People Will Live in Prosperity, Peace and Security

In Christ's Kingdom, God's people will live in perfect peace, prosperity and security. Note the wonderful promise in Scripture:

In Christ's kingdom, God's people will be like sheep that feel completely safe. They will eat and rest without fear of predators. In truth, there will be no more predators on earth — no more enemies, sin or corruption. Therefore, there will be no more war or strife of any kind. Neither will there be poverty, disease or death. Instead, prosperity and health will abound. Everyone will enjoy an abundance of all good things in life. People

will no longer suffer lives of meaninglessness or despair as so many do today. All of their physical, emotional and spiritual needs will be met. Thus, every man, woman and child will be completely fulfilled. They will live eternally in the Kingdom of God and be rewarded with peace, prosperity and security.

Rev 7:16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

Isa 65:25 "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

Jer 31:12 They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD — the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.

Joel 3:18 In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias.

V. *Zephaniah 03:14–16 The People Will Sing and Rejoice With All of Their Hearts*

At this point, God's people will have passed through the judgment to the height of peace and prosperity. For this reason, they will sing and rejoice with all of their hearts. In verse 14, the whole tone of Zephaniah's message changes, reaching a climax: he moves from judgment and doom to exultation and praise:

Only the LORD could make such joy and praise possible — especially in the face of coming judgment. Yet, this is exactly what the LORD did. He promised to use the judgment to remove all sin and corruption from the earth. He was going to bring permanent peace and prosperity to His people through judgment. Therefore, Zephaniah encouraged the people to praise the LORD, to shout and sing. They were to rejoice with all of their hearts. God's people were to praise the LORD for the good news they were hearing and for the future hope they were being given.

Note a significant fact: it was not easy to praise the LORD at this time, for the people had just heard the prophet's message of doom. Fierce judgment was staring them in the face. Nevertheless, the LORD is gracious and always provides hope. Therefore, Zephaniah called the people together to rejoice and sing, not for the coming judgment but in spite of it. The certainty of judgment was to be followed by the certainty of restoration. God would restore His people.

Note, too, that the prophet was calling the people to faith and trust in the LORD. For most, it would be very difficult to see beyond the impending destruction. Even so, this is what Zephaniah was asking the people to do. Because the LORD had promised restoration, the

people should rejoice and sing in the face of coming judgment. They should trust the LORD and His promises.

Believers today share in the same promises. Therefore, we too can cling to the great promises of God and give Him praise even when we face great trials. Such praise demonstrates our faith and trust in the LORD.

In addition to the general peace and prosperity that Judah would one day enjoy, God's people had several other reasons to praise Him. Zephaniah noted four reasons in particular that were cause for great joy. Each statement was a promise of certainty, and each was stated in the past tense as if it had already occurred. In fact, these promises are so sure, so certain, that nothing can prevent their fulfilment.

1. The LORD will take away His hand of judgment (v. 15a). There will be no more need for judgment. All sin will have been atoned for and the wicked removed from the earth. There will never again be rebellion or corruption on the face of the earth; hence, sin and the need for judgment will be vanquished forever. Never again will the LORD have to judge the world or His beloved people.
2. The LORD will defeat and cast out all the enemies of God's people (v. 15b). This would include all of Israel's enemies — past, present and future. It also includes the enemies of all believers. Believers have suffered persecution down through the centuries and still do today. One day, however, all of their persecutors will be defeated by God and removed from the earth. None who have persecuted Christ's church will have a place in God's Kingdom — unless of course, like Paul, they have repented.
3. The LORD will be their King. He will live with and protect them forever (v. 15c). In Christ's Kingdom, the LORD Himself will be the believer's King. Even more amazing, He will live in the midst of His people. A more glorious promise could not be given. Remember that a Holy God cannot live in the midst of sin, nor can sin exist in the sight of a Holy God. However, the LORD will remove all sin and unrighteousness from the earth. He will redeem His people and make them righteous through the precious blood of Christ. Therefore, the fullness of the LORD's presence will dwell among His people for all eternity. As their eternal King, His presence will be continuous and permanent. Thereby, He will protect His people forever.
4. The LORD will remove all fear of harm (v. 16). The theme of absolute and eternal safety is continued and re-emphasized. So secure will God's people be that even Gentile believers (non-Jews) will know it. How different from days past when so many nations and peoples persecuted Israel. But on that day, no one will persecute the Jews. Rather, the nations will reassure the Jews with words of encouragement. They will suggest that the Jews no longer let their hands hang limp, meaning that they should not despair. In fact, despair and all anxiety will be totally absent in Christ's Kingdom. All fear of harm will be removed.

John 10:28 *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”*

Rev 21:25 *On no day will its [the New Jerusalem] gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.*

Isa 32:18 *My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.*

Isa 54:10 *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

Jer 23:6 *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD OUR RIGHTEOUS SAVIOUR.*

Jer 32:37 *I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety.*

Ezk 34:27 *The trees will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them.*

Hos 2:18 *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.*

VI. Zephaniah 03:17 The LORD Will Be with His People and Save Them

The LORD will be with His people and save them. The promise of God's presence and salvation is re-emphasized. The LORD declares that He is mighty to save and that He will save; that is, the LORD is both able and willing to save His people. This promise repeated part of the promise given in verse fifteen:

1. The LORD will take great delight in and rejoice over His people (v. 17). The LORD's presence among His people will be a certainty, as will His love and delight. God will delight in His people because they have been redeemed. He will sing and rejoice over them because they will be restored to Him and will live securely in Christ's Kingdom. Just as the people sing to and praise the LORD, so will He sing and rejoice over them. What a wonderful picture of God's love and joy — the delight He has always sought in His people.

Luke 15:7, 10 *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent....In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Psa 16:11 *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Isa 61:10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

2. The LORD will calm His people with His love and His eternal presence (v. 17). His loving presence will bring them lasting peace and protection. His people will no longer experience fear, anxiety, restlessness or concern. They will finally be at rest in the presence of God. The LORD will fulfil all of His purposes: the proud and disobedient will be removed from the earth; the meek and humble will remain. Sin and rebellion will be cast away, and God's people will be secure in God's presence forever.

Rev 7:15 Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

Joel 2:27 You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I the LORD, am your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Zep 3:15 The LORD, the king of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.

Zec 2:10 "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for behold, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you," says the LORD.

VII. Zephaniah 03:18 The LORD Will Gather His People for Worship and Remove Their Sorrow over Missing the Appointed Feasts

God will gather all of His people to worship the LORD in Christ's Kingdom. No longer will they miss the appointed feasts, the special worship services and celebrations ordained by God for His people. In fact, all of their sorrow — their godly grief over having missed the appointed feasts during captivity — will be removed. Note the Scripture and outline:

Though this verse poses some difficulty in translation, it likely addressed the Israelites who had been (and would be) taken captive as a result of God's judgments. The people would be exiled from the promised land and scattered among many hostile nations.

As history shows, Assyria had already conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Babylon would soon conquer Judah just as Zephaniah prophesied. Therefore, God's people were unable to worship the LORD in freedom, to celebrate their special feasts and worship services. As an enslaved people, they were often forbidden to worship the LORD and instead were forced to bow down to the idols of their oppressors.

Sadly, many of the Jews willingly turned to the false gods of other nations. However, the faithful exiles longed to worship the LORD as He had instructed them. These were the humble and meek, the righteous who trusted the LORD. These faithful few felt a deep godly sorrow over missing the appointed feasts. Thus, the LORD's promise to gather the people

and restore their freedom to worship Him was given to the faithful exiles in particular. Furthermore, He would remove all of the sorrow they had felt during their long exile.

Psa 22:27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.

Psa 66:4 All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing the praises of your name.

Jer 4:2 And if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' then the nations will invoke blessings by him and in him they will boast.

Zec 14:16 Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.

VIII. Zephaniah 03:19a The LORD Will Deal Severely with All Who Oppress His People

The LORD will one day judge all those who have oppressed and persecuted them — past, present and future. Note the Scripture and outline:

The people of Israel have been persecuted ever since their beginning as a nation. Dozens of nations have risen up against the Jews throughout their long history. This is just as true in the modern world as in the ancient, and tragically, nations will continue to threaten Israel right up until the end of time. It is then that God will enact His justice, His holy vengeance against Israel's enemies. And without question, the LORD has witnessed every act and every threat of aggression that has ever occurred. In light of that, no oppressor of His people will escape His severe judgment.

Jer 20:11 But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten.

Jer 30:11 'I am with you and will save you,' declares the LORD. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'

Thought 1. God extends to every believer His promise to protect His followers and to deal severely with their oppressors. The LORD will take care of His own. He will punish every individual who has persecuted or wronged one of His people. It is this great promise that frees us to love our enemies. Because the LORD promises to protect us, we are able to follow Christ's command to bless those who persecute us. Difficult as that may be, it is God's command to do so. We can — we must — leave the judgment to God. We are not to take matters into our own hands.

Mat 5:39 "But I tell you; Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Luke 6:27-28 *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*

Rom 12:19 *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.*

IX. Zephaniah 03:19b–20 The LORD Will Restore His People to the Promised Land

In the last days, when Christ establishes God's Kingdom on earth, the LORD will restore His people to the promised land. This is the great hope of Israel, and it is the hope of every true believer. God gives several additional promises to His people in these verses.

1. The LORD will save the lame, that is, the weak and helpless (v. 19b). God's people were defenceless because of their sins and the judgment their sins had brought on them. Many nations had conquered and oppressed them, but the LORD promised to make them strong again. He spoke to them tenderly and reassured them of His mercy and protection. Though He had judged them in order to cleanse them, a day was coming when God would rescue and restore them.
2. The LORD will bring back His people who have been driven away, those scattered among the nations (v. 19c). Israel and Judah had been driven away from the promised land because of their sin and God's judgment. They had been shamed and scattered among idolatrous and heathen nations. In preparation for God's coming Kingdom, though, the LORD will gather and restore His people to the promised land. He will gather the remnant of exiles — those who have sincerely followed Him — and restore them in Christ's Kingdom. In fact, the LORD has protected a remnant of true believers throughout all of His righteous judgments, and Christ Himself is said to have suffered with the afflictions of His people. Just as Christ carried them throughout their many years of suffering, He carries us through our trials today.

Isa 63:9 *In all their [Israel's] distress he [Christ] too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

Isa 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

Ezk 11:16 *Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.’*

3. The LORD will cause His people's oppressors to honour them (v. 19d). Not only will the enemies of God's people be defeated but also they will be forced to honour Israel. Those who have persecuted God's people in the past, as well as those who persecute His church today, will be made to honour genuine believers, all who truly

follow the LORD. This is part of God's vindication worked out on behalf of His people. This is another way God will reward His people and bring honour to His Holy Name. Anyone who has cursed God's people or persecuted His church has done so to the LORD Himself. For this reason, in the last days, prior to their final doom, all oppressors will be forced to acknowledge the LORD and to honour God's people.

Deut 26:19 *He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honour high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.*

Isa 25:3 *Therefore strong peoples will honour you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.*

Jer 33:9 *Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honour before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.*

4. The LORD will bring His people home — back to the promised land (v. 20a). Zephaniah repeated God's great promise of restoration. The LORD will bring back to the promised land all the people of Judah and Israel who have trusted Him — no matter how far they have been dispersed. In addition, God will restore their fortunes. Remarkably, hundreds of years before their rebellion, the LORD prophesied through Moses that His people would rebel. At the very same time, the LORD prophesied their restoration, the same blessings prophesied here by Zephaniah. Note the consistency and coherency of God's Word:

Deut 30:1-6 *When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. (see Jer 31:33).*

Thought 1. God will also bring true believers from every generation into the promised land. This is the great hope of the redeemed, all who have trusted Christ for their salvation. The promised land is a picture of the new heavens and earth that await us. It is the sure promise of God's Holy Word:

John 14:1-3 *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."*

2 Cor 5:1 *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

Heb 11:24-26 *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*

Heb 11:16 *Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

5. The LORD will arouse all the people of the earth to honour His people (v. 20b). The prophet Micah described a steady river of people who will stream to Jerusalem to learn the ways of the LORD. In his vision, Jerusalem will be exalted above all cities (Mica 4). Here, God makes a similar promise. All nations will honour Israel for one reason: God chose the Israelites to be the people through whom He would pour out His mercy upon the world. It was through the chosen believers of Israel that God brought His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world. And it is through Christ, the promised seed of Abraham, that the whole world has been blessed with the great gift of salvation. Someday in the future, the whole world will honour the Jews who truly believed Christ and passed down the glorious message of salvation. There can be no greater cause for celebration — no greater cause for bringing honour to God's people. By the LORD's rich mercy, shown in Christ, we have all been saved and restored. Astonishingly, we will also share in His honour when He is exalted in His coming Kingdom.

Note how Zephaniah began chapter three with the severe judgment of God. The LORD was filled with wrath because of the atrocities committed by His people. Nevertheless, the prophet came full circle and concluded his prophecies with an emphasis on the rich mercy of God. This was no accident. The end of the world, despite its terrible judgments, will testify to the riches of God's grace and mercy. Indeed, God's mercy will swallow up His judgments. His judgments will cease, but

His mercy will abound forever. This is the central lesson of *Zephaniah*: through God's judgment, His mercy will prevail. God will save His people — all who truly trust in the promised Messiah, Christ.

Thought 1. In reading this prophecy, we are compelled to make a critical decision. We can choose to trust and obey the LORD, heeding the warnings of His coming judgment. In so doing, we choose to join the promised remnant, those who are redeemed. Or, we can choose to be among those who reject the LORD, thereby condemning ourselves for all eternity. The choice seems obvious, yet so many still reject God or put Him off. What they fail to realize is that by putting off the decision, they are actually making their choice, choosing their destiny. Tomorrow may never come. Thus, we must ask ourselves *today*: *Whom will we serve?*

1 Cor 6:2 *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?*

Josh 24:14-15 *“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

1 Kng 18:20-21 *So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.*

Deut 30:11-19 *Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*

Thought 2. In closing the study on Zephaniah, note the excellent remarks by these well-known commentators:

- (1) The excellent expositor John Phillips makes this statement in *Exploring the Minor Prophets*:

*The book of Zephaniah begins with a king and ends with a King. The prophet referred to a past king (his kinsman Hezekiah), a present king (his distant cousin Josiah), and a promised King [the coming Messiah]. Hezekiah and Josiah were both good kings and both had bad fathers and evil sons; both failed, in spite of their sincere efforts, to bring the Hebrew people back to God. Hence the Hebrews needed another King, a King of kings, not just another king of the Jews. Earnestly hoping for the coming of this King, Zephaniah put down his pen; and earnestly hoping that this King will come [again] soon, we ponder what Zephaniah penned. (John Phillips. *Exploring the Minor Prophets*. (Grand Rapids: MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), p. 241).*

- (2) Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey state in the *New American Commentary*:

The promise of Zephaniah found its immediate fulfilment in the return from the seventy years of exile of which Zephaniah's contemporary, Jeremiah, spoke. At that time the people were rescued and the reputation of the people restored.

*The book ends where it began with a scene of the reversal of the whole world order. It began with cataclysmic overthrow. It ended with the blessings of God's people being returned to the land. "God's restoration of the nation in chapter three is as complete as His destruction of the world in chapter one. He is now a judge who pardons." (Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey. *New American Commentary*, 498).*

- (3) In his conclusion to Zephaniah, Warren W. Wiersbe's remarks are well worth quoting:

God's promise is that His scattered people will be gathered, His lame people will be rescued, and His sinful people will be forgiven and no longer bear the shame of their wicked deeds. "I will bring you home" (Zeph 3:20 NIV) is God's gracious promise, and He will keep it. Where once the Jewish nation brought shame and disgrace to God's name and were poor witnesses to the Gentiles, now Israel will bring honour and praise to the Lord their God and reveal to the Gentile nations the glory of His name. Israel will receive honour from the Gentiles and give the glory to the Lord.

The [modern] state of Israel was "born" on May 14, 1948, but that event, significant as it is, was not the fulfilment of God's promise to regather His people and restore their fortunes. That promise will be fulfilled in the end times, after the Jews have experienced the Day of the Lord and been prepared to see their Messiah. But God's promises will be fulfilled, and God's people Israel will be restored and bring worldwide glory to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*...there is a present-day practical lesson here for any of God's people who have strayed from His will and have experienced His chastening. When you come to Him with a broken heart, confessing your sins, He will receive you the way a loving mother receives a disobedient child. He will love you and even sing to you! He will bring peace to your heart and "quiet you in His love." Yes, we suffer for our disobedience; and sometimes we carry the scars of that disobedience for the rest of our lives. But the Lord will forgive us (John 1:9), forget our sins, and restore us into His loving fellowship... Is that your experience today? (Warren W. Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 432). ■*