

# 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. ■*