

ZEPHANIAH

INTRODUCTION

The date of the writing of Zephaniah is about 625 B.C.

The good King Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, bad King Manasseh, a boy of twelve years. The heathen party assumed control of the government.

Josiah, the last good king of Judah came to the throne at the age of eight, sought God at age 15, began to reform the land at age 20—the reform was completed at age 26. It was after this that Zephaniah prophesied.

Zephaniah means “God hides.” Zephaniah probably was born in the trying time of Manasseh, the wicked son of Hezekiah, who filled Jerusalem with blood. Social injustice and moral corruption appear to be widespread; luxury and extravagance are seen on every hand. The baalism was still worshiped and what worship was offered to God was little other than idolatry. The time was ripe for judgment.

Zephaniah speaks to an idolatrous Judah, whose religion and morality were at a terribly low point.

The theme of the book is, “the Day of the Lord is at hand for Judah.” Zephaniah’s emphasis to “the day of the Lord” should have struck terror in the hearts of the wicked leading them to repentance. “The day of the Lord” is a day of doom! Not a remnant will escape, but it is a “day of deliverance” for the faithful.

It is impossible to understand Zephaniah without some knowledge of the world situation in which he lived. In the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. the world stood in terror of a federation of wild tribes from what is now southern Russia. The Scythians smashed Syria and poured over all of western Asia. They pressed to the Egyptian delta before being bought off by Pharaoh Psammitichus I.

They rode bareback on wild horses, drank their enemy's blood and used his scalp for a napkin. The women rode with their men as warriors until they married and marriage was forbidden until a woman had killed three enemies.

Zephaniah teaches that it would be not only a "day of wrath" for sinners but also one of salvation for the righteous.

The temple itself was desecrated by heathen altars, and to Baal worship was added the abominable Assyrian worship of the planets, the sun and the moon. Witchcraft ran rampant throughout Judah and sacred prostitution was the order of the day. Even the sacrificing of babies to Baal was revived.

Manasseh's son, whom he had named Amon for the Egyptian version of the sun god, succeeded his father to the throne of Judah, but his two-year reign was so brief as to be unimportant. At the age of eight, Josiah the reformer ascended the throne. Nothing changed during the years of Josiah's regency, but when he reached the age of twenty-six, he initiated a wide-ranging reform.

Zephaniah's prophetic ministry no doubt played a large role, both in bringing about reform and in implementing it. The idolatrous priests, the worship of strange deities, the adoration of heavenly bodies, all come in for their share of denunciation by Zephaniah. So also do those who forsake the true worship of Jehovah, the atheists who have altogether abandoned worship, those who give lip service to God, and those who believe Jehovah will passively do neither good nor evil to anyone.

The message addressed to the world of his time is summed up in Zephaniah's repeated use of the term "the Day of Jehovah." Two major ideas are included in this term.

1. The universal judgement of God.
2. The comfort and hope reserved for the remnant.

Special attention must be given the term "Day of Jehovah" if we are to understand the prophecy of Zephaniah.

To the Jews of Amos' day, the Day of Jehovah was a day when the Hebrews would finally overcome their enemies. God would utterly destroy all Gentile

power, and the world would be ruled from Jerusalem. Throughout the Old Testament the term *yom* YHWH (Day of Jehovah) denotes the time when God's kingdom will be finally consummated and free from attack from without and corruption within.

To bring this consummation to its fullness, four characteristics are described in various contexts, both in the Old and New Testament.

1. The judgment of Israel, Judah and the nations of the pre-Christian world.
2. The deliverance and preservation of the remnants during and after the captivity.
3. The first coming of the Messiah.
4. The second coming of the Messiah and is final judgment of all men and nations.

Conceived of in terms of Judgment, the day of the Lord is described as a "day of wrath" or "day of judgment."

In keeping with the nature of His Kingdom, which is not of this world," the Scriptural teaching concerning the "Day of Jehovah" is concerned more with the qualities of the day than with the time of its fulfillment.

Any period of history in which God raised up a nation to punish wickedness or unfaithfulness answers to the first characteristic of "that day." It is in this sense that Zephaniah places most of his emphasis on "the Day of Jehovah."

There is a fervor of wrath revealed in the overthrow of wicked Judah and her equally wicked neighbors. There is the overriding warning that a nation which does not turn from sin to God is "living on borrowed time."

JUDGEMENT OF GOD

Salutation — Chapter 1

Verse 1

In Zephaniah's opening verse his claim to inspiration is never in doubt. The prophet's opening words "the word of Jehovah" are calculated to establish the authority of what he is about to say. He will write down the word of Jehovah God.

Zephaniah identifies himself as son of Cushi, of Gedaliah, Amariah, of Hezekiah. The important name here is Hezekiah, the last God-fearing king of Judah prior to Josiah with whom Zephaniah is contemporary.

UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT PROCLAIMED

Verses 2-3

Verse 2

Whatever the chronological relationship of Zephaniah's "Day of Jehovah" is to the final summing up of all history by God, it certainly prefigures the ultimate destruction of all the sinful works of man in preparation for the establishment of the universal reign of God.

Verse 3

Along with the wicked, God will wipe out those things which have caused man to sin. This is no doubt an illusion to the idolatrous worship of the beasts, fishes and birds mentioned here. Ezekiel uses similar language in condemning idol worship. (Ezekiel 14:3-7)

Zephaniah will allow none of the nonsense current in our time regarding his prophetic insight. Those who today would tell us that this insight came from an informed political prognosticator, do so only by ignoring the prophet's claim, "Thus says Jehovah." Here is the watchword of all Old Testament prophecy. The message is from God.

JUDGMENT OF JUDAH Verse 4-Chapter 2:3

MY HAND UPON JUDAH

Verse 4

Some others (Amos) whose pronouncements of judgment begin with Judah's neighbors and their focus of her, Zephaniah begins at home. All the world is wicked. The sin of God's people is worst of all, precisely because they are God's people. (1 Peter 4:17)

The prophet immediately turns to listing those specifics which have brought God's judgment against Judah. At the top of the list is Baal worship. The last vestige, or remnant, of Baal worship is going to be obliterated from "this place," that is, Jerusalem. However, thorough the reform was, it did not remove all the remnants of Baal worship.

This was accomplished only by the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Chemarim in Aramaic means priests. Its literal meaning is "black." It applied to the priests because of their black robes.

Probably both the priests of Baal and the apostate priests of Jehovah are meant here. Just as Zephaniah begins his pronouncement of universal judgment by focusing on Judah; within Judah the focus is on Jerusalem; within Jerusalem "His place" or the temple; within the temple the priesthood. The prophet obviously believes in coming directly to the source of Baalism among God's people.

THE HOSTS OF HEAVEN ON THE HOUSETOPS

Verse 5

In addition to Baal, the perennial blight on Judah's faith, the Assyrian worship of the planets, has also infected the people of God. The housetops mentioned here are the flat roofs of Palestinian homes which were the ideal vantage point from which to worship "the hosts of heaven."

Malcom here means literally “their king.” The name, “Malcom” is related to Moloch, the Phoenician name for Baal. As sun god, Baal was king of all the heavenly hosts.

In Zephaniah’s day religious syncretism was a mixture of Jehovah worship and Baal worship. Both “Baal” and “Jehovah” mean “Lord.” The worshipers, by appealing (swearing) to the authority of both, were attempting to serve two masters.

The same approach is advocated today as Christianity searches for some peaceful co-existence with Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, etc. In both Zephaniah’s day and ours the problem of syncretism is a problem of authority. In Judah there was a willing compromise of Jehovah’s authority with that of Baal. In our time the premise is situationalism in which the presupposition of absolute authority is summarily dismissed. In either case the Biblical answer is “Thus says the Lord!”

Verse 6

Indifference to and unconcern for Jehovah are described here. Then as now, there are those who, surrounded by evil heinous enough to merit the judgment of God, were simply satisfied to live out their lives without considering God at all.

In pronouncing punishment against such indifference the prophet describes it as “men that are settled on their lees that say in their heart Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil.” This amounts to spiritual stagnation just as fermented wine was left for a time on the “lees” to allow solid matter suspended in it to settle, so the unfeeling indifference of some in Judah has left them a congealing of the soul. Perhaps God’s judgment will surprise none so much as these.

Verse 7

As the indifferent had nothing meaningful to say for, to, or about God, they are to be dumb in their presence of His judgment.

The Lord has prepared his evil backsliders as a sacrifice. The despised Chaldeans are called to be His guests. They will feast on the remains of Judah as

the priests feasted on the remains of the sacrifices on feast days.
Nebuchadnezzar was invited to come to take vengeance on Jerusalem.

Verse 8

Jehovah had regulated the attire of His people in a measure. Special dress was designed to remind them they were in a special relationship to God. (Deuteronomy 22:11f) Beyond the copying of foreign dress is the implied aping of foreign customs which inevitably accompanies it. The adopting of foreign dress and customs led to the acceptance of foreign religions. There was a gradual blending of Judah with her neighbors until there was little to distinguish the one from the other.

Verse 9

Several possible implications are suggested here. The priests of the Philistine god, Dagon, avoided stepping on the threshold of their temple because their god had fallen across it. (1 Samuel 5:5). When the Judeans emulated this practice, they were yielding to idolatry.

Household deities may have entered into this leaping over the threshold. Sacrifices of food were left on the threshold for such gods so that the threshold constituted an altar. As such, it was not to be desecrated by stepping directly on it.

Perhaps Zephaniah intends rather to single out by this phrase those who in haste to intrude on the privacy of their neighbors, or to rob and ransack their houses, leaped across the threshold. In any of these cases, the offense is worthy of punishment.

The house of the master refers to the household in which one was employed. Those who are disloyal to their employers, who enrich themselves at their employer's expense, are to suffer God's judgment

THERE SHALL BE THE NOISE OF A CRY

Verses 10-13, Verse 10

The fish gate was located in the north wall of Jerusalem. When the invading Babylonians came against Jerusalem they would come from the north. From their direction the alarm would sound throughout the city.

The second quarter was a northern suburb of Jerusalem, new in Josiah's day. It also would be in the line of Babylonian march.

The "hills" likely refer to the hills immediately north of Jerusalem. Scopus, northeast of the city had long been inhabited as a section of Jerusalem, but without the city walls. Invading armies captured this hill and, because of its commanding view of the city, made it their field headquarters.

Verse 11

Between the eastern and western hills on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem is the valley of Maktesh. The name means "hollow place." Those who dwelt there would be directly in the path of any invader from the north.

The "people of Canaan," here probably means merchants. Not only those who lived in the northern outskirts of the city, but those who came there to trade, would be caught in the judgmental onslaught. Zephaniah describes the sudden anguished cry of all who stood in the path of the Babylonians.

Verse 12

God's judgment will be exhaustive; none will escape. This searching is directed against those whose sin was indifference. By their non-commitment they have sought to escape from responsibility for the sins against which God's wrath is directed. They have remained obscure, the "silent majority" will not be held unaccountable for the evil all about them. God will search them out for their own punishment.

Verse 13

Indifference not only is no assurance of lack of moral responsibility. It actually becomes a danger in itself. Non-commitment cannot protect property from an invading army. Because they have remained indifferent to God and to

conditions about them, they will not be allowed to reap what they produced by their labor. Others will lay waste their vineyards.

The indifferent are self-content in their suburban homes. They have escaped the immediate consequence of the evil of the city. But in God's judgment against the city all they have secured by their indolence will be lost.

Verse 14

Here again is the prophetic "Day of the Lord," the day in which Jehovah would directly intervene in the affairs of man's history in such a way as to reveal His judgement and redemption. The Jews, smug in their racial identity, were prone to view the day as one of extreme gladness for themselves and of extreme discomfiture for the Gentiles.

Zephaniah's warning is that the city will be one of anguish for the unfaithful among God's people. In every age of history, God works in human affairs on the basis of the same principles. Hence there is evidence in every age of the impending judgments of God.

One need only visit the lands of the Bible and walk among the ruins of twenty-two fallen civilizations to realize that urgency concerning God's judgment is well-founded.

When the final curtain is about to fall on the history of humanity, and the last "day of the Lord" is indeed imminent, the "signs of the times" will be the same.

We live in a time when these "signs" are all about us. Whether they portend the declining days of our culture and the beginning of another era, or the soon coming of the final "last days" is irrelevant.

In either case, we would be fools not to share with the prophets and the New Testament church the sense of urgent need for repentant preparation. We, as Zephaniah, need desperately to know the day is so near that the "voice" of it can already be heard.

THAT DAY IS A DAY OF WRATH

Verses 15-18

Francis Schaeffer's book, "Death In The City" says "anyone who is unwilling to speak of the wrath of God does not understand the Christian faith." If we allow "the Christian faith" to include those covenant people who looked forward to His coming as well as those who look to it as a thing already done, we would be like Zephaniah's readers.

It is precisely because they, and we, are under God's wrath that the judgment must come. It is because we stand guilty and unfit for His presence that He must come to us. Zephaniah's description of the day of wrath in these verses pictures the physical destruction occasioned by God's wrath implemented by Nebuchadnezzar.

It may describe what lies in our own future. Figuratively, it certainly depicts the spiritual suffering in the last judgment day by those who know not God.

CALL TO REPENTANCE CHAPTER 2

Verses 1-2

God's threatenings are always designed to call men back to Him. Even though He knows that few will repent, He is "not willing that any should perish." (2 Peter 3:9)

Probably these three verses belong to chapter one. They form the usual high note upon which the prophets close a section of threatenings. The purpose of such denunciations as we have just considered is always to bring about repentance and cleansing.

The meek, that is, the humble before God, those with the moral courage to see the truth of the prophet's preaching are called to act in concert, to gather together in a common repentance which bespeaks the truth that even the faithful have not always acted according to their faith.

The word gather describes a stooping such as is done in the gleaning of fields. It is to be done "before the days pass as the chaff." The "day of judgment" is a

time of harvest. Not only are the unfaithful punished but the faithful are rewarded.

The nation, per se, has no shame, Judah's submission to the wooing of Baal marks her as no different from other nations. However, the meek within her still may find hope in gleaning themselves from the whole.

Verse 3

This verse is a bridge between the pronouncements against Judah in chapter one and the following declaration of judgment against Judah's neighbors. Peter's discovery that, "In every nation the man who fears God and does what is right is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:35) This is the discovery of eternal truth!

The "meek of the earth," are presented by Zephaniah as, "they that have kept His ordinances." This same concept is found in Paul's Roman letter. (Romans 2:14-15) Meekness is the moral courage to be humble before God. Jesus' statement is that the meek shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

The achievements of those who are haughty before God are always temporary because they will not stand in the Day of Jehovah.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS UNIVERSAL

Verses 4-15

Just as God's mercies are universal, so is His wrath. Those who have not the law not only keep the essential moral requirements of it and thus be excused by their consciences, they may likewise also violate this moral reality to their own detriment. (Romans 2:15)

The often-heard argument made by those who do not believe in missions; that the people who have not heard are excused somehow by their ignorance will not stand up in the light of either the Old Testament or the New Testament. They have violated the light of their own consciences and so stand as objects of God's wrath along with those who have access to His written Word. Surely the love of Christ in us ought to drive us to give them the same chance to repent as ourselves.

Verses 4-7

In these verses, Zephaniah names the areas to the south and west of Judah who are to feel God's wrath along with the Hebrews. The statements are general rather than descriptive as had been Nahum's rather delighted picture of Nineveh's downfall. Nevertheless, the names roll from the prophet's pen like the muffled drums of a funeral dirge.

Gaza—forsaken, Ashkelon—desolation, Ashdod—driven out at noon, Ekron—rooted up, the Cherethites—woe, the Philistines—destroyed. The entire coast will be pasture land.

Those who are left behind of Judah will pasture their flocks in the lands and cities of the Philistines. The fifth, Gath, was wiped out earlier by the Assyrians and so is not mentioned by Zephaniah in regard to the Babylonian invasion.

These sea people, whose entrance in to Canaan had been contemporary with that of Abraham and who had been a constant thorn in the Hebrew's side, would now feel the devastating wrath of God as never before.

Verses 8-11

These verses pronounce judgment against the nations of trans-Jordan. For centuries they have spoken against God's people. Now Ammon and Moab will feel His wrath. They had long boasted they would annex land belonging to the Hebrews. Now, lest they carry out their boast during the captivity of Judah, they will share that captivity! The desolation described here is evident today.

The gods who once were worshiped in Ammon and Moab are no more. Jehovah worship, even when He is called Allah, as in Moab and Ammon today, is a far cry from the pagan abomination called Moloch.

Zephaniah's promise is that, when all the false gods are made desolate, famished by God, every man will worship Jehovah in his own place, even all the isles and nations. There are Messianic overtones here. Jesus said in John 4:23-24.

The universal worship of Jehovah in every place rather than in a particular “holy land” was more than an after-thought on Jesus’ part. It was the main thrust of the Old Testament.

Verses 12-15

Zephaniah broadens the scope of this pronouncement. Not only are Judah and her near neighbors to feel the sting of God’s wrath, far away Ethiopia and Assyria and Nineveh shall feel it also.

All those included in this sweeping indictment shall feel the sword of the Lord, just as the Philistines, Moab, and Ammon. “My sword” is whatever instrument of judgement God uses.

COMFORT AND CONSOLATION

REAFFIRMATION OF JUDGEMENT

Chapter 3:1-8

Note: In chapter 1:2-2:3, social sin and injustice are hardly noted. Social sins will cause Israel to be led captive. This supreme sin, “man’s inhumanity to man,” is the inevitable consequences of the false religion dealt with in Zephaniah’s first two chapters.

In chapter 3, Zephaniah briefly but emphatically indicates that it is social injustice, such as that spelled out by Micah, Amos, and Isaiah, for which Israel will be led captive. This supreme sin, “man’s inhumanity to man,” is the inevitable consequence of the false religion dealt with In Zephaniah’s first two chapters.

Verse 1

Jerusalem is not named, but is obviously intended. Her rebellion against Jehovah worship has caused her social pollution. The oppression of the “have nots” by the “haves” is the consequence of the religious syncretism of the “haves.”

The twenty-first century nonsense that “it doesn’t make any difference what one believes so long as he is sincere” is proven erroneous in the history of Judah’s punishment. The social evil in America today is in large measure the

result of the same sort of religious non-commitment that brought about the downfall of Judah. No culture can remain just and equitable that does not have a certain moral and spiritual base.

The social inequity resulting from a lack of religious certainty is the dry rot which destroys civilizations. Mere lip service to Jehovah is not enough.

Verse 2

The prophet's charge of rebellion against Jerusalem is spelled out in this verse. Four failures have brought her to the brink of destruction.

1. Judah did not obey the voice of God.

Hebrews 1:1 tells of God speaking to the fathers in the prophets. Their voice was His voice. His people did not obey.

2. Judah did not receive the correction.

When God sent other prophets to correct her failure to hear, Jerusalem (the spiritual center of Judah) did not receive the correction.

This stiff-necked attitude compounded to and pushed the nation farther down the slopes toward disaster.

3. Judah trusted not Jehovah.

This would seem, in light of the first two charges, to be self-evident. No one really trusts God who does not heed His spokesmen. The prophet, in this third indictment, calls attention to Judah's alliances with foreign powers.

Rather than trust Jehovah's might for her national security, Jerusalem aligned herself with the Assyrian-Egyptian power block in the struggle with Babylon. She would find herself on the losing side.

America, whose currency bears the inscription "In God we trust," seems unable to learn this lesson.

4. Judah drew not near to God.

Instead, Judah sought Baal. The failure of Judah was not passive merely. She not only failed to hear and trust, she actively sought false gods.

Verses 3-4

These verses are reminiscent of Micah's denunciation of the various influential classes in the culture of the people.

1. Judah's princes are roaring lions. That is, those who held political authority over the people are roaring lions. They as Satan, go about "seeking whom they may devour."
2. Judah's judges are as wolves in the evening.

Wolves feed at night beginning at dusk and by morning there is little left of their victims. So, with common people who are at the mercy of a corrupt court system. A corrupt judicial is ever the companion of an evil executive.

3. Judah's prophets are light and treacherous persons.

These more than any other, must answer for Judah's corrupt religion.

As Micah accused them, they preached what their wealthy listeners wanted to hear rather than thundering forth God's truth. They proclaimed the imaginings of their own minds rather than God's Word.

A dangerous parallel could be drawn here by comparing the practice of these prophets to the modern preacher of topical sermons who neglects the expository treatment of God's Word.

4. Judah's priests have profaned the sanctuary.

The present day American churchgoer, with his blase' attitude toward things sacred cannot appreciate the seriousness of this offense. One of the functions of the priests of Levi was to guard the sanctity of the Holy Place.

The priests to whom Zephaniah writes have become worldly-minded, so tolerant of false religion they are no longer concerned for the sacredness of the temple.

They perverted the law to suit their own advantage while practicing a narrow legalism generally. They had forgotten the dramatic lesson of Uzzah who was struck dead for placing unclean hands on the sacred ark.

Verse 5

God has not left His people. In the midst of rebellion and injustice, He is faithful to the covenant. He has not been turned aside from His purpose by the unfaithfulness of the people.

“Every morning He brings justice to light.” The worship of Baal began with greeting Him at dawn in the rising sun. As this very hour when the people’s unfaithfulness reached its daily pinnacle, Jehovah brings justice to light. His moral standards and His righteousness are as reliable, and more so than the rising of the sun. But the people refuse to see.

“The unjust know no shame.” Even the constancy of Jehovah in the midst of their unfaithfulness does not shame them. They are unmoved in their pursuit of unrighteousness and error.

Verse 6

God’s righteousness judgments are not limited alone to Judah. The prophet has already listed the sentences of God against the surrounding Gentiles. It is God, not Zephaniah, who has cut off the nations. The desolation and ruin of those named in the previous chapter are not the result of Jewish nationalism but of God’s universal judgment.

The archives of history are filled with the records of those nations cut down by God’s righteous judgment because “knowing God, they did not honor Him as God.” (Romans 1:21)

Verse 7

God still speaks through Zephaniah. He calls the Hebrews back to the rudimentary beginning of wisdom.

Paul, quoting Psalm after Psalm, will prove that all social evil such as that against which the prophets spoke are the result of failure to fear God. He will list lack of righteousness, and understanding, failure to seek God, turning aside from His purpose, failure to do good, all spiritual uncleanness, deceitful speech, cursing and bitterness, war and destruction and misery and the futile search for peace as the consequences of not fearing Him. (Romans 3:9-18)

One can only shudder today as the church member whose twisted misinformation about God's love has led him to a contemptuous familiarity which does not believe one should or must fear Jehovah.

God's plea through Zephaniah is "only fear me." Only . . . just . . . please!

Note: A deep and genuine fear of God will bring about the correction of the evil against which judgment must otherwise come.

Despite God's plea to fear Him, the people ignored His plea and rose up early to greet the sun god. In so doing, they paved the way for all other corruption.

Verse 8

The great Day of Jehovah is again called to mind as the decisive day on which He will gather the nations before Him in wrath.

The meek, those who are humble before God, are called to wait for that day when He will prey upon His enemies. In that day when Jehovah's wrath is poured out to devour the earth with fire, the meek shall inherit the new earth.

The idea of destruction by fire in relations to God's judgment is fairly distributed throughout the Bible.

1. Joel spoke of a time which would be revealed in blood and fire and vapor of smoke. (Joel 2:30)
2. Psalm 50 depicts God's coming in company with a devouring fire. Isaiah wrote of similar phenomena. (Isaiah 29:6, 30:30, 66:15-16)
3. We have heard Nahum speak of the hills burning and the earth burning in His presence. (Nahum 1:5-6)
4. Malachi will tell us of the day of the Lord burning as an oven.
5. Those nations found guilty in Jehovah's court of justice will feel the fiery fierceness of fire that is to devour the adversary. (Hebrews 10:27)

WE ARE SOMETHING LESS THAN WISE NOT TO FEAR HIM!

This gathering need not be seen as taking place in Jerusalem. There is no biblical proof for the tradition that the final judgment will take place in the Kidron valley.

The idea is that all nations simultaneously and universally are judged by God.

His righteousness will flow across the earth as the fiery lava of a volcano consuming all those that stand in the way of His covenant purpose.

THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

Verses 9-13

The purpose for which God's wrath is poured out in human history is a redemptive purpose. Zephaniah sees, as do the other prophets, the promise of repentance and consequent redemption.

God is just, not arbitrary.

He does not punish out of vindictive petulance but out of love. (Hebrews 12:6)

His judgments are therapeutic, not merely punitive. Ultimately He chastens to save. The hope comes to Zephaniah like a calm after a hurricane.

Verse 9

"For then" that is, following the judgment just described, there is reason for hope.

I will "turn" that is, I will change the nature. The Psalmist cried, "Create in me a pure (clean) heart, O God." (Psalm 51:10)

Paul wrote, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things have passed away, behold new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Evidence of this redemptive reconciliation is a "pure language" or more accurately, a clean lip. Isaiah called by God to speak for Him, cried out, "I am a man of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5) And after he had been purged with fire from the altar, God said to him, "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

A purified heart, redeemed and reconciled to God always results in pure speech. Those who are redeemed not only may, but will serve Him. Jesus promised that the living water of redemption would, in him, who drinks, it becomes a fountain, bubbling over to eternal life. (John 4:14)

And their service will be with “one consent,” or more literally with one shoulder. As several oxen pushing against a single yoke, they will serve as one. Both the redeemed of Israel and the purged nations will “in that day” serve Him as one.

Here is a glimpse of the unity characterized in the New Testament church which, from Antioch forward was a fellowship of those redeemed from Israel and those purified from among the nations.

Verse 10

From the long list of those to whom God’s wrath would be revealed in judgment, Zephaniah selects Ethiopia to represent the redeemed from among the nations.

His company of the reconciled is also to include Jews from among the dispersion, that is, those who were scattered among the nations. It was to the synagogues of the diaspora that Paul first took the gospel in every city.

The church, fifteen years after her birth in Judaism, had become a fellowship of redeemed from every kindred and nation. This concept of universal salvation is not unknown to the Old Testament. In fact, Jesus saw in such prophetic passages the meaning of the entire Old Testament. (Luke 24:44-47)

Verse 11

In the day when the fires of Divine judgment shall have purged men of all nations, promises the prophet, you will not be made ashamed for those things in which you have transgressed. What a promise! (Romans 8:1)

When Jesus received in our behalf the judgment of God upon our sin, he purged us of all those things for which we need be ashamed. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Zephaniah points out that the lack of any reason for shame on the part of the redeemed is due to God’s removal from their midst the boastful and proud. (Romans 3:27; Galatians 6:14)

Since Christ received for all of us the wrath of God for our sins, none among the redeemed has any reason to boast. Therefore, no one has any reason to be

ashamed of the sin from which he was redeemed, since there are no exceptions. All have sinned and all, in Him, have been redeemed. No Christian has any right to a guilt complex or an inferiority complex.

Verse 12

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) To be poor in spirit—“afflicted and poor” as Zephaniah has it—is to recognize that we are of ourselves unprofitable to God—fit subjects for His wrath.

Having exacted our due punishment on Calvary, God leaves us poor--wholly dependent upon Him, but in this dependence, we are rich beyond our fondest hopes. O, the depth of the riches of God’s love!

Verse 13

The remnant is again, as in Isaiah and Micah God’s redeemed covenant people on the redemption side of God’s wrath. They were those who passed through the captivity, God’s punishment for former sin—they are now those who have passed through Calvary, by being united with Christ’s death. In any context the remnant are God’s covenant people.

The impure speech of an unredeemed heart is not to be found among God’s people. Those whom God has cleansed will remain after all others have been burned away in the consuming wrath of God’s judgment. The redeemed are to become like their God. Here, as in, many other Old Testament passages, God’s people are pictured as a flock, lying down in the security of His fold.

This security is only for those who have their refuge in Jehovah.

PORTRAIT OF THE REDEEMED

Verses 14-20

The closing verses of Zephaniah are in contrast to the bulk of this book. To this point the judgments have been harsh. The closing paragraph is tender and gentle.

But there is no contradiction. As we have seen, God's judgments are redemptive. He does not rejoice in such suffering. He only does what must be done to call His people back to Himself and purge the Gentiles from their sin.

Here is the anticipation of the day when such affliction shall be over, when God's people shall be reconciled to Himself. There is ample reason for such rejoicing.

Verse 14

Cities were, and are, frequently referred to as women poetically to express affection. Daughter of Zion and daughter of Israel are synonymous terms. Daughter of Jerusalem also seems interchangeable with these terms. All are "loaded" with covenant significance.

Verse 15

An end shall be put to all their trouble and distresses. Though some grievances remain, they shall be only afflictions, not judgments, for sin shall be pardoned.

The term "cast out" here is literally "swept out." When they sweep out their sin by reformation, God will sweep out their enemies by destruction.

Our Lord is called "King of Israel" (John 1:49) There is no doubt of the Messianic significance of these verses. He is always in the midst of His people. (Matthew 28:20) Because He is in our midst, we need not fear evil. (Romans 8:31-39)

Zephaniah sees Israel, purged from sin by the fires of judgment, now ready for God's presence which she has heretofore rejected.

Verse 16

With the King, even Jehovah, in their midst, God's covenant people need not slump in despair. An awareness of His presence is cause for courage and strength even in adversity.

Verse 17

God will delight in His people. After all, this is the reason He created man. When the purging of sin is accomplished and His people at last are His, He will have reason to rejoice! God not only loves us, He loves to love us. If we love Him as we ought, we will have as our strongest desire His good pleasure, just as He has our good pleasure.

Verse 18

The prophet here promises reprieve to those of Israel who are scattered broad. Their absence from the sacred feasts is a reproach to Jerusalem. After all the purging of their sins, He will bring the faithful into the assembly. In God's eternal Israel, the redeemed, there will be no reproach.

Verses 19-20

In the closing verses, the Messianic light of Zephaniah burns brightest. There has been a gradual turning from the contemporary and the mundane.

The enemies of the people have been destroyed, the gathering of the faithful has been accomplished. Jehovah is in their midst. A praise and a name are theirs among all the people of the earth.

The people, righteous and blessed by God, are known throughout the earth. Even the people of earth's nations praise them.

Isaiah also spoke of a new name which God would give His own in the Messianic age. (Isaiah 62:1-2) The fulfillment of this promise is seen at Antioch when the covenant people are called Christian. (Acts 11:26)

In the intervening ages, before these promises are fulfilled, there would often be cause for sorrow. There would not be the liberty to meet together to keep the public ordinances. During the captivity, the Jews were denied what

previously they had neglected. They were reproached and made the objects of derision.

But despite the darkness of judgment, Zephaniah at last sees an end of suffering and a day of universal praise to God and of His people.

The faithful will come from distant nations and the remnant will live in the presence and security of Jehovah the King.