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C1202 – January 11, 2012 – Zephaniah 3.8-13
The Blessing On Gentile & Jews

We are studying the book of Zephaniah which is one of the Twelve smaller scrolls placed at the end of your OT. The order of these scrolls in your OT is due to Jerome in the 4th century after Christ who called them The Minor Prophets, whereas the Jews, before the time of Christ, placed them in a single scroll and called them The Twelve. As far as volume of content the Twelve are smaller overall than the one book of Isaiah. So that gives you an idea of the amount of content in comparison to one of the larger OT prophetic works. But they are equally inspired of God and equally part of the canon of Scripture and equally important to study. So we don't discount them and we don't think of them as minor in importance.

We have been studying them in the order in which they were written and not in the order they are placed in your OT. And we are doing it this way so we can trace the history of Israel and Judah chronologically. So we have studied Obadiah and Joel, they both ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah, then we studied Jonah and Amos, they both ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel, then we came back to the southern kingdom and studied Micah, then we went back north and dealt with Hosea, right on the brink of the northern kingdom's Exile to Assyria. Then we came back to the south and everything is written to the south from here on out, we studied Nahum which is a prophecy against Assyria for their evil and now we are in Zephaniah and he prophecies on the brink of the southern kingdom's Exile to Babylon. Further down the road we'll study Habakkuk and that will conclude the nine pre-Exilic prophets. Later on we'll study the last three of the Twelve, the post-Exilic prophets.

So the first nine of the Twelve are all pre-Exilic and they help us track the spiritual decline of the two kingdoms. Remember this entire period is known

broadly as the Kingdoms in Decline. The period of the United Kingdom under the Monarchical Reigns of King David and King Solomon was already past. And so the Twelve prophets are writing during a time when the Kingdom was spiraling down due to spiritual rebellion against God and the theme is God's discipline upon the two kingdoms. God disciplines in order to convict of sin so there can be confession and restoration to fellowship. God disciplines those whom He has chosen. And He disciplined the nation Israel along the lines of what He said He would do in Lev 26 and Deut 28. Five degrees of cursing are charted if they cursed Him; agricultural catastrophe, economic recession, military defeat, public health problems, disease and eventual Exile, it's all there in Israel's Constitution. Now God's discipline comes out of His love. God loved them and He didn't want them to ruin their lives by continually sinning against Him. But since they insisted on sinning more and more and refused to respond to His gracious discipline finally God booted them out of the land into Exile. So both kingdoms followed the same path, one went into Exile to Assyria and the other to Babylon. And we in the Church haven't fared much better than the two Jewish kingdoms.

The parallel with the Church is that God has chosen you individually to be in His family and He loves you and He will discipline you if you decide that you are going to sin, sin, sin and not confess and just stay out of fellowship and blow your whole Christian life. God is so interested in keeping you in His family that He is not going to let you do that; so He pursues you and pursues you and pursues you to get your attention and He may do this through fellow believers, He may do it through illness (not all illness), He may do it through church discipline. He has many avenues to get your attention. But the bottom line is He wants your attention because He wants you to learn loyalty to Him through His word. But if you refuse to respond to His discipline then He'll just take you out, sin unto death, boom and that's it. And then you're going to have to answer to Christ at the judgment seat and there aren't going to be any rewards there for you. So the lessons we want to learn from the first nine of these Twelve prophets are in the area of discipline. The lessons in the last three of the Twelve will be different.

Now last week in Zeph 3:1-7 we saw these disciplinary lessons taught very poignantly. In verse 1 we see the three sin patterns in the southern kingdom had developed right in the capital city of Jerusalem; rebellion, defilement and tyranny, all deep habitual sin patterns by this time in the life of the southern

kingdom. Verse 2 describes how she became so sinful; she heeded not the Law and the Prophets. She did not accept instruction in the word of God. She did not trust the LORD and she did not draw near to God at the Temple. So then you can predict that the solution to their sin problems is to reverse verse 2 and do those very things. It's not rocket science how these deep habitual sin patterns get resolved. The central issue is always the word of God and if that is not central to the solution then you can kiss it off as having any lasting effects. Verses 3 and 4 give the evidence of these sins. Her princes, the four sons of Josiah, are roaring lions; they oppress the people by the manner in which they rule, always preying on the weak and the needy. Her judges are wolves at evening; they make court decisions in smoke filled rooms all night, so the court the next day is nothing more than a charade. Verse 4, the prophets are reckless, treacherous men, they proclaim to be the prophets of God and yet they are false prophets and lead the people astray. The priests have profaned the sanctuary, violating the Levitical laws for keeping purity in the Temple; they turned it into an idolatrous shrine. The priests, prophets, princes and judges all did violence to the law in that they violated the righteous standards God gave at Mt Sinai and therefore they were making themselves out to be the standard and this really makes God angry. But God is patient. As you can see in verse 5, despite their rebellion, defilement and reign of tyranny, each day God did right within Jerusalem. He did right by disciplining the nation just as He said He would in Lev 26 and Deut 28. The LORD is righteous; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But despite the fact that God showed true disciplinary justice each day right in front of their eyeballs, the commentary at the end of the verse is that the unjust knows no shame. Their consciences were seared by all the evil they had committed and now when they committed evil they weren't even ashamed of doing it. So they were way out of it and they had developed complex evil in their hearts and what this means, practically speaking, is they were never going to confess their sin genuinely. They may go through some religious motion and have a big temper tantrum, why are we suffering God and all the rest of it, but they would never confess their sin and therefore they would never get back in fellowship and therefore the only thing left to do to them is send them into Exile, the ultimate discipline. Maybe in a country far, far away, where idolatry pervades and they are slaves to Gentiles, maybe then they'll listen to the word of God!

In verse 6 God graciously did another thing to try and wake them up. He judged the surrounding nations. Surely if the Jews saw that surrounding Gentile nations could not get away with sin then they couldn't get away with it either. 6I have cut off nations; Their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, With no one passing by; Their cities are laid waste, Without a man, without an inhabitant. 7I said, 'Surely you will reverence Me, Accept instruction.' So her dwelling will not be cut off According to all that I have appointed concerning her. Surely you'll pay attention! If they'd just pay attention and accept instruction they could get back on the right track and avoid the ultimate discipline of Exile. So you see the only solution to these deep habitual sin patterns is to sit down and start accepting instruction, start receiving the teaching of the word of God. That is the only way, when you are this far out of it to get back with it because that is the only thing that will straighten out your view of God. So the correction for habitual sin patterns is exposure to the word of God, it's not games, it's not songs, it's not holding hands, it's not even prayer because how do you know what to pray if you don't know the word of God, you just sit there and flap your gums and all sorts of nonsense comes out and God says, O would you shut up and listen to Me, I don't want to hear what you have to say, I want you to shut your mouth and get My counsel, My word. But then we see the conclusion. Did they respond positively to God's daily discipline and judgment of surrounding nations? Did this convict them of their sin? The end of verse 7 is a devastating critique. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds. Jerusalem wasn't going to stop sinning. They had reached the point of no return and while they could still get right with God, theoretically speaking, they would not. They were now chasing after sin, eager to destroy themselves and so the ultimate discipline would now fall, Exile to Babylon. And it came in the three deportations we've mentioned again and again, 605BC, 597BC and 588-586BC.

Today we come to verse 8 and we launch forward in history again to things yet future, to a future remnant of Israel who will gather and believe on the Lord Jesus in the future day of the Lord, what most people call the Tribulation. The Lord is telling them to wait for Him because rest is coming; a time of rest is coming for the remnant of Israel. **Therefore wait for Me, declares the LORD**, Wait for what? Well, we have to do a little translation work. **For the day when I rise up as a witness**, should read, as it does in the Masoretic text, **For the day when I rise up to the prey** (cf Matt

24:28), that is, rise up to destroy the prey. Who are the prey? The nations, Gentile nations that have, by this future time, all turned anti-Semitic, the fourth and final kingdom of the Daniel 2 statue, the terrifying and dreadful fourth beast of Daniel 7, the final Gentile kingdom, they are the prey. "Why the only solution to the world's problems," all nations will say, "is to destroy the Jews," destruction of the Jew is the path to world peace. Now they are right in identifying the Jew as the key to world peace. There is no doubt that the Jew is central to world peace ever coming upon earth. But they are wrong about what must happen to the Jews in order to get world peace. They say the path to peace is destruction of the Jews. God says the path to peace is salvation of the Jews. So the world is 180 degrees wrong here. They couldn't be more wrong. So when they all turn against the Jew they become the target in God's scope and he puts the hairs right on all the nations and He's about to pull the trigger, that's what it means, For the day when I rise up to the prey. That is I am like a lion and I come out of my den to feed and I am going to feast on the nations.

Continuing verse 8, **Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms**, this is the gathering where? At Armageddon, or as the Hebrew says, Har-Megiddo, the hill of Megiddo. Megiddo is an ancient city that sits on a hill on the western side of the Jezreel Valley. This is the meeting place of the world's armies. They will gather here, this is not the sight of the battle; this is the gathering place to deploy for the battle. Antichrist will gather all the armies of the world together to this place in preparation for the final destruction of the Jew. But verse 8 says God is the One who decided to gather them. **Indeed, My decision**, not Antichrist's decision, **My decision is to gather nations, To assemble kingdoms**. God's sovereignty controls whatsoever comes to pass and He uses the rebellion of demons and men to bring His plan to pass. So while the world's plan is to assemble in this valley to destroy Israel it is God's plan to assemble them in this valley so He can destroy them

Notice the rest of the verse. Why has He made this decision? **To pour out on them My indignation, All My burning anger; For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal**. That's a global judgment on all nations starting with the world's armies that gather in this valley. God is very concerned about Israel, the apple of His eye, because He has made promises to them and the promises rest upon His character. So if you try to touch the

apple of God's eye He's going to protect His eye. And that is a very easy thing for the sovereign Creator of the world to do. His footprint is far bigger than that valley and it's a little bitty thing for Him to stomp them and devour the whole earth.

That is what is described here, the destruction of the present heavens and earth by **the fire of His Zeal**. God can get very angry. Someone says, well, that's not the God I worship. Well, you don't worship the biblical God then, plain and simple God can get angry. Look at this; I will **pour out on them My indignation**. I don't think I want to be on the other end of that. **All My burning anger**. All of it, not some of it, all of it. And being the recipient of all His anger doesn't interest me in the slightest. **For all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal**. Zeal for taking back earth which is rightfully His because He sent His own son to pay for sin which has corrupted the earth. And so this is a cleansing of the earth of sin and that means sinners and then He will usher in a whole new world.

For then, verse 9, there's the transition phrase, **For then** and from here on out it's blessing. Up to this point in the book it's been judgment, judgment, judgment, from this point on it's blessing. What did we say the broad outline of prophecy is? The day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the central motif of prophecy. And since the day in Creation week started with evening, a period of darkness and ended with morning, a period of light then the eschatological day of the Lord will start with a period of darkness, which signifies judgment and it will end with a period of light, signifying blessing. The period of darkness we learn from other Scriptures is slightly more than 7 years and the period of light is 1,000 years. So with that said, now you can see easily from the outline of Zephaniah why this book is called a compendium of the prophets.

- I. Setting (1:1)
- II. The Day of the Lord Judgment/Darkness (1:2-3:8)
 - A. Judgment of All Living Things on Earth (1:2-3)
 - B. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-13)
 - C. Judgment on All Inhabitants of Earth (1:14-18)
 - D. Gather Without Merit (2:1-3)
 - E. Judgment on Israel's Enemies (2:4-15)
 - F. Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7)

- G. Judgment on All Nations (3:8)
- III. The Day of the Lord Blessing/Light (3:9-20)
 - A. Blessing on Gentiles Purified to Worship (3:9)
 - B. Blessing on Israel Restored to Kingdom (3:10-20)

By its very structure it lays out this basic prophetic scheme. In Chapter 1:2-3:8 he describes The Day of the Lord Judgment/Darkness, the central message of which is to Gather Without Merit so as to avoid the Judgment; followed by Chapter 3:9-20, The Day of the Lord Blessing/Light for those who do Gather Without Merit.

And that fundamentally is premillennialism. Premillennialism is saying that the LORD Jesus Christ will return *before* the time of millennial blessing. And that's what the structure of Zephaniah is teaching. So structure is important.

Alright, so now we have in verse 9 what we would say is the beginning of the Millennium. He starts it with the transitional words **For then I will give to the peoples purified lips**, speaking of the Gentile nations. There will be Gentiles from the nations that will believe in the Messiah. They won't all be destroyed. Those who believe will enter the Millennial Blessing and in the NT the passage which deals with the judgment on living Gentiles when Christ returns is called the Sheep/Goats judgment, Matt 25. The Lord Jesus Christ lines up all the Gentiles in the Valley of Jehoshaphat and He divides them into Sheep and Goats. The Goats are placed on His left hand and the Sheep are placed on His right. The Sheep are believing Gentiles, the Goats are unbelieving Gentiles. The Sheep are brought into the millennial blessing, the Goats are slaughtered.

As for the Sheep that go into the millennial blessing this verse says he will give to them **purified lips**. Now there are two opinions as to what this means. One approach is to say that the Gentiles will speak truth rather than lies and grace rather than defilement and that since the lips speak forth that which fills the heart then Christ will at this time change their hearts to make their lips speak truth and grace. However, a second approach, and the one I prefer, says that **purified lips** refers to a purified language, implying that there will be a single language spoken in the millennium. The world before the Flood spoke one language and God judged the people at Babel creating a diversity of languages. The diversity of languages have been used to worship

idols ever since and therefore are considered impure languages. In the millennium the Gentiles who speak these languages will be given a new language. And if you ask me whether this language is Hebrew or not I don't know. But that we will all worship in one language is known. As Jamieson-Fausset-Brown notes, "The confusion of languages was of the penalty sin, probably idolatry at Babel (Ge 11:1–6, *Margin*, where also "lip" expresses *language*, and perhaps also *religion*; Zep 3:4, "a tower whose top *may reach* unto heaven," or rather, *points to heaven*, namely, dedicated to *the heavens* idolized, or Bel); certainly, of rebellion against God's will...The full restoration of the earth's unity of language and of worship is yet future, and is connected with the restoration of the Jews, to be followed by the conversion of the world. Compare Is 19:18; Zec 14:9; Ro 15:6, "with one mind and *one mouth* glorify God." The Gentiles' *lips* have been rendered impure through being the instruments of calling on idols and dishonoring God (compare Ps 16:4; Ho 2:17). Whether *Hebrew* shall be the one universal language or not, the God of the Hebrews shall be the one and only object of worship."ⁱ Therefore, that would mean we are all going to speak a new language in the Millennium. The rest of the verse seems to support this single language in the Millennium

That all of them may call on the name of the LORD. The first usage of the expression **call on the name of the LORD** is Gen 4:26 when men began calling on the name of the LORD so this usage signifies the same thing, a unity of worship, a unity of language in worship. Because all sorts of nonsense passes for worship these days, to get the biblical idea of worship think of the word appreciation. Worship is appreciation of God. And in the millennium the Gentiles will appreciate God because of heightened realization of the wonder of His salvation accomplished. We will all worship Him more than now because we will have a greater appreciation for His realized accomplishments for us. So we worship Him now but the greatness of our worship is a function of our realization of His accomplished work for us and in the millennium that realization will be greater than now. And further, we will be given a new language, unlearned, but instantly attained, the purpose of which is to worship Him in unity with all believers in the Millennium. **To serve Him shoulder to shoulder**, that is, with one consent, all of us will be united in our worship and service of Him as soldiers in an army serve one and the same general.

Verse 10, **From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia**, now that was the farthest known place in Zephaniah's day, they knew the world was much bigger but they didn't know anything beyond Ethiopia, so he says, beyond the rivers of the farthest place we know of, **My worshippers, My dispersed ones, Will bring My offerings**. And here he shifts from Gentiles to Jews of the dispersion, Jews who have been scattered into every nation upon earth. There will be both believing Gentiles and Jews in the millennium. He calls the Jews of the dispersion **My worshippers** or literally, "My burners of incense," incense being a symbol of prayers going up before God, so those who pray to Me, those who belong to Me and pray to Me will bring offerings. He also calls them **My dispersed ones** because they are Jews of the dispersion, probably most of them are of the so-called ten lost tribes of the northern kingdom, which may be lost to man but were known by Jews in the NT period and have never been lost to God. These **will bring My offerings**, they are His offerings by right and they will be bringing them to Him in His millennial Temple to worship Him.

Verse 11, **In that day**, in the day they come up with His offerings, **you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain**. When the Jews of the dispersion are gathered they will be taken to judgment and the Jewish unbelievers will be removed from them, the believers old hearts will be taken away and they will be given a new heart that will not sin.

Turn to Jer 31:31. This is the key passage on the New Covenant. The New Covenant promises certain things to the remnant of Israel in the millennium because the New Covenant can't be fulfilled until the Millennium. The founding sacrifice has been made by Christ on the cross but it hasn't been fulfilled yet because the parties to the covenant are Israel and Judah. And so the New Covenant is not being fulfilled right now in the Church. We are partakers of spiritual blessings of the New Covenant because of our connection with Christ, the founding sacrifice of the New Covenant, but we are not taker-overs of the promises of the New Covenant, those are ultimately to be fulfilled for the believing remnant of Israel. Notice verse 31, "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," does anyone see church in

there? Not with the Church, with Israel and Judah, “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke,” the Mosaic Covenant, “although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” That last part is the part Zephaniah is saying will be fulfilled, I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Which, by the way, doesn’t mean God isn’t omniscient. God knows all things, but the point is that God is not going to bring up their sin, God is not going to make an issue out of their sins. And further, they’re not going to sin anymore because v 33 He’s going to put His law, millennial law, within them and on their mind I will write it...to the point that there won’t be any Jews teaching other Jews Bible. They’re all going to know the bible. Now they may teach it to Gentiles in the millennium but they won’t need Bible teachers in Israel because they’ll all know the Bible perfectly and they will follow the Bible perfectly.

So let’s go back to Zeph 3:11 and when you read it this time it makes sense because the New Covenant has been fulfilled. **In that day you will feel no shame Because of all your deeds By which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst Your proud, exulting ones, And you will never again be haughty On My holy mountain.** So the living Jews will be taken to judgment when Christ returns and He will destroy the unbelieving Jews leaving only the believing Jews and being a pure nation who has been given a new heart they won’t be ashamed of any past sins and they won’t ever commit any future sins.

Verse 12, **But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.** **humble and lowly describe** the remnant of believing Jews that are left after the Jewish judgment. Ezekiel 20 may describe this judgment. Let’s turn there. I’ve never been completely satisfied with this passage, whether it refers to a judgment within the day of the Lord judgment or at Christ’s second coming, but I lean

toward the latter, it sounds like there is a judgment of Jews at Christ's Second Coming. Verse 34, "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; ³⁵and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶"As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord GOD. ³⁷"I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD." So that seems to be describing the same thing Zephaniah is describing, that there is a judgment of living Jews when Christ returns and the result of that judgment is that there is a remnant of believing Jews left, **A humble and lowly people who will take refuge in the name of the LORD.**

Verse 13, **the remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths;** See, no sin, none of the remnant of Israel will sin in the millennium. Why is that? Why is the condition that they not sin necessary? So they can live in the land. Why did they get kicked out of the land in 586BC? Because of sin. What is required so they can live in the land? No sin. Sin defiles so they can't sin and stay in the land. And so by way of the New Covenant God is going to guarantee that they will not sin by inscribing on their hearts His law, as He inscribed the ten commandments on the stone tablets, so He will inscribe His law in their mind, making that the governing principle in their life. And so whatever this inscription of the Law of God on their heart means it is something more than what God gives us in regeneration, it's something that completely prohibits sin; we have the opportunity to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ and to walk by the Spirit, but we also have the ability to walk by the flesh and sin. They apparently will not have that ability.

The rest of verse 13, **Indeed they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble.** The nation Israel will enjoy peace on all sides, there will no longer be the Arab-Israeli conflict, no more nuclear Iran's, no more rockets from Gaza, no more tanks from Syria, the nation will enjoy and prosper in their Promised Land with complete homeland security.

Alright, so we've transitioned tonight from the first period of the day of the Lord, the judgment, which is extensively treated, now to the second period of the day of the Lord, the blessing and we've come to realize that it is the Lord who will gather the armies of the world at Armageddon for the purpose of judging them in His fury, and that He will take any surviving Gentiles to the Sheep-Goats judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat where He will slaughter the Goats and take the Sheep into Millennial Blessing, giving them a new language so they can worship Him in unison. On the other hand you also have Jews living at Christ's return and He will take them to a judgment as well. He will destroy the unbelieving Jews and take the believing Jews into the bond of the New Covenant, inscribing on their hearts the word of God so they won't sin against Him and they will enjoy peace and security in the Promised Land for the entirety of the millennium. So the only people who will enter the millennial blessing are those who Gather Without Merit, they gather in faith, they put aside their works and trust in Christ's work. That is the only ticket that will gain entrance into kingdom blessing.

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Zep 3:9). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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