

## Zephaniah 3:1-20

### “Regathering, Restoring, Rejoicing”

Last week I referenced 1<sup>st</sup> Pet Ch 4. That judgment begins in the house of God. & If it begins w/us 1<sup>st</sup>, what will be the end of those who *do not* obey the gospel of God? It’s certainly a sobering thing to consider... Conversely, we should also consider this; if God holds the *heathen* accountable for sin, how much more *His own* people?

In other words, the ungodly live lives of ungodliness because they’re... well... ungodly 😊! They don’t *know* the Lord, they don’t seek *after* the Lord, nor do they claim a desire to be pleasing *to* the Lord. Yet their sin is still an offense against the holiness of the Lord... As our Creator, we’re accountable to Him, whether we acknowledge Him or not. Here’s my point. If God holds accountable those who aren’t mindful of Him, how much more those who *know* what God expects yet deliberately sin *against* him?

God’s people are to be different from those who aren’t His people. A light shining in the darkness, the salt of the earth. But what good is salt that loses its flavor, or its ability to preserve? So; though we’re *in* the world, we’re not to be *of* the world because Christ has called us *out* of the world. Ours is the admonition of Rom 12:2, “...do not be conformed to (fashioned after, shaped by) *this world*,”<sup>1</sup>

In Vs 4-15 of Ch 2, God took aim at the nations *surrounding* Judah/Jerusalem. Now He draws His attention *back* to Judah & zeroes in on the city of Jerusalem.

### Vs 1-4

Because of the convenience of Ch breaks & the fact that we didn’t read through the writing of Zephaniah in one sitting we have the capacity of a mental reset when we open our bibles from week to week.

But if you were to follow the flow from Ch 2 into Ch 3 w/no break & you were hearing the reading of this as a Jew in about 625-630 B.C., you might be feeling pretty good about what you were listening to coming out of Ch 2 into (what’s now) the 1<sup>st</sup> Vs of Ch 3. Because God has been pronouncing judgment upon the nations. Specifically (as Ch 2 is concluding) Assyria to the north, & making its capital city (Nineveh) a desolation. The Assyrians were the ones who’d taken the 10 northern tribes of Israel into captivity about 100 yrs earlier.

& Here God is pronouncing judgment, desolation upon them because of their pride & arrogance, it would become a place for beasts to lie down (nothing but ruins).

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<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 12:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So as far as we're concerned, God is still pronouncing judgment upon them as Ch 3 opens up... "Woe to her who is rebellious & polluted, to the oppressing city!" – But as Zephaniah begins to elaborate on their refusal to *trust in the Lord*, to *draw near to her God*, he speaks of *prophets, priests, the sanctuary & the law*... It becomes increasingly, alarmingly clear, he's speaking now *not to the pagan nations that surround Judah, but to the people of God w/in Judah & he draws a bead on what's supposed to be the pure city, the holy city of Jerusalem. But God calls it the rebellious city, the polluted city, the oppressing city.*

Rather than *receiving* the instruction of God's word, they *rebelled against* God's word. Rather than having hearts that were *pure*, their hearts were *polluted*, rather than liberating & helping those in need, they *oppressed* their people, profited from the people & enriched themselves at their citizen's expense.

When God calls Jerusalem a "polluted" city. He's not saying that they have a horrific carbon footprint. That they need to engage in the green new deal & get things right w/their climate control... He's not speaking about things that pertain to the physical, that are on the outside of His people. He's speaking of things spiritual, of what's happening on the *inside* of His people.

Now we can certainly acknowledge that what's happening on the inside of man will *become evident* on the outside. & What causes filth on the outside is a reflection of the filth on the inside. & You can probably take that just about as far as you want to go. When a man gets right w/God it will evidence itself in something as simple as the fact that he *won't dump his garbage* on another man's property. He won't dump a bunch of poisonous chemicals in lakes or streams or whatever. But if I'm not right w/God, I couldn't care less about any of those things.

If a person's right w/God, his/her speech won't be perverted, it'll be pure. What's in my heart will surface through my lips. My actions will be moral, not immoral. Again, you can chase that principle about as far as you want to. But when God speaks of the polluted city, He's speaking spiritually/inwardly, not physically.

He calls Jerusalem rebellious, polluted & oppressing (refusing to regard the rights of her people. Rather than fight for the needs of the people; she oppressed them, enriched herself off of them).

God indicts them on 4 counts. (We might consider it the root of Jerusalem's sin) #1 She has not obeyed His voice... It wasn't that God wasn't speaking to *them*, it's that they weren't listening to *Him*. (heeding, obeying).

It's a key characteristic of God's people... ears to hear. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."*<sup>2</sup> (That is they "obey" Me, do what I say, go where I lead). Listen, (as a child of God) if the Lord is speaking to your heart, you tend to know it. – It may be through a bible study (like this), it may be in a time of devotion, a quiet time – or sometimes the Lord may just interrupt what you're doing & direct you, or correct you, or give some word of insight or instruction to you. & If there is any voice for the sheep to obey, it is the voice of the shepherd – but "she has not obeyed His voice."

One way that God speaks directly to us is through His written word. So often we're like, "God, speak to me." & I wonder if He's like, "I have, read your bible!" There's so much direction, correction, instruction in righteousness for us. Paul put it like this, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*<sup>3</sup> If you want to hear from God, it's imperative that you spend time in scripture. "She has not obeyed His voice..." It's not that they didn't know what the bible said, they just deliberately didn't obey.

*"She has not received correction."* You might jot it down so you can read it later (Lev 23) God had promised blessing through obedience & discipline through disobedience. God would punish Israel for disobeying His word... terror, wasting disease & fever, famine & wartime defeat. He said, *"And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."*<sup>4</sup> Over & over again He spoke of the accumulation of the devastation He would bring upon them if they refused to receive correction. But they were a lot like you are & I am. When the discipline came, they didn't receive the correction... They chalked it up to tough times, difficult days, a rough patch to push through.

Isn't amazing how we as people have a tendency to resist correction? Now: I'm not saying that every rough patch in life is the hand of God's discipline upon us. But certainly we should at least allow it to cause us to stop, search our heart & seek the Lord! It could be that God is growing us, teaching us to walk by faith... but if there's sin in my life, perhaps God's trying to get my attention! But so often when things begin to press down on us, rather than cry out to God, we get mad at God. We put up our defenses, dig in our heels, root down in our stubbornness. – She has not received correction.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 10:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Ti 3:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Le 26:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“She has not trusted in the LORD” It’s not that God had ever given her a reason to *not* trust Him. But in openly defying & denying God’s word & God’s promises, it’s become evident... she has not trust in the Lord.

Finally he says, “She has not drawn near to her God.” At the root of it all is this; God longs for a relationship w/His people. **“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”<sup>5</sup>** But in drifting away from God rather than drawing near to God, they’ve gone their own way, they’ve gone astray & are refusing to return, refusing to repent. God would have us to return to Him, to draw near to Him, to grow in our relationship w/Him. –

Vs 2 is the essence of what it means to be a Child of God. #1. *Obedience to His word*, #2 *The receiving of correction* (again write it down/read it later Hebrews 12:5-11). Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, He disciplines, He corrects... but it’s up to us to receive or reject it. #3 Trust. We’re to trust in the Lord w/all our heart, lean not on our own understanding. We’re saved by grace through faith & from there nothing changes, we grow by grace through faith, we trust in the precepts, principles & promises of the word of God. – & # 4 We’re to draw near to God. Intentionally pursue a relationship w/ Him (again Hebrews 10:22).

**But this was not the case in Judah, was not the case in the privileged city of Jerusalem. As to where the political leaders (prince, judges) should’ve been protecting the flock they were devouring the flock through insatiable greed. Using them as a platform for power & wealth.**

The religious leaders were just as bad. The prophets were insolent (reckless), just telling people what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to do to get right w/God. The priests were polluting the sanctuary... the word of God & the ways of God were being twisted & perverted to serve their own self-seeking ends...

### **Vs 5-7**

In Vs 5 God says, “Hey, I’m here... & I’m righteous, I’m just.” God always does the right thing. But in acting contrary to His righteousness & His justice they’re ripening themselves for His judgment. God had identified Himself w/Jerusalem, yet they’re misrepresenting Him to the people.

Can I just say, God doesn’t take it lightly when we “misrepresent Him” to people. God has said, **“Be holy, for I am holy.”<sup>6</sup>** The idea being that if God is holy & He lives in me, then my life will reflect His holiness. (I won’t be perfect because I still have a sin nature.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jas 4:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.  
<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Pe 1:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But the general pattern of my life will one that is set apart to God.) So if my life belongs *to* Jesus, I will grow to be more & more *like* Jesus. When the “Holy” Spirit lives in you, He will be consistently nudging you toward holiness. (You might write it down; 1 Thess 4:3-8)

& You can be mad at me, or you friend who’s encouraging you to knock off what you shouldn’t be about that you might start living the life God’s called you to. But your real problem is w/God who’s called you to holiness, righteousness & justice.

Btw, I’m not going to expound on it, but you might underline it, “He never fails”. Is there anything God can’t do? Here’s one, He can’t fail. That means He’ll never fail you. Now that doesn’t mean you’ll always understand... how can we? His ways are infinitely higher than ours... Comes back to “trust” doesn’t it? He never fails.

But God points out the nations He’d cut off, made desolate & destroyed... & He says, “I said, “Surely you will fear Me, you will receive instruction”, the idea being, “What you saw happening *around* you, should’ve served as a warning *to* you that I punish ungodliness.” It should’ve served as a wake-up call! If God cut off other sinful nations, what made them think they’d be some sort of exception? (Interesting how we always think our sin is the exception isn’t it?) But despite everything, “they rose early & corrupted all their deeds.”

When He speaks of “rising early”, think of a vacation coming up & you can’t wait to get up & get on the road. Or a project you’re excited about so you get up early & get after it. That’s what He’s saying. They were excited *about* & couldn’t wait to get *on* w/their sin...

& In one respect they were even more guilty than the pagan nations around them because they had the word of God. They were sinning against a *flood* of light.

**Vs 8**

Right here the prophet shifts gears. He begins looking down the runway to the Great Tribulation when God will deal w/every nation (all the earth shall be devoured w/the fire of My jealousy). It’s a time that’s written of again & again throughout the O.T. & you’ll find it most readily detailed in Ch’s 6-19 of the book of Revelation.

& Zephaniah states that God will pour out His indignation upon the entire Christ rejecting world & then a new day will dawn, a time of restoration & mercy. The bible speaks of a 1,000 yr reign of Christ upon the earth where He will rule in righteousness.

**Vs 9-13**

Vs 9 & 13 seem to form book ends.

He says, “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language.” Some wonder if God is speaking a one world language (they point to the Hebrew language for a couple of reasons). Some see this as a reversal of Babel (when God confused the languages of the nations because the people were growing increasingly evil). Perhaps both of those are in view...

More than not, I believe it's pointing to the fact people won't be communicating in any polluted fashion. No vulgarity, no blasphemy (Vs 13), “no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;”. Why? (Vs 9), “That they all may call on the name of the Lord...” The world will worship J.C. as one (not just Israel).

Pure language, pure worship, salvation, restoration... for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21) shall be saved.

“To serve Him w/one accord...” What a glorious day it will be, when we worship the Lord & serve the Lord w/one accord. No division, no disunity, no one feeling like their ideas aren't being heard or whatever... Just serving the Lord w/gladness.

In the Millennial Kingdom, Israel will be the global superpower. But it won't be accompanied by pride or arrogance (Vs 11) “you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain.” She'll understand it's not by works, but by the grace of the Lord J.C. she stands.

There'll be no shame in that day... why? Because the sin that causes shame will have been taken away, cleansed... As for me, I can't wait. I know that positionally we have no shame right now (our sin has been washed by the blood of J.C.). But practically we struggle don't we? We know where we've been, what we've done, & we're ashamed.

But allow the Lord to give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning & the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. How can He do that? Because Jesus took care of the source of our shame upon the cross. *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*<sup>7</sup> What is the source of our shame? It's found in that word “iniquity” (perversity, depravity, guilt). & God has “laid” it upon Jesus in our place. Now as we come to Him, confess our sins before Him, He is faithful & just to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There's no room for pride... (Vs 12) we walk in humility & thanksgiving before Him. -- “And they shall trust in the name of the LORD...”

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 53:5-6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 14-17

What an incredible section of scripture. God is assuring them of restoration, of salvation, of purity in consecration... It's more than reason enough to sing & shout, to be glad & rejoice w/all your heart!

Family, the interpretation belongs to Israel, but there's application here for you! The Lord has taken away your judgments (remember, He was wounded for *our transgressions*, bruised for *our iniquities*, the chastisement for our peace was laid upon *Him*). How is it that when we enter this place we don't sing w/all our heart! Shout w/a voice of triumph, be glad & rejoice w/all your heart... He has cast out your enemy.

In writing to the Colossians about the work of the cross Paul said that Jesus, *"...disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."*<sup>8</sup> The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. God is enthroned (Ps 22:3) upon the praises of His people...

& He is mighty to save... (Vs 17) if God is for you, who can be against you? & Look at this, so often we can see God as the giant joy killer in the sky. Always disappointed in us, always frustrated w/us, always ready to punish us... **But how many of you realize that in truth God rejoices over you? He rejoices over you w/singing... Wow. Listen, God loves you, He's redeemed you & He rejoices over you... Jesus told us (Luke 15) that there's joy in heaven when even 1 sinner repents... Why be so reluctant to give Him all of your heart!**

## Vs 18-20

"I will gather... I will save... I will bring you back." Back in Vs 18 we see another characteristic of the people of God... participation in the "appointed assembly". Again, interpretation – Israel. Application – you & me. We have an appointed assembly as well (Heb 10:24-25). We call it going to church... Though it's not a matter of salvation, the bible doesn't really leave out there like "take it or leave it" either.

& The incentive shouldn't be how good the worship band is, how good the preacher makes you feel, whether or not my kids enjoy it... The incentive is obedience to the Word of God... It's where we worship corporately, encourage & pray for one another w/regularity. It's a place of accountability, somewhere we're challenged to keep growing spiritually, it's where we learn the Word of God & serve the body.

When you quit coming around, it's much easier to begin to drift & become more callused to the things of God... It's good to be in the presence of God's people. (Closing)

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Col 2:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I love what God says in Vs 19. "I will save the lame." Because that's me. Again, interpretation Vs application, but I'm so glad that God delights to save the lame...

& Once again to emphasize the divine authority of his message as well as the certainty of God's comfort, Zephaniah ended his book with the words, "says the Lord."

Difficulties may await you, dark days may be in front of you... but ultimately, eternally you will rest in God's love. There will be singing, shouting & rejoicing.

Whether you get 70, 80, or 100 yrs on this earth... It's even a vapor in the eternal spectrum. & This life is as bad as it's ever going to get for you as a child of God. Beyond that, it will only get better—incalculably better—for the next 10 trillion years & forevermore. So, take heart and have hope. Rest assured; God will see you through & rejoicing awaits you... Let's pray.

#### Prayer Points:

God may we have ears to hear You today. That we be not rebellious, but repentant. That we be not polluted but pure. That we obey Your voice, receive Your correction, trust *in* & draw near *to*... You. We hasten the day that You reign in righteousness over all the earth. Thank You that You are a God of salvation (Mighty to save) & of restoration. Renew our hearts...

It doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done, what you're caught up in, God can set you free & save you today. He will rejoice over *you* – with gladness. He will quiet you w/His love. Give Him your heart today.