

“God Will Rejoice Over You”
Zephaniah 3:14-20, August 7, 2011

Background and Focus

- Zephaniah wrote just before the Babylonian invasion, “in the days of Josiah,” the reforming king who followed the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon (2 Ki 21:26-23:20; 2 Ch 33:25-35:27). Zephaniah’s focus is on the corruption and evil among the civil and religious leaders of Judah and on the coming day of the Lord, when God will judge the Earth and save his remnant.

A. God Will Judge the Entire Earth

- The opening verses (1:2-6) of Zephaniah contain one of the strongest descriptions and pronouncements of judgment and destruction in the entire Bible. Zephaniah announces the coming day of the Lord (1:7) that will display God’s wrath against everyone, including his own people who have not followed his law. It is a picture of utter destruction as the Lord exercises his righteous judgment against mankind.
- We all deserve judgment for our sin (Ro 1:18-21). Consequently, God’s judgment on the world is just, complete and devastating (cf 2 Pe 3:10). God will be absolutely fair, according to Psalm 96:10-13. Nobody will receive anything undeserved from God. The picture in Zephaniah is of God’s judgment on the entire world, including his people who have engaged in idolatry (1:8-9). In the context of Zephaniah, God will judge Judah for its false worship. In the context of 2011, God’s final judgment is coming at an unexpected moment which nobody knows or can foretell. All who do not trust in Jesus Christ in faith will be eternally separated from him.
- Are we sobered as we contemplate the picture of destruction that Zephaniah prophesies will come upon the world (and in fact did come upon Judah through the Babylonians)? The tsunami which struck Japan in March, the earthquakes in Chile and in New Zealand as well as other natural disasters, are pictures of the devastation which will accompany God’s judgment.
- In light of that coming day of the Lord, do we sense an urgency to tell others about God and to live lives of obedience before his throne? Not an urgency that causes fear, but an urgency that energizes us toward evangelism, i.e., sharing the good news of Christ with others. The prospect of God’s judgment should cause us to pray for mercy and for salvation for those who do not know the Savior. While we rightly acknowledge God’s justice in judging, at the same time we thank him for mercy since we deserve eternal separation from him. God will judge the entire earth at his appointed time, as Zephaniah prophesies.

B. But the God in Our Midst Has Taken Away His Judgments Against Us

- The good news is the amazing declaration in Chapter 3:15-16. God in our midst has taken away his judgments against us. The King of Israel (3:15) has taken away our judgments, not because we’re deserving, but because of the work of King, who has secured our place for us in his Kingdom. The role of King is associated with the Lord in OT theology; in the NT Jesus holds the title (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 15:3; 17:14; 19:16). The presence of the Lord, the King, results in the absence of fear because he is a victorious warrior. God fights on behalf of his people in their midst so that they can worship him.

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He gathers his people together (3:18-20) to honor them. It's a marvelous statement that Zephaniah makes! The Lord, who has the right to judge the earth, saves for himself his people and he makes them “renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth” (3:20).

- The Lord is the author and the perfecter of our salvation. Zephaniah states that the victorious warrior (mighty one) will save. God as author and perfecter, as judge and redeemer appears in the OT (Is 45:20-22) and NT (Ro 3:21-26). God takes away the judgment we deserve and justifies us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who respond to his offer of salvation in repentance and faith receive the crown of righteousness (2 Ti 4:8). What are the characteristics of those for whom judgment has been turned aside? The answer is in Zephaniah 3:12-13; the pattern of those for whom God has taken away judgment is to live humbly before his throne, to obey his law and to delight in being his servants and children. God has mercifully turned aside the judgment he will bring to all those who don't trust in him, he has removed the fear, he has gathered in the lame and outcasts, he has exalted his people in the earth and he rejoices and sings over us.

C. So Rejoice that God Will Rejoice Over Us!

- The verses in chapter 3:14-20 contain some of the most beautiful language in the entire Bible about God's love for his people. Even the Hebrew word in v 17 refers to a deep, devoted love of one person to another, similar to Jacob's love for Rachel or Joseph, or Jonathan and David, or the Psalmist's love of the law in Psalm 119.
- In Psalm 8:3-5, David asks why God is mindful of man, his creature. God really has crowned us with honor and glory, and he has sent his son to remove the judgment that we deserve, to take that judgment on himself on the cross and to provide reconciliation between us and God. As NT believers, we read Zephaniah and realize that God has provided salvation for all his people through Christ. OT believers saw a copy and shadow (Heb 8:5), but we see and know the Risen Christ who has called his people to repentance and belief in the one Living God who can save.
- Are you amazed at the thought of God rejoicing over you with loud singing? Christ has called each one of his sheep to follow him, and he has taken an intensely personal interest in each one of us, in fact he sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in each of our hearts. Zephaniah points to the final judgment which Christ will pronounce over the entire earth and the great joy which his followers will experience at his return. Our Lord Jesus will deliver us from our enemies, lastly death (1 Co 15:26). And he will gather in all his elect from the nations (Mk 13:26-27).
- Zephaniah begins his prophecy with a vivid description of the coming devastation on Jerusalem and ultimately the world. He closes his prophecy with one of the most strikingly beautiful passages about the relationship between God and his beloved people. Let us thank the Lord today that he has turned aside the judgment that we deserve and that he rejoices over us with loud singing. Let us delight in the fact that we who trust in Christ will live eternally with him, the one who has so loved us that he gave his life for us. And let us pray for his Second Coming when the Lord Jesus will redeem the entire groaning creation and make everything right.