

Zephaniah

Chapter 3

Judgment on Jerusalem and the Nations

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! 2 She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God. 3 Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. 4 Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law. 5 The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame. 6 “I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without a man, without an inhabitant. 7 I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then you dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.’ But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt. 8 “Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.

3:1 *city*. Apostate Jerusalem is condemned for its sins. (CSB)

defiled. Morally polluted, unclean (Is 59:3). (TLSB)

oppressing city. See Jer 22:3. (CSB)

Zephaniah’s hearers may have thought he was still speaking about Nineveh, but what follows reveals that he is speaking about their own city of Jerusalem, which has oppressed and mistreated people. (TLSB)

3:2 *she does not draw near*. The people of Jerusalem refused to enter the Lord’s presence in worship and prayer and would not place their confidence in Him. (TLSB)

3:3–4 *officials ... rulers ... prophets ... priests*. All classes of Judah’s leaders are castigated for indulging in conduct completely opposed to their vocations and responsibilities. (CSB)

Civic leaders of Jerusalem are compared to hungry animals that devour everything they find. Officials and judges used power of their offices only for personal gain. (TLSB)

3:3 *roaring lions ... evening wolves*. Those in power are rapacious. (CSB)

3:4 *fickle*. The Hebrew word suggests that the prophets were as light as the froth on boiling water. They were unprincipled and imparted worthless teachings. (TLSB)

priests profane what holy... do violence to the law. When they should have been teachers of the law (see Dt 31:9–13; 2Ch 17:8–9; 19:8; Ezr 7:6; Jer 2:8; 18:18; Mal 2:7). (CSB)

The priests desecrated God’s holy temple and treated the sacred sacrifices disrespectfully. (TLSB)

3:5 *Lord within* – The citizens of Jerusalem failed to recognize that because the Lord is righteous, He would take action against those who knew no shame. (TLSB)

no injustice. He is sinless, without error. (TLSB)

3:6 *I have cut off nations.* The destruction of other nations was meant to serve as a warning to wanton Judah, but to no avail (see v. 7). (CSB)

The Lord reminds Jerusalem of what He has done. (TLSB)

battlements. Walled towers for defense. (TLSB)

are in ruins, No community is secure when the Lord comes in judgment. (TLSB)

3:7 *fear me* – This is not craven fear but godly reverence shown in obedience to the Lord’s will. (TLSB)

appointed against you. If Judah would return to the Lord, He would not carry out His planned judgment. (TLSB)

eager...deeds corrupt. Rather than repent and seek the Lord’s will, they gave themselves completely over to sin. (TLSB)

They were eager to speed their perverted actions, their infamous deeds. Thus many a godless person refuses to heed the Lord’s call to repentance and deliberately plunges all the more deeply into transgressions of every kind. (Kretzmann)

3:8 *wait.* A sarcastic statement to Judah to wait for the threatened catastrophe. (CSB)

Most often, God encourages believers to wait for His salvation (Lm 3:26). But here the wait is for the day which the Lord will consume the earth. (TLSB)

declares the Lordy. To lodge accusations (see Ps 50:7)—and then proceed to execute judgments. (CSB)

my decision is. Or “For I have decided.” The Lord concludes his announcement of judgment with a general declaration of his intent. (CSB)

the day. The day of wrath (1:15), when God will assemble all people for judgment. (TLSB)

fire of my jealousy – Here it used as the act of an arbiter who makes the decision to pass judgment. God’s fiery anger is to be unleashed against His people, who refused to worship only Him. Because they ignored the warning of His judgment against the nations, God had no other option. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Verb form can describe a camel growling or a person cursing. (TLSB)

3:1–8 The city of Jerusalem, including its leaders, refuses to return to the Lord. Such impenitence brings upon them God’s day of wrath. These things are meant as a warning for us (1Co 10:6), as Jesus preached, “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). All who believe in Jesus will

escape everlasting punishment. • Lord Jesus, be merciful to me, a sinner, and spare me on the Day of Judgment. Amen. (TLSB)

The Conversion of the Nations

9 “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. 10 From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. 11 “On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. 12 But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, 13 those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”

3:9–20 A three-stanza oracle (vv. 9–13, 14–17, 18–20) announcing redemption that will follow God’s judgment. (CSB)

3:9–13 The Lord gives assurance that the nations will be purified, the scattered remnant restored and Jerusalem purged. (CSB)

3:9 God’s fearful judgment of the nations will effect (or be followed by) their purification so that they will call on his name and serve him. Israel’s God will be acknowledged by the nations, and God’s people will be held in honor by them (cf. vv. 19–20). (CSB)

that time – Might also be translated “after that,” meaning “after the coming fire of judgment.” God will indeed bring about a sudden change, turning or overturning. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

NT era. Chemnitz: “He brings in a reference to Christ by repeating preceding prophets” (*LTh* 2:459). (TLSB)

speech of – Might also be considered “language,” as in the “one language” and “common speech” of the tower of Babel. Zephaniah anticipates a time when fouled and flawed language will be cleansed and corrected and a unified people, with “one shoulder,” evenly balanced and with one accord, will call on the name of the Lord and be saved. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Mouths of former idolaters will resound with praises to the Lord. (TLSB)

3:10 *Cush*. The most distant area imaginable. The most widely dispersed will be restored. (CSB)

My worshipers. Cush is an example of a foreign nation whose people will worship the Lord. Cf Is 19:21. (TLSB)

*bring me offering*l. Rather than to Baal and Molech (cf. 1:4–5). (CSB)

They shall offer their bodies as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1). (TLSB)

3:11 *no longer be haughty*. Pride has no place in the hearts of those whose rebellion has been forgiven. (TLSB)

3:12 *humble and lowly* – The humble trust solely in the Lord for salvation. (TLSB)

3:13 *those who are left* – This would mean the people of Jerusalem who have survived the catastrophe that God will have brought upon then world and upon Judah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

none shall them afraid. Quoted verbatim from Mic 4:4. (CSB)

Believers will have pure speech (v 9); like a flock of sheep, they will enjoy provision and security. (TLSB)

3:9–13 Along with the remnant in Israel, nations from around the world will call on the name of the Lord and serve Him. Once proud and haughty, these people will now praise God because Jesus has paid the price for their rebellious deeds. You and I are part of this great communion of saints. • Lord, help me always praise Your name and find refuge in Your protection. Amen. (TLSB)

Israel's Joy and Restoration

14 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. 18 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. 20 At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD.

3:14–17 Joy in the restored city (in two parts: vv. 14–15 and vv. 16–17)—the prophet’s reassurance (contrast 1:10–13). (CSB)

3:14 *Daughter of Zion ... of Jerusalem.* Personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

Citizens of God’s Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church (Heb. 12:22) (TLSB)

This is the re-gathered remnant. There is to be a loud celebration because God has prepared them for rescue and this was a really big deal. The more magnificent the one being praised, the nosier and more enthusiastic will be the rejoicing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:15 *taken away the judgments* – The excitement within the faithful remnant feeds upon God’s restoration of His grace-agreement with them. He has “taken away their punishment,” “dropped the charges” against them, “commuted their sentence.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Ezekiel 18:4, “The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

If the punishment is gone, and if the great enemy, death, has been removed and what remains of it is simply a sleep of the body unto the resurrection, then sin and the guilt associated with it before God must be gone as well. (PBC)

The Lord has removed every legal accusation against His people (Romans 8:33) (TLSB)

These were the sentences of condemnation which had rightly been spoken upon her on account of her sins. (Kretzmann)

Notes from Romans 8:33 – BRING ANY CHARGE – Only God himself could bring charges against his elect, but he himself has justified us by the sacrifice of his Son. The judge is himself the Redeemer! Because of Christ, our record before God is clean. We are exonerated.

This is a legal technical term for bringing a charge against someone. A scene in the heavenly court is envisioned, where now the Accuser can no longer bring any accusations (Rev. 12:10). (CC)

The “elects” innocence and inviolability is grounded in the eternal and unchangeable designs of God. (Franzmann)

Christians do have enemies who accuse them. They are all hostile power, as Satan, the world and the flesh. (Stoeckhardt)

your enemies. All those arrayed against Israel. (CSB)

God had used the foreign nations to punish Israel and Judah. Now he had removed them and there was nothing to fear. When the Lord is once more again worshiped as King in their midst, His people will experience no more evil. Therefore, they can live without fear. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Sweeping away the world-power which personified all the hostile forces of the world. (Kretzmann)

3:16 *on that day* – After the Lord has dropped the charges, no one needs to fear His condemnation. There is none. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

let not your hands grow weak. Do not be discouraged. (CSB)

This would have been a sign of despair. Since the charges were dropped they could now lift those same hands in praise to God for his great grace and mercy. They now are extended in service to others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:17 *a mighty one who will save* – He and only he has the power to save them. He is not only capable but also willing.

He will quiet you by his love – Jesus soothes the sinner’s guilty and troubled heart. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

The Lord lives among His people and guarantees their salvation. Luth: “It happens for the righteous that [the Lord] allows them to be attacked, to be molested in various ways, and to be troubled by many evils, so that they be conformed to their King. Yet He adds that feeling of joy, that security of heart, so that all things may become sweeter, so that nothing can separate them from the love of God, Rom 8:39” (AE 18:361). (TLSB)

The second consequence of the removal of sin is that God is present in the midst of His people with His protecting power. He is with them, protecting them from harm, delivering them from evil, quieting and comforting them in their fears and anxieties, and empowering their limp hands to move in service to Him. Believe it or not, He actually rejoices with songs on His lips because they are living in His presence. What a glorious revelation of our God! We are the one who should be filled with joy and singing, because we have the privilege in Christ of living with our God for eternity. (PBC)

he will exult over you – God, too, breaks out in celebration. He rejoices in the salvation of his people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:18–20 Summary announcement of restoration—the Lord’s final assurance. (CSB)

3:18 *the festival*. The fall of Jerusalem disrupted the celebration of annual festivals such as the Passover. (TLSB)

you will no longer suffer – When many Israelites were taken into exile foreigners were imported to fill up the cities. They would have been a constant problem for those Jews left behind. This phrase seems to indicate that these foreigners, too, were removed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

The Lord will remove from His people anything that oppresses them. (PBC)

3:19 *all your oppressors* – Nations that afflict God’s people. (TLSB)

shame into praise – God will cause the lame and outcast believers to express praise rather than to wallow in shame. (TLSB)

3:20 *give you honor and praise*. See Ge 12:2–3. (CSB)

restore your fortunes – Yet another use of Hebrew shub. Literally, “return the things turned over (to someone). So, this is not a request for mere luck. The idea is closely related to the blessings of the new creation depicted as the new land of Israel (Ezek 47:3-12). In the NT, restoration describes what God effects through the coming of the messianic kingdom (cf. Mt. 17:11; Acts 1:6; 15:16; 1 Peter 5:10). (TLSB)

The fulfillment of this prophecy is clearly found in the gathering of the Christian Church, its members being called from the various nations of the earth, and the consummation and climax will be reached in the eventual complete deliverance from this present evil world as the Kingdom of Glory opens its portals. (Kretzmann)

3:14–20 Zephaniah urges God’s people to fear no evil but instead to rejoice over their coming salvation. Fear may hinder us from witnessing of God’s love and mercy; how wrong and foolish that would be! God has redeemed us in Christ. He will always be with us, and someday He will

take us to the heavenly Jerusalem. • Lord God, make me a bold witness of Your saving power.
Amen. (TLSB)