

Israel's Joy and Restoration

The OT reading for this coming Sunday (Third Sunday in Advent) is Zephaniah 3:14-20. The end of exile had come. 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."

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.

Verse 16 reads: *let not your hands grow weak*. They were not to be discouraged. 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.

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. The phrase *you will no longer suffer* suggests that these foreigners, too, were removed.

The Lord has removed every legal accusation against His people (Romans 8:33). That included ancient Israel and it is just as true for us today. After the Lord has dropped the charges, no one needs to fear His condemnation. There is none. 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.

Prayer: Lord God, make me a bold witness of Your saving power. Amen. (TLSB)