

When God Will Sing

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[0:00] Some people tend to stay away from the minor prophets because they have such a message of gloom and doom a lot of times.

But they do have a lot of gloom and doom in their messages, but they always leave some hope in there as well. And we'll look at passages from Zephaniah tonight. We'll see some of the warnings that Zephaniah gives, but we'll also focus most of our time on the hope passage that's at the end of Zephaniah.

And then we'll talk about how that applies to us as well. So let's start by looking at the very first verse. In Zephaniah 1.1, it says, So Zephaniah traced his ancestry back four generations to Hezekiah, and most likely that was Judah's famous king, Hezekiah.

We don't know that for sure, but that's the general speculation of that being the case. And after the long and evil reign of Manasseh and his son Ammon, Josiah began his rule in Judah.

And Zephaniah began ministering as a prophet in Jerusalem that same year. And that was also the same year that Jeremiah also began his ministry. And of course, you probably remember that Josiah later started a reform, but it didn't last past Josiah's time.

[1:33] So like many of the minor prophets, like we said, Zephaniah began with a message of doom. And we see that message of doom summarized in 1 verses 2 through 6.

So here's Zephaniah 1 verses 2 through 6. It says, So Zephaniah begins his message with the pronouncement of universal judgment.

And these words introduce the particular judgment that would be pronounced upon Judah. And then they also speak about the final judgment that will usher in the kingdom of God on the earth. You might have noticed the phrase in there where we said stumbling blocks. And stumbling blocks here refers to idolatry or substitutes for God in the life of the people. Remember that there's nothing in the universe that really can be compared with the creator.

So God abhors all things that put anything above God himself. Because that actually is a form of idolatry. And if you skip down in chapter 1 a little bit and go to verses 17 and 18, we see a little more detail about the reason for God's wrath.

[3:17] In verse 17, God is speaking and he says, I will bring distress upon men and they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood shall be poured out like dust and their flesh like refuse.

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy. For he will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

And chapter 2 begins with Zephaniah telling the people how they can avoid the day of wrath. Look at chapter 2 verses 1 through 3. It says, Gather yourselves together.

Yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued or the day passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth who have upheld his justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. So I put this next quote in your handout because having described the awful day of God's wrath on Judah, Zephaniah at last brought his readers to the real purpose of his book.

[4:31] And his goal wasn't to bring people to despair, but to bring them to repentance and obedience. And you see the quote from Matthew Henry there. Matthew Henry said that Zephaniah intended not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins.

And that's a key distinction there, that he wanted to frighten them out of their wits. I mean, he wanted to frighten them out of their sins, not out of their wits. So notice what he urged the people to

do.

He urged the people to gather together, and that was perhaps to come collectively and repent as a nation. And repeating the command then stressed the urgency of the appeal, because with the announcement of coming judgment, God mercifully invited his people to repent.

So they were to assemble and to seek the favor of the Lord and try to avert his wrath. And even the meek, which were those who had followed the law of the Lord, were encouraged to continue to show fruits of repentance.

And then they would be sheltered in the day of his judgment. So the mercy and grace of the Lord is still available to a repentant people. And that's a key thing to note here, because we just looked at all of the doom passages and all the judgment passages, but yet God still holds out a message of safety for those who repent.

[5:43] And then starting with 2.4 and for the remainder of chapter 2, the focus of the book moves from the description of God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem to a description of divine judgment on the surrounding nations.

Then after he pronounces judgment on the nations, Zephaniah returned again to pronounce judgment upon Jerusalem and more woes upon Jerusalem. And that city was a favored position among the nations, so more was expected of Jerusalem because of their favored position with God. And we won't look at the verses, but chapter 3, verses 1 through 7 summarize the judgment on Jerusalem. Then in 3.8 is where Zephaniah transitions from the historical invasion of Judah by Babylon to the future day of the Lord.

And starting in 3.8, he speaks of the great tribulation when the Lord is going to gather all the nations for judgment. So the faithful remnant then at that time, which is presumably the meek that was mentioned in chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, is then exhorted to wait and trust in God to carry out his judgment and then protect his people.

So that's where we'll actually pick up with our detailed study tonight. We'll look at verses 8 through 20 in detail, and we're only going to divide them into two sections. And then we'll consider how they apply to us.

[7:04] So in verses 8 through 13, Zephaniah tells God's people to wait for restoration. So wait for restoration is that first section there. And we see the command to wait for restoration in verses 8 and 9.

Verses 8 and 9 say, Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, until the day I rise up for plunder. My determination is to gather the nations to my assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, all my fierce anger.

All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call on the name of the Lord, to serve him with one accord.

So Zephaniah predicted that the nations will be renewed both morally and spiritually. And he mentioned the phrase, restoring a pure language. And restoring a pure language there doesn't mean that the people are going to speak a new language.

Instead it means that their speech, that was once defiled, is going to be renewed. Remember that words spoken reflect the inner life of somebody.

[8:11] And the nations that were formerly perverted by the blasphemy of serving idols are then going to be cleansed by God for true worship. And so a remnant of those nations will be converted by the Lord, and they'll worship him in righteousness and truth.

And when they do that, they'll have pure speech that comes from the purified hearts. So the nations that turn to a reverential trust in God then will call upon the name of the Lord, and will evidence their dependence on him by uniting in service to God.

So check out verse 10 now. It says, From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. So as an example of their united spiritual service, Zephaniah mentioned those beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.

And that's a way of referring to the most distant land to Zephaniah's knowledge at that time. So in their converted state, those nations are going to bring offerings to the Lord in Jerusalem.

And this will be a marvelous reversal of what we saw from the Gentiles' policies during Zephaniah's day, because the stream of worshipers going to Jerusalem will also include Israel, which Zephaniah refers to as my dispersed ones.

[9:24] So then when God restores the nations to himself, he'll also turn from his wrath to bless the chosen nation of Israel. And this grand prophetic theme is both the high point of Zephaniah's

message, and it also is the high point for the nation of Israel itself.

And remember that Israel's regathering to Jerusalem was promised by God in words that he gave to Moses all the way back in Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 1 through 10.

So just listen to that promise to Moses that God made in Deuteronomy 30, verses 1 through 10. It says, Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey his voice according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

And then he goes on to say, If any of you are driven out to the farthest points under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.

He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers, and the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

[10:53] Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you, and you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all his commandments which I command you today.

The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as he rejoiced over your fathers.

And that's a key phrase to remember. Listen to that sentence again. It says, For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as he rejoiced over your fathers. Then the last verse of Deuteronomy 31 through 10 has the condition of that.

It says, If you obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep his commandments and his statutes, which are written in this book of the law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

So here again we see that God must punish sin, but he's full of mercies and he's always true to his promises. So even though the national judgment is assured, God is not going to completely forsake his people.

[12:00] So going back to Zephaniah, let's look at the last three verses of this first section. That's Zephaniah 3, verses 11 through 13. And in these verses, God speaks of the removal of impurity from Jerusalem, so that his people will be restored.

It says, In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds, in which you transgress against me. For then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.

For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. So before we look at the verses in detail, just scan through verses 11 and 12 to see who's going to be doing the action there.

Who's going to be doing the action in verse 11? Yes, God says that he is going to take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride.

[13:07] And then in verse 11 we also see, or excuse me, in verse 12, we see that God will take a certain kind of people away. And really that is verse 11.

It says he's going to take the haughty and prideful away. And then in verse 12 we see that God is going to leave a certain kind of people in the land. Look at verse 12 again. It says, Keep in mind that when the Bible speaks of meek, that doesn't mean somebody who's really weak like we tend to think today.

Meekness really means power under control. And power used the right way, submissively in service to God. So at the beginning of the millennium then is what he's referring to when he says that day. And on that day Israel will be cleansed and restored. And she's going to have no shame before God because of her wrongdoings. And when it talks about their wrongs there, it's actually rendering a

Hebrew word that means terrible deeds.

So God is really trying to emphasize that they're going to be cleansed from doing terrible things. But they will be cleansed from doing that. And God will remove from the city all those that are guilty of pride and haughtiness.

[14 : 24] And this will occur in the judgment of Israel. And in that judgment then, evildoers who are full of shame will be judged. And in God's holy hill will be inhabited only by the pure people, which are the meek and humble, those that actually trust in the Lord.

And then look at verse 13 again. It has the results of the cleansing. And it also describes the behavior that's going to characterize the remnant that's going to be left. It says, The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.

For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid. So look at the ending of that verse again. It says, For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

Does that remind anybody of a famous psalm, perhaps? Yes, it definitely brings to mind Psalm 23. And you notice how everything is tying together.

We went back to Deuteronomy to see what God said He would do then, and you see that it's mentioned in the psalm as well. And if you think about Psalm 23, it shows us that Israel, so long defiled and turbulent and ravished, then will at last be at rest among the nations and without fear.

[15 : 38] Then verse 13 also fulfills the promise of Leviticus 26.6. And in Leviticus 26.6, God said these words. He said, I will give you peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid.

I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. So once again, we see how everything is tying together there. And Zephaniah is showing how everything is going to work out in the millennium.

So that brings us to the second section of the passage, and that covers verses 14 through 20 of chapter 3. And we're going to see a command to rejoice. And God's people are commanded to rejoice in salvation.

So rejoice in salvation is what they're told to do. Look at verses 14 and 15 first. They say, Sing, O daughter of Zion.

Shout, O Israel. Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, and you shall see disaster no more.

[16 : 49] So look at the four verbs that are imperative verbs that are similar in meaning in verse 14. You see sing there. You see shout. You also have the command to be glad and to rejoice.

So the redeemed people should be glad and rejoice with all their heart. And in Hebrew, the term heart could be used in three basic ways. It could refer to the will of the individual.

It could refer to the mind or the intellect of the individual. Or it could refer to the emotions of the individual. And Zephaniah here used the term with its latter meaning. He's talking about the emotions of the people.

So he's saying that with all their emotions, the people should rejoice and be glad for what God is going to do for them. And of course, verse 14 also has the basis for rejoicing.

And that basis is that Israel's day of judgment is past, and her king is now residing in her midst.

Remember that God departed just before Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple, and Ezekiel 8, 11 talks about God departing the temple.

[17 : 54] But he's going to return as Lord and Messiah. And that's a fact so glorious that we're going to see it repeated again in verse 17. So the human kings of Israel and Judah only served as representatives of Israel's true monarch, who here is going to bless with his presence those who repent, and returned to him.

So let's read on through verse 17 now. Starting with verse 16, it says, In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Do not fear. Zion, let not your hands be weak.

The Lord your God in your midst. The mighty one will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

So you'll notice in your handout, I put an expression there to explain, the let not your hands be weak. So let's read them one more time. It says, In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Do not

fear.

Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst. The mighty one will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

[19:00] So you'll notice in your handout, I put an expression there to explain, the let not your hands be weak. Because that's an expression that may not be familiar to us.

In Hebrew thought, the hands symbolize strength and power. So if you let your hands hang limp, that referred to a feeling of weakness or powerlessness and a sense of discouragement.

So instead of letting your hands hang limp, then Israel instead is going to lift her hands, symbolic of triumph because of the Lord's presence. Notice it says, He will be with you and He will have power because it says, He is mighty to save.

So look at the first part of verse 17 again. Does it say the mighty one may save? It's pretty definite there. It says the mighty one will save.

And God will do more than that because the verse goes on to say, He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing. So as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, then the Lord will exult over His people with gladness and song.

[20:08] And He'll rest in quiet ecstasy over His people in whom is all His delight. So how amazing is it that God is going to join with the redeemed people to rejoice in salvation?

You know, we talked about this section being rejoice in salvation. It's not just the redeemed people that are rejoicing. We see here that it's God rejoicing as well.

So this verse remarkably adds then that God Himself will rejoice over you with gladness, indicating that when God's people seek Him and follow Him and rejoice in Him and trust Him, then God is going to personally delight in them as well.

So you know, a lot of religions and even some people today who claim to be Christians say that God is an aloof, emotionalist God. But you see here that this is anything but an emotionalist God. He's actually bursting forth in joyful celebration. He's going to rejoice over the people with singing. And I know some of you have the English Standard Version. If you're following along in the English Standard Version, the last line of verse 17 actually says, He will exult over you with loud singing.

[21:21] So that even intensifies the emotion of God even more to say that He's going to exult over you with loud singing. I have a feeling when God wants to sing loud, He can really sing loud.

One day we'll find out whether that's the case or not. But I suspect that's true. So then in the last three verses of the chapter, God is going to speak in first person and to reemphasize what's going to happen.

So let's read verses 18 through 20. It says, I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden. Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you.

I will save the lame and gather those who were driven out. I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you, for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth.

When I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord. So you notice there are six I wills of restoration in those verses that God says He will do.

[22:29] The first one is when God says, I will gather. So we have the I will that God will gather in verse 18. And then just walking right on through the rest of the verses, verse 19 says, I will deal for the second I will.

So I will deal. The third I will that's also mentioned in verse 19 is I will save. And the last one mentioned in verse 19 is I will appoint.

So I will appoint then is the fourth one. There are two more to go because in verse 20, God says, I will bring you back. So once again, He says, I will bring you back.

And then in verse 6, or number 6, He says, I will do more than bring you back. He says, I will give you. And He says, I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth.

So not only is God going to bring the people back, He's going to do more than that. He's going to give them additional blessings. And He's going to give them fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth.

[23:42] So now let's look at 18 through 20, verse by verse, starting with verse 18. That's the verse that says, I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly who are among you to

whom its reproach is a burden.

So when they were in captivity and exile, the godly remnant couldn't celebrate the appointed feast. But now that they're being restored, the Lord is going to remove their sorrow giving them, according to verse 19, praise and fame.

And so then they will be able to celebrate their feast again. So they won't have to sorrow anymore in that situation. And then if we look at verse 19, it says, Behold, at that time, I will deal with all who afflict you.

I will save the lame and gather those who were driven out. Then He says, I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame.

So God is going to act on behalf of all His flock who suffered under exile, and He's going to take steps to save the lame, just like a shepherd would. Also, the exiles, like outcasts and scattered animals, then, will no longer suffer shame at their plight, but they'll rejoice that it's over.

[24:58] So then look at verse 20 one more time. It says, At that time, I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you, for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord.

So the first part of the verse very closely approximates the preceding verse because it talks about God again returning the people to their land, and it talks about how the people will experience praise and fame rather than shame and reproach.

So at that point, the day of the Lord will be complete, and it will be marked by the liberation of God by the people who had everything going against them. Now they'll have everything going for them, and they'll have their well-being restored.

So before we leave verses 19 and 20 to talk about the application for us, we need to remind ourselves of one more thing to set up the application. The first line of each of those two verses includes the phrase at that time, and once again, at that time again refers to the time of the return of the king, who of course is Messiah, and that's when the Jews will be regathered and become a source of blessing to the world and fulfill Israel's original destiny.

So like it did for the people of Zephaniah's day, Zephaniah's words have both short-term and long-term applications for us because in the quick overview of the first two chapters, we saw God's hatred of sin and a call to repentance, and then in chapter 3, we saw the blessings upon those who do repent, and of course, these things prefigure the gospel that we learn about more fully in the New Testament.

[26:38] So in Acts 3, 19 through 21, Paul recorded these words, or excuse me, Luke recorded these words from Peter's sermon, and they closely mirror what we saw from Zephaniah. Listen to what Peter said in his sermon in Acts 3, verses 19 through 21.

He says, Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus Christ who was preached to you before whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

So you can see how Peter, as recorded by Luke, reached all the way back to all that the prophets had said and reminded people of what was going to be coming. And he reminded them that it was planned all along.

So one application for us is that the call for repentance and the rewards of repentance that we saw in Zephaniah still carry forward to us today. So the call for repentance and the rewards for repentance still apply to us today.

And of course we saw that in Acts 3, 19 where Peter said, Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

[28:00] Then the second application then is that Christ makes the blessing of Abraham apply to us. So Christ makes the blessing of Abraham apply to us.

Staying in that same passage in Acts, Luke records what Peter went on to say. Verses 24 through 26 of Acts 3 say this, says, Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.

You are sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all of the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up his servant Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from your

iniquities.

So because the blessing of Abraham applies to us who put our faith in Christ, Zephaniah 3.15 also applies to us.

Look back at Zephaniah 3.15 again. It says, The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

[29:07] You shall see disaster no more. So let that sink in a little bit. The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

And you shall see disaster no more. Of course, that's great news for us today, but can you imagine how the captives must have felt when they heard that that would be coming up at some point?

And of course, the removal of judgments and the removal of the curse that's spoken of by Zephaniah comes with Christ. And Christ is now the Lord in our midst. And now he indwells the church through the Spirit.

So for more detail about how Christ makes the blessing of Abraham apply to us, listen to Paul's words in Galatians 3, verses 13 and 14. It says, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.

For it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. And then here's a key part, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

[30:14] So verse 14 says that the blessing of Abraham will come upon the Gentiles, just like what we've been talking about here. So why should we care that the Gentiles now receive the blessing of Abraham?

As far as I know, everybody in here is a Gentile, so that should ring pretty well with us. We are those Gentiles that he's talking about. So listen to Galatians 3, 13 and 14 in part again, just to keep that in mind.

It says, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.

So because Jesus makes the blessing of Abraham apply to us, we can also hang upon the promise of Zephaniah 3, 17. And that's what I want to leave everybody with tonight, is just to let it sink in that Zephaniah 3, 17 applies to you.

That's the verse that says, The Lord your God in your midst, the mighty one will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

[31:34] He will rejoice over you with