

Restoration after Judgment

Zephaniah 3:9-20

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Introduction: As we come to the close of our study in Zephaniah, we need to recall again the call & promises given to Abraham. We read in Genesis 12:2-3, “*And I will make of thee a great nation, & I will bless thee, & make thy name great; & thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, & curse him that curseth thee: & in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” God’s blessing of all the nations (“*families*”) of the world was demonstrated by God giving the Jews the knowledge of the one true God, the written Word of God, & the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. The Jews were to share these blessings with the world & to magnify the name of the Lord before the Gentile world. Yet for much of their history, the Jewish people have failed to carry out God’s purpose. But Zephaniah now prophesizes Israel’s restoration after her judgment. I will use John Phillips’ outline to bring our study in Zephaniah to an end. Consider in these closing verses: Israel’s responsibility (:9-10); her repentance (:11-13); her rejoicing (:14-15); & her Redeemer (:16-20).

I. Israel’s responsibility (:9-10)

A. The conversion of the nations (:9).

1. Even though Israel failed to live up to its spiritual responsibilities, God still has His program.
2. While some suggest this “*pure language*” will be a universal language (say Hebrew, as a reversal of Babel), it is probably best to see this as a purified, uncontaminated speech.
3. “Since what we say with our lips comes from the heart (Mt. 12:34-35), cleansed lips indicate forgiven sin & a cleansed heart (Isa. 6:1-8)” (Wiersbe).

B. The cooperation of the nations (:9-10).

1. The nations once divided will now serve as one people
2. The Jews returning from faraway places like Ethiopia by these Gentiles may be considered as a kind of offering to the Lord.
3. Though this is a Millennial promise, there is even now a partial fulfillment with the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations of the world.

II. Israel’s repentance (:11-13)

A. A new humility (:11-12).

1. Such humility leads the people to repentance – see Zechariah 12:10 – 13:1.
2. “The pride of race & religion, so characteristic of the Jews down through the centuries, will be a thing of the past” (Phillips) – see Romans 10:1-4.

B. A new holiness (:13).

1. No more iniquity, falsehood, or deceit in the people – having been cleansed by the blood.
2. Now they find prosperity & peace – “*none shall make them afraid*” – contrast with today.

III. Israel’s rejoicing (:14-15)

A. A merry people (:14).

1. Israel is exhorted to sing & be glad – because of all that God has done for her.
2. “Only a redeemed people can really sing” (Phillips) – cf. Exodus 14:30 – 15:1 (first song?).

B. A Messianic presence (:15).

1. “*The King of Israel, even the LORD*” – Christ, the Messiah in their midst.
2. “He (God) has taken away their punishment, defeated their enemies, & come to dwell with them” (Wiersbe).

IV. Israel’s Redeemer (:16-20)

A. The climax of the Lord’s blessing (:16-17).

1. Israel is encouraged & enabled not to fear – no more anxiety causing hands to be slack.
2. The Lord rejoices over His people as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride – see Isaiah 62:5; 65:19.

Summary: “The Lord’s rejoicing over His people, resting in His love for them, & singing joyfully over them are incomprehensible but precious truths, illustrated by the response of the father at the return of his prodigal son (Lk. 15:32)” (RSB).

B. The context of the Lord’s blessing (:18-20).

1. The gathering of Israel (:18).

“True Israelites – the believing remnant who will have been scattered, hiding, living in fear for their lives during the days of the antichrist (& even today?), & grieving over the termination of the temple services – will be gathered home” (Phillips).

2. The guarding of Israel (:19a).

Compare the shepherd gathering & guiding his sheep home & consider the Jews now able to sing Psalm 23 as never before!

3. The glorifying of Israel (:19b-20).

“There is hardly a country on earth where Jews have not been insulted, vilified, hated, & persecuted. But in the millennial age, their management of public affairs will be so brilliant, their love for the Lord will be so personable & convincing, their influence & power will be so obvious, & their wisdom, insight, & skill will be so beneficial that all nations will hail them & welcome them – especially the nations that have cursed them & ridiculed them most” (Phillips).

Conclusion: It has been noted that the book of Zephaniah begins & ends with a King. There is reference to a past king, Hezekiah & to a present king, Josiah, as well as to a promised King, the Messiah. Though both Hezekiah & Josiah were “good” kings, they failed to bring the Hebrew people back to God (in spite of their sincere efforts). What is needed is the King of kings, not just another king of the Jews. It is for that King that Zephaniah was waiting & for whom we wait today!

Another lesson to learn is for anyone of God’s people today who have strayed from His will & have experienced His chastening (contrast 3:2), if he/she comes to the Lord with a broken & contrite heart, the Lord will forgive (I John 1:9). It may well be that one will carry the scars of disobedience for the rest of their life, but there is forgiveness & restoration into His fellowship. The late president of Moody Bible Institute would often end his prayers with, “And Lord, help us bear the consequences of forgiven sin & to end well.” Has Israel not suffered the consequences of disobedience & unbelief? Consider Matthew 27:25, “*His blood be on us, & on our children.*” This is no excuse for anti-Semitism, but the reality of Israel’s history. “But when God establishes His kingdom on earth, He will restore His people, renew the land, & give His people a new beginning that will cause them to forget their past disobedience & focus on praising the Lord & glorifying His name” (Wiersbe).

One final lesson: “It is imperative that we seek Him (the Lord) now to escape the wrath to come & to enjoy both the present life in Christ, who took God’s wrath for His people, & the prospect of eternal hope. To this end the day of the Lord is a purifying & comforting truth for God’s people” (RSB). Is it for you?