

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH
Lesson 8, Chapter 3 Concluded
END

Zephaniah chapter 3 verse 8 concludes a long list of accusations against and indictments against Israel and the nations, and in verse 9 changes to a more upbeat tone when the Prophet calls to the world to turn from their old, wicked ways to true Godliness, and speaks of a time when Yehoveh will restore His set-apart people Israel to a more glorious state than they've ever experienced.

I purposely used the word "calls" instead of the more commonly used word we'll find in our Bibles and in our Bible commentaries, which is "convert" or "conversion". In our previous lesson I took much of our time together to speak about the misdirection the notion of converting sets us upon, and by no means is that what the biblical intent was. The Hebrew word was ***haphak***; it does NOT mean to convert but rather to respond to a divine impulse to change direction. That time we spent on the matter better prepares us to understand the sense of what is being said in the remainder of chapter 3, which then concludes the Book of Zephaniah.

Let's re-read chapter 3 beginning with verse 9.

RE-READ ZEPHANIAH CHAPTER 3:9 – end

The resounding theme and tone of this final section of Zephaniah is joy. Jerusalem will burst into praise because her condemnation has turned into deliverance. We have just read about what amounts to a reversal. The early chapter's that speak of the chaotic nature of battle and the frightening cacophony of sounds of pain and misery that it emits, are turned into beautiful sounds of worship and gratefulness. The ending of the chapter sounds very much like the end of Amos's prophetic book. A world headed for what can be only the bleakest of endings is actually about to enter into a most unexpected and unmerited ideal future.

The Hebrew word to begin verse 9 is the familiar ***ki***, which has a number of nuances to it. Here the sense of it is closest to "after that". It is best to take

this to refer to everything that has been spoken about up to this point in Zephaniah's book. So, this is after a great worldwide conflagration that spares no nation, including God's favored nation of Israel. As verse 9 continues, we get begin to get a picture of what God is going to do now that the He has judged the entire world. And, it says that He will ***haphak*** the peoples. There's that word we have been talking about. The word that quite often is translated to English as "convert". Here, however, most English translations will choose to use the word "change" or "turn" ...a much better choice.

This is a notoriously difficult verse to translate, but mostly because of the archaic expressions used that sound so strange to our ears. Even when translating this to the most literal extent possible, it's tough to grasp.

YLT Zephaniah 3:9 *For then do I turn unto peoples a pure lip, To call all of them by the name of Jehovah, To serve Him with one shoulder.*

So, what does it mean for God to turn unto people a pure lip? As you can imagine, there is no consensus. Some say it means to restore a pure language. Others say it means to change the impure speech to a more pure speech. Some think this means giving the surviving peoples a single language for all to know and use (and then it is speculated that this must be Hebrew). Luther goes a different direction altogether and says it means to be preached to with God-friendly lips that the peoples will all be able to respond by calling upon the name of the Lord. Here is how I take this expression to mean.

First, when we look at other uses in the Bible of the term ***saphah*** (which is most often translated as "lip"), even though it is thought to refer to language, that isn't really the case. It works like this: the lips are the organ we use for speech. To have pure lips means that the speech organ (the lips) is now able to speak the truth, which can only come from a purification of the heart.

Second: as typical, no standard English Bible uses anything but the word "Lord" when it says the result of having purified lips is the ability to call upon the "name of the Lord". The word "Lord" is not there... instead it is the word Yehoveh. When we find a phrase in Scripture that says to "call upon the NAME of the Lord" (which actually says "call upon the name of Yehoveh"), it means it

literally. The word “name” is not a throw away word. Literally we are call out “Yehoveh!”. Of course, Christianity says that might be true for Jews, but for gentile Christians, we change that to “Jesus”.

As current Believers in Yeshua and His Father, we already have the ability to do this because we have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit. Even so, I cannot say with confidence that this verse, then, is referring *only* to people who had (up to now) been non-Believers... or if it also includes taking existing Believers to a far more heightened level of trust and devotion to God. The result being a singular sincere commitment to serve Him as a world body. What has happened is that the catastrophic actions of God by bringing judgment upon the world has brought about a transformation... a radical turning... of all the survivors of the onslaught from following their own sinful and idolatrous ways, to worshipping the one True God in harmony and in purity. The world has not “converted”; rather, they have turned away from evil to good.

CJB Zephaniah 3:10 *Even from beyond Ethiopia's rivers they will bring those who petition me, the daughter of my dispersed as my offering.*

Scratch out the word “Ethiopia” and insert the word “Cush” in your Bibles because that’s what is there in the original Hebrew. So, it is not speaking of the sovereign nation of Ethiopia but rather the regions that Cush’s tribe eventually settled. Those areas included parts of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as a large area of Northern Africa. So, this is a very generalized term that for the Jews of Zephaniah’s day was referring to areas mostly to the south of them that described the extent of the known world.

But... there is also a Mesopotamian Cush. So, Ibn Ezra comments that this is referring to the rivers of Assyria (to Israel’s northeast). He’s onto something here. What this is more alluding to, I’m rather confident, is speaking of the rivers that emanated from the Garden of Eden. So, overall, this means bringing people back to God’s territory (the former Canaan) from their distant places, and since this is about restoration of Israel, then the biblical ideal is to restore Israel to the ideal pre-fallen state best represented by the Garden of Eden.

Who, exactly, is God bringing? Again, different English words are employed to translate the Hebrew **athar**. Without going into great detail about it, we can properly simplify this to mean “worshippers”. Does this mean all of God’s worshippers, or a specific group? The group is called “the **bat** of my **puwts**”. **Bat** means daughter, and **puwts** means scattered or dispersed. So, essentially this a very Hebrew-ized way of saying offspring of the dispersed Israelites. Interestingly, some English translations such as the KJV, will add the word “even” (making it, “**even** the daughter of my dispersed”). That word “even” is not there. It is a gloss from later times to make this verse appear to refer to everyone... gentile and Hebrew... that is, gentiles and **even** Hebrews... when in fact this speaks ONLY of the dispersed of Israel. The Church age cannot stand it when Israel gets some blessing, they don’t. So, the Church either includes itself or poaches it altogether by saying that blessing was transferred from Israel to the gentile Church.

Finally, what does it mean about something being God’s (or my) offering? Again, there is no consensus of meaning. However, it is rather easy to recognize that how this is interpreted depends largely upon a denomination’s particular doctrines, so it also defines who these “dispersed” are that is coming. To begin with, the English word “offering” is not really the best choice. The Hebrew is **Minchah**, and it refers to a very specific kind of sacrifice. That said, it was often used by the Hebrews in a less technical sense to mean something given to the Temple voluntarily as opposed to something required. So, either the gentile Believers are coming and bringing with them the ancient, dispersed Israelite God Worshippers as their present to God, or the dispersed Israelites coming to God are presenting themselves to Him and He sees them as a kind of sacrificial gifting to Himself. I see nothing in this verse that is inclusive of gentiles, so it is my opinion that these returning dispersed (which would naturally include the return of the 10 Lost Tribes) is what is being spoken about, and God sees them as a kind of sacrificial gifting.

CJB Zephaniah 3:11 ***When that day comes, you will not be ashamed of everything you have done, committing wrongs against me; for then I will remove from among you those of you who take joy in arrogance; you will no longer be full of pride on my holy mountain.***

“When that day” comes, means Judgment Day... the Day of the Lord... of the End Times. In this case, this is speaking of the culmination of Judgment Day. That is, because Judgment Day is not at all meaning a single 24-hour day, but rather an event occurring over a period of time, then this is more or less referring to its final stage or aftermath.

A major contested point is whether the “you” that will not be ashamed means every survivor on earth, or it means surviving Israel. If one believes (as I do) that verse 10 is referring to all of surviving Israel (and not to gentiles), then so is the “you” of verse 11 Israel. If you believe that verse 10 is referring to all earthly survivors... Jew and gentile... then you believe that it is also the “you” of verse 11. The rhetoric used here to describe the wrongs done against God are rather typical offenses committed by Israel over the centuries. Gentiles were certainly not “full of pride on my holy mountain”. I am quite confident this is speaking of God’s people Israel... that surviving remnant of them.

The new condition of the Israelite remnant is as people who are restored, made pure, and they are rejoicing in their land inheritance and newly pacified relationship with God. It is one of the saddest realities that today the bulk of the Jewish people have little pride or interest in their homeland, Israel. The major portion of Israeli Jews do; but the even larger population of Jews living outside of Israel do not. There will be those who will, in the last days, become terribly ashamed of their former cavalier attitudes towards the homeland of their heritage that had meant nothing to them. In fact, God says He will cull-out those Jews that, even in the last days, with the world falling to pieces in the face of Judgment Day, remain stubbornly rebellious and hardened. He will remove those people, and at the same time this culling-out will also produce a sudden realization of those who repent and turn and feel a great shame for how they have lived and what they have thought. In His mercy, God says He will remove that shame from them. Now, they will become meek and humble due to that new realization.

CJB Zephaniah 3:12 *I will leave among you a poor and afflicted people, who will find their refuge in the name of Yehoveh.*

I think that selecting the word “poor” is a not the best choice for the word ***dal***. “Lowly” is much better because the idea is not of a materially poverty-stricken people. But rather “lowly” means greatly humbled. “Afflicted” is a good choice for the second word that characterizes this group. They have been humbled, they have gone through tremendous suffering and are in need of refuge in order to heal. God will be that refuge for them.

CJB Zephaniah 3:13 ***The remnant of Isra'el will not do wrong, nor will they speak lies, nor will there be found in their mouths a tongue given over to deceit; for they will be able to graze and lie down, with no one to disturb them.***

By now, it ought to be clear enough that these last few verses are speaking of the surviving remnants of the Diaspora and the exiled Israelites, and certainly not gentiles. The Spirit of God shall so overwhelm them, with their turning so sincere and deep, that the things that caused God to finally react against them are no more. They will not commit sins; they will no longer speak lies; they will end their idolatry; they will no longer use deception to get what they want. This is a spiritually restored people; transformed from the inside-out. Only Yehoveh can cleanse a person this thoroughly. The term “the remnant” is emphasized here. They are relatively few in number. Without doubt, just as it is now within Christianity and Judaism, there are the many who make claims with their mouths about their devotion to God, but their choices and their lives reveal something else entirely.

The Church prefers to refer to those who call themselves “saved” but live an immoral life that looks exactly like world, “carnal Christians”. You will find no such concept in the Bible. A carnal Believer is an oxymoron. It is something that cannot and does not exist other than in the minds of Church authorities and their members. It is that person who might actually “believe” for a while, but then they fall away. Fallen away is fallen away. They are no longer among “the saved” group.

Those who have turned, those who have let the Holy Spirit transform them fully, will “be able to graze and lie down, with no one to disturb”. These reformed Israelites will finally be at peace. Back in their own Promised Land,

back under the good graces of God, secure and protected. Their enemies have been permanently vanquished, and all that remains among the Israelites themselves are sincere God worshippers. What a day lay ahead for Israel, and I hope many more among Israel will come to recognize this and start living as they should, now!

CJB Zephaniah 3:14 *Sing, daughter of Tziyon! Shout, Isra'el! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Yerushalayim!*

Has it occurred to you that Judgment Day results are a kind of paradox? It reminds me so much of Charles Dickens opening line of his 1859 novel, ***A Tale of Two Cities***. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times". He adds "it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness" and then proceeds to set out yet a series of unfathomable paradoxes of his day. Set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution, this iconic passage contrasts extreme opposites to describe an era of great contradiction, duality, and historical upheaval. That is how things are now in some ways, and it is also how the aftermath of Judgment Day will be. Horrible carnage and destruction for some brings complete freedom and restoration for others. And the paradox deepens when we understand that both *had and have* to exist at the same time because we live in a Universe of opposites. We live every day in a 4-dimensional paradox; we just don't think about it that way.

She who not long ago had been defiled, unfaithful, full of hate and rebellion... and constantly oppressed... was now restored. Now they are called "daughter of Zion", Israel having attained its ideal, and "daughter of Jerusalem". We can rightfully call this the Messianic Era. Messiah has returned, and God's Kingdom has overtaken the world. At least for Israel, there is nothing left but to "be glad and rejoice" with every ounce of their being.

CJB Zephaniah 3:15 *Yehoveh has removed the judgments against you, he has expelled your enemy; the king of Isra'el, Yehoveh, is right there with you. You no longer need to fear that anything bad will happen.*

Here, Israel is assured that their Day of Judgment is in the rearview mirror. Their just punishment has come, been inflicted, and has ended. There is no reason to fear anymore. God's judgments against Israel have all been satisfied. Israel's enemies are subdued. But even greater, God is right there with them. A bit of the barrier between Heaven and Earth has been breached. What else can this mean except Yeshua, as His Father's agent, sitting on His throne in their midst... in every literal, tangible way?

I want to reiterate something I've spoken of before, but this is a perfect place to revisit it. I think if we can but understand that in the Bible, one of the key aspects of any firstborn son is that at a certain age he becomes his father's agent (barring some extreme failure on that son's part, or some other unusual circumstance). Agency is perhaps the best earthly concept that we currently have to describe the relationship between Yehoveh and Yeshua. If we cannot recognize this, then the many times (like in verse 15) that the Father's formal name (Yehoveh) is used for that divine being that is going to step his foot on the Mt. of Olives and it splits or be ruling in person right there in Israel's midst, makes us face a conundrum that need not be. We think: I thought this being was to be Yeshua, the Messiah? The Messiah's foot... the Messiah on the throne. Yet, that is not what the prophecies tell us. It loses all its problematic side when we understand the notion of agency. As His Father's agent, Yeshua indeed bears all of His father's authority and many of his attributes. As we are told: when you have seen the son (the agent) you have seen his father (who is the one who gives his agent his authority). The Bible makes it clear that Yehoveh has indeed given authority over to Yeshua... not meaning that the Father no longer holds ultimate authority, but rather that Yeshua has the full authorized ability and permission to wield His Father's power. But... an agent is only to do the will of the one he represents. If a son goes outside of bringing about the will of his father, he exceeds his authority. Yeshua tells us on several occasions that it is His Father's will He has come to do... not His own. Yeshua is an agent. He will be the one sitting on the throne in Jerusalem, as though He was Yehoveh. Yet, they are two separate entities and the Father remains supreme.

CJB Zephaniah 3:16 *On that day, it will be said to Yerushalayim, "Do not fear, Tziyon! don't let your hands droop down."*

“On that day” is repeated to keep it clear to the reader that the timing is in the future, after Judgment Day and after Jerusalem’s sentence has been commuted. Because God has dropped all the charges against Israel and the people of Jerusalem, they no longer have to fear the usual accompanying consequences. The expression “don’t let your hands droop down” is the equivalent of “don’t be discouraged”.

Jerusalem as the city infrastructure is not what is being addressed, but rather it is the people. As Israel’s capital, it is representative of the nation as a whole.

CJB Zephaniah 3:17 ***Yehoveh your God is right there with you, as a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you and be glad, he will be silent in his love, he will shout over you with joy."***

The CJB takes some liberties with this verse that it ought not to. So, let’s look at it more literally.

YLT Zephaniah 3:17 ***Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, A mighty one doth save, He rejoiceth over thee with joy, He doth work in His love, He joyeth over thee with singing.'***

While it feels like we’re dealing with quite a bit of needless repetition, what we’re actually dealing with is Hebrew poetry and the way it presents information. It is repeated that it is Yehoveh that is in Israel’s midst. And, that this must be His agent, the Messiah (as opposed to the Father Himself) gets support when we read “a mighty one doth save”. Note: It does NOT say a “mighty savior”. Yehoveh... the Father... God... is regularly referred to as a God who saves in the Old Testament. So, this is speaking of an action that the Father *does* and not a title or office (Savior) that the Messiah assumes. Here, whereas Israel is told to rejoice and be glad, it is God that is pictured as joyous and is expressing His love towards His people. Where we read in some versions that Yehoveh, then, is singing over His people, that is a poor choice of words to translate the Hebrew *rinnah*. It more means a ringing cry. A few versions speak of God uttering shouts of joy. Exactly what English words can express the exact Hebrew thought, I don’t know. But we don’t want to get the

idea of God literally singing like a soloist in a choir. He is uttering some type of noise that shows His deep approval and satisfaction.

I would liken this, somewhat, to the act of Creation when God pauses to see what He has accomplished and evaluates it as “very good”. In this act of redeeming planet earth from the Prince of the Air, and all the many steps that it has taken to get here, from a human perspective He is pausing to enjoy what has finally come to pass.

CJB Zephaniah 3:18 ***"I will gather those of yours who grieve over the appointed feasts and bear the burden of reproach [because they cannot keep them]."***

This is another notoriously difficult verse to translate. Listen to the YLT version.

YLT Zephaniah 3:18 ***Mine afflicted from the appointed place I have gathered, from thee they have been, Bearing for her sake reproach.***

Word salad. No 2 Bible versions agree. I am certainly not going to try to reword this myself. I think the best approach is to take all that we know from Zephaniah, and from others of the Prophets about this future time in history, and step back for the longer view. There are some key words present that really aren't in dispute... such as I (or My) meaning this is Yehoveh speaking, appointed, gathered, and reproach. This helps to give us some context although it is admittedly skeletal.

To begin, since we find here in the Hebrew a derivation of the word **mo'ed**, then biblically the more usual association means “appointed times”. That is, the biblical festivals and holy days. Some of the various attempts at translation come to a similar conclusion as with the CJB, the NAS, the RSV, and others. The thought that this has to do with an “appointed place” (and not an appointed time) as some translations suggest might fit technically and even grammatically, but it makes little sense in this present case. There is also a sense of those who have been gathered being sorrowful. I am comfortable with connecting the idea of those who have been gathered from the Diaspora

or (as in verse 10) those that come from far away beyond the rivers. That is, the returning exiles of the 10 Lost Tribes. Essentially, all those Israelites who, for whatever reason, do not live in the Holy Land at the present time.

Putting those 2 thoughts together, then it seems to match well with where some of the translations tend to take us in that those who lived far away from Israel for so long have been deprived of being in Jerusalem especially for the Pilgrimage Festivals, causing them great sorrow. And the reason that they weren't able to come is ultimately the result of their punishment of exile (the reproach that they bore) for their sinning and rebellion against Yehoveh. But now, God is gathering those folks and bringing them back so that they can enjoy the festivals, which is such a key part of the experience of being a Hebrew.

I might also add this, which occurred to me, but it might be venturing a bit far out on a limb. It is this: because the 7 biblical feasts served both as memorial for things in Israel's past as well as prophesying about things in Israel's future that would primarily be manifested in various acts of Yeshua the Messiah, that we find these cryptic words of verse 18. He went to the cross on Passover, went into the grave on Unleavened Bread, and arose on Firstfruits. Upon ascending to Heaven some 40 days later, He opened the way for the Holy Spirit to come on Shavuot (Pentecost). From our time standpoint, the prophetic fulfillment of the first 4 feasts has already occurred, but the final 3 feasts (the Fall Feasts) are yet to happen. Nevertheless, the pattern makes clear that those 3 will also revolve around Yeshua's return, Judgment Day, and the setting up of God's Kingdom to its fullest on earth (the establishment of the so-called Millennial Kingdom). In other words, although there are many thousands, perhaps millions, of God worshippers who today see the important role of this past and future nature of the biblical feasts, the Jewish community in general has not and does not (any more than does the general Christian community). So, one possibility of the cryptic meaning of verse 18 is that although Messiah is front and center throughout the biblical feasts, all these Israelites missed it and now that it has been fulfilled, they are grieving that they had unnecessarily missed all the vivid signs. Had they recognized the connection of the feasts with their Messiah, their reproach and burden would

have felt so much less severe and brought so much hope with them rather than the continued mourning for what was lost.

CJB Zephaniah 3:19 *When that time comes, I will deal with all those who oppress you. I will save her who is lame, gather her who was driven away, and make them whose shame spread over the earth the object of praise and renown.*

So, verse 19 begins by attaching itself to verse 18 in the sense of making them occur in the same time frame. A whole lot easier to translate (as has most everything since verse 9), “when that time comes” is a repeat of an expression that is pointing to Judgment Day. So, when the culmination of the horrors of Judgment Day happens, and the happier results begin to take shape (at least for Israel), this is what the remainder of verse 19 is speaking about. It joins with verse 20 to complete the picture.

CJB Zephaniah 3:20 *When that time comes, I will bring you in; when that time comes, I will gather you and make you the object of fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth- when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says Yehoveh.*

Many nations had oppressed Israel over the centuries... some like Assyria and Babylon and even Rome at God’s urging to punish His people. But they were much too harsh, and those nations remained idolaters, so their demise was baked-in to the historical puzzle. Whatever nations remain at the time of Judgment Day that had oppressed Israel would be dealt with. Those who made Israel so weak and so scattered would be no more. And, when that is done, those weak and scattered Israelites, whose shame of being dispossessed of their land due to their faithlessness to their God that had followed them wherever they went, will become a strong remnant of people that are praised and admired because they now have a good name. That is, just as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and so many other Prophets predict, the oppressed, exiled and dispersed Israelites will come home, and they will be restored by their forgiving and faithful God.

Walter Kaiser, Jr. once said: **“Zephaniah’s passionate appeal is to seek *the Lord*. His reasons are multiple, but one overwhelmingly important reason why mortals all over the planet should see Him is that He has planned a final day of judgment, known as the Day of the Lord, when He will finally make right all the wickedness, unrighteousness, and injustice”.**

The Book of Zephaniah has taken us from the first days of the inevitable and unstoppable Day of Judgment to the end of them when restoration and forgiveness get underway. Every nation on earth will be judged... none spared... and that includes Israel. The first part of the judgment will involve human evil being cut loose and God’s restraining hand on it lifted, to an extent never seen before, nor will it be ever again. The later and final part of the judgment will be God’s direct intervention, that will involve Him using the cosmic forces in a deeply punitive way. If that were the end of Zephaniah’s prophesy, we would come away pretty depressed; but it’s not. For at last God will dwell upon the earth, in Jerusalem, with men, and rule horizon to horizon in perfect justice. The joy of all the surviving beings... but a remnant of humanity... nearly all having become fully devoted to Yehoveh and His Son Yeshua in the crucible of life and the decisions it demands, will be unspeakably marvelous.

The unspoken question that confronts all of us in Zephaniah is: will we be among them?