

June 25, 2023

"Renewed in God's Love"
Lesson 3

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Intro

The first verse of Zephaniah does something no other prophetic book does: it lists his ancestry back four generations. We are told that Zephaniah is great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, one of the "good" kings of Judah, who began his reign in about 727 BC. Zephaniah's book is written about 100 years later. In chapter one, Zephaniah rebukes members of the royal family. Perhaps because he was of royal blood himself, he had more standing than other prophets to condemn those who were likely related to him.

Josiah is also mentioned in 1:1. The book of the law was found by Hilkiah during his reign, but because of the sin that is condemned in Zephaniah, it's likely the law hadn't been found yet. So this book was written in roughly the late 620's BC.

Judgment and punishment and a coming Day of the Lord are the focus of chapters 1-2. The punishment promised was to be a tool of God for purifying His people. But in chapter 3, the restoration of a remnant is the focus. Today's passage looks at the last seven verses of Zephaniah, where hope is center stage.

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20

1. vs. 14: The 3 phrases used here as a name all refer to the same thing

Daughter Zion, Israel, and Daughter Jerusalem all refer to the faithful remnant
All three phrases are seen in various OT scriptures, referring to Jerusalem or the people

The people here are called to shout, be glad, and rejoice
God has restored them to Jerusalem just as He promised He would
Receiving such a blessing after having been in captivity so long would lead to rejoicing

2. vs. 15: Vs. 15 lists the reasons why the people were called to shout and rejoice

First, their punishment is in the past; they need not fear punishment anymore

Second, God has defeated the Babylonians, their enemy

Babylon was God's tool to punish His people for their rebellion

This was still in Israel's future

God is promising ahead of time a restoration and justice for the nation

Now, God had "turned back" the ones who afflicted the people

Third, (most important!), The Lord is with them

In the ancient world, the king's presence was vital to the people

The king would judge disputes

The king would provide protection and justice

This will hopefully encourage them during the captivity

Fourth, if God is with them, the people do not need to fear harm

This promise is to the faithful remnant who will return to Jerusalem

It is not a blanket guarantee to those who remain stubborn and hard-hearted

3. vs. 16: The people here receive an encouragement that all will be well
“Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp”
These people have gone through a great amount of trial and challenge
It would be natural for them to think more disaster is coming
But God reminds them to be confident, because....
4. vs. 17: God promises to be with them
God is pictured here as a victorious King, a “Mighty Warrior”
He has saved his people by defeating the enemy
Now he turns to his people, delighting in them
They were rebuked by God before for their rebellious ways
Now they have been restored, and God delights in being present with them
5. vs. 18: This verse has several possible translation possibilities
One thought is that the “appointed festivals” were not what God wanted
Those who will miss them do not properly serve God, so He will remove them
Another thought is that some continue to wallow in sorrow, even after being delivered
These will be removed, so they don’t prevent others from celebrating with joy
6. vs. 19: God will “deal with those who oppressed you”
The Babylonians, the oppressors, will suffer God’s judgment
God also will take care of those who are most in need
The lame will be rescued, the exiles will be gathered
Lameness in the Near East was seen as proof of a deity’s judgment
Being an exile was seen as the inability of the king and the deity to protect
A restored relationship with God removes those signs of judgment/abandonment
Physical healing, freedom, and returning home are concrete signs of God’s justice/love
7. vs. 20: This is the last verse in the book of Zephaniah
It ends on a very positive note
It is a promise to alter what has gone wrong to what it should be
If they are brought home, it means they were living away from their home
If their fortunes are restored, it means that they were lost
Getting praise and honor from other nations means they were ridiculed before
“At that time” indicates when God will do these things
When He restores them as a people is when these promises will be fulfilled

Application: Today’s passage is a lesson in hope. The people rebelled against God and His commands for their lives. They were taken into exile for almost 50 years. Yet many of the people who originally heard these prophecies didn’t live to see them fulfilled. They were made during Josiah’s reign, which ended over 20 years before the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. The people who first heard it likely did not understand it well or completely, but those in exile in Babylon certainly understood it. Jesus promised that He would come again, and we don’t know exactly when that will be. But if we listen to His words instead of rebelling against them, we will make sure that we are ready when He does come back.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for keeping your promises and for instructing us about what is best for our lives. Help us to be stronger daily, to be faithful until Jesus comes again or until our time here is over. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.