

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **The Prophets Proclaim God's Power**

June 2023

Summer Quarter

**June 24, 2023**

**Lesson #4 – Renewed In God’s Love**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Zephaniah 3:14-20

**ICE BREAKERS-**

1. What are the sources of a believer’s hope?
2. How can looking forward to future blessings in Christ provide hope and enthusiasm for our spiritual journey with Him?

***Key Verse: “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love.—Zephaniah 3:17a***

**LESSON BACKGROUND –**

The instructor for a class on the Minor Prophets presented an imaginary conversation in Heaven. A person had recently arrived there, and one of the first persons he met introduced himself as Zephaniah. The new arrival was thrilled, for he assumed that this was the prophet who wrote book of the Bible by that name. So he asked his new friend if he had indeed written that book. The individual replied that he had, and then he asked the new arrival in Heaven what he thought of the little book of only three chapters. One of the students in the class reflected on that scenario and decided to write a term paper that would feature some aspect of the book of Zephaniah—just in case!

The prophet is identified in Zephaniah 1:1 in terms of the name of his father. That was a normal way to identify a person more specifically. But that designation is part of a listing found in no other writing prophet: the four generations of those who came before Zephaniah. The fourth one is Hezekiah (given as “Hizkiah” in the *King James Version*), the same name as one of the “good” kings of Judah (reigned about 727–699 BC; 2 Kings 18). The information given by Zephaniah causes many to conclude that he is referring to that king. That is a conjecture, but it is usually understood that there is no reason to list the name unless it referred to that king, who reigned about 100 years earlier. Zephaniah was therefore a great-great-grandson of Hezekiah. The prophet rebuked members of the royal family (Zephaniah 1:8), and it has been suggested that his being of royal blood gave him more grounds to condemn his cousins.

Zephaniah 1:1 also features the name of “good” King Josiah, during whose reign (from 640 to 609 BC) Zephaniah prophesied. The flagrant iniquity that is condemned throughout most of the book seems to indicate that the reforms of Josiah had not yet taken place. The revival began after the Book of the Law was found in 622 BC by Hilkiah the priest while doing repairs to the temple (2 Chronicles 34:8–15). A possible time for the book of Zephaniah is, therefore, in the late 620s BC.

Judgment, punishment, and hope are three topics frequently found in the writings of the prophets. Judgment indicates that God has compared His announced expectations with the obedience of the people, nation, or nations being considered. Punishment is pronounced on those found guilty. Hope often follows when the punishment has accomplished its purposes. All three topics are present in the book of Zephaniah.

The prophet is primarily concerned with Judah's continued rebellion against God (see 2 Kings 22:1–23:28). The first two chapters of the book of Zephaniah describe a coming Day of the Lord, in which Judah is to face judgment and punishment for idolatry. The punishment promised was to be a tool of God for purifying His people.

The prophecy presents us with a sharp change of theme beginning in Zephaniah 3:9, where restoration of a remnant takes center stage. Today's study reviews the final verses of Zephaniah, where a hopeful theme resounds.

### **LESSON COMMENTARY**

**3:14–17.** The second benefit God promised is the joy that Israel will experience. Calling upon Jerusalem to **shout for joy** (v. 14), the Lord gave three reasons for their exultation. First, God has acquitted them, taking away His judgments (v. 15a). Second, He has delivered them from their enemies (v. 15b). Third, and most important, their longed-for King Messiah, the Lord, will be ruling in their **midst** (v. 15c). Obviously this reflects that day during the tribulation period when Israel as a nation has turned in faith to Jesus as Messiah (see the comments on Zch 12:10; Mt 23:39; Ac 3:19; Rm 11:25–27). As a result, the nation will **not be afraid** or despairing (**let your hands fall limp**; v. 16). They need not do so because **the LORD ... in [their] midst** will protect them (as **a victorious warrior**), rejoice over them (**He will exult over you with joy**), and love them (**He will be quiet in His love**) (v. 17).

**3:18–20.** The third benefit God promised is the regathering of Israel. Although God would have regathered some of Israel before the “day of the LORD” (see 2:1), many Jewish people will still be scattered in exile when Messiah Jesus returns. Thus He will **gather** them so that they no longer need to grieve about being unable to celebrate the biblical feasts (Lv 23) far from Jerusalem (Zph 3:18). God promises to **gather ... outcast** Israel (v. 19), at which time He will transform them from **shame to praise and renown in all the earth**. Thus, all the covenant promises made to the patriarchs would be fulfilled.

Some object that these verses merely describe the restoration from exile when Israel returned from Babylon in 539 BC. However, this description goes far beyond the events of those days. Certainly, when the people returned from exile, all Israel did not know the Lord, nor were all the captives restored physically to the land, nor did the nation become a reason for praise in all the earth. These verses anticipate their fulfillment in the millennial kingdom. At best, the prophets used the return from Babylon as a mere foreshadowing of the future Messianic Age when the Lord would be faithful to keep His covenant with Israel literally and completely. The prophet Zephaniah, by focusing on “the day of the LORD,” continually forced the reader to look for that day when Israel comes to know her Messiah, and He will fulfill every promise He made to the nation.

**LESSON NUGGET** – The people will rejoice and sing because their discipline is ended, the enemy has been defeated, and the Lord is king over Israel. But the Lord will also sing! Like a loving father, He takes his fearful children in his arms and quiets them with His love. Note, a repeated “I Will” promises that God gives. If we delight in the Lord and obey Him, He delights in us and shares His best with us. If we sin, He will chasten us in love. If we turn to Him in repentance, He will forgive us and restore our joy and peace. “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (Hosea 14:4).

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***