

**Zephaniah**  
**For LoveIsrael.org**  
**Chapter 1**  
**Part 1: Zephaniah 1:1-11**

Names are important in the Scripture. The name of this prophet, Zephaniah, means ‘Hidden by the Lord’. We can understand this in two ways:

1. Sometimes God hides some truth from the world. In the parables Yeshua spoke about those who would see but who would not perceive, those who would hear but who would not understand (Matthew 13:13-15, see also Deuteronomy 29:29).
2. This name can also be a term for protection – God is able to hide us from the difficulties, hardships and troubles that are coming upon this world (ie He can cause us to overcome these things).

**Verse 1:** “*The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.*”

*The word of the LORD...came:* The Rabbinical Scholars see this as a term of revelation. The book of Zephaniah is a prophecy. The main subject of this book is ‘The Day of the Lord’. The Lord used Zephaniah for the purpose of revealing things to His people, so that they could be people who would be ready and prepared for this Day that is still to come.

*Hezekiah:* Hezekiah was a king who descended from the tribe of Judah (2 Kings 18-20). Zephaniah was part of this kingly family, but he was not descended from the kingly line (After Hezekiah had reigned, his son Manasseh reigned as king, then his grandson Amon reigned, and after him came *Josiah* – Hezekiah’s great grandson – 2 Kings 21-22).

*King of Judah:* This is a term that has Messianic implications. It is a term that points to Messiah and gives the text a Messianic context.

**Verse 2:** “*I will utterly gather up all from upon the face of the ground,” declares the LORD.*”

*Utterly gather:* In Hebrew this is written twice: ‘I will gather. I will gather’. When translators translate this into English, they translate it as to ‘utterly’ or ‘completely’ gather. Within the context, this ‘gathering up’ is a term of judgment.

*Ground:* Unusually, the word for ‘ground’ is used here (הָאֲדָמָה) and not the word that we would expect: ‘land’. Some scholars say that the use of this term ‘ground’ has implications for humanity - we were created from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). The name ‘Adam’ (אָדָם) is taken out of this word for ‘ground’. Although this was a prophecy given to Israel, it has a message within it that applies to all of humanity.

*Declares the LORD:* This is a term of promise. God has said it. God will do it. God is promising that this is going to happen.

**Verse 3:** *"I will gather man and beast; I will gather the fowl of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks of the wicked. I will cut off man from upon the face of the ground," declares the LORD."*

*Man and beast:* Nothing is going to escape this judgment. The Jewish scholars see this verse as alluding to a similar outcome of the judgment that fell in the days of Noah. The flood not only impacted human life, but it also impacted the animal kingdom.

**Note:** This verse is also reminiscent of the creation narrative in Genesis. This should not surprise us. When God speaks about creation prophetically, He is not speaking about the first creation but about the second – the new heavens and the new earth (i.e. the establishment of His Kingdom). At the first creation, that which was formless, void and empty was brought into God's order (Genesis 1:2-3). This world, which is currently hurtling toward 'out of order' and displeasing to God ("Not good" – as opposed to all that God pronounced 'good' in Genesis 1) is going to be brought back into the order of God – firstly through the millennial kingdom and then through God's creation of a new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

*Stumbling blocks:* This world is full of stumbling blocks – sin, temptation, etc

*I will cut off man:* God is going to bring destruction and death upon this world. He is comforted through His judgment. Righteousness is going to be the defining characteristic of the Kingdom that He is going to establish.

*Cut:* The word used here is the same word used in relation to a covenant (cutting covenant). God behaves in this way in light of His covenant – Deuteronomy 30:11-20.

**Verse 4:** *"I will stretch out My hand concerning Judah and concerning all the residents of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests -"*

**Note:** At the same time that God is bringing His destruction, judgment and wrath upon the world, He is also bringing a change (spiritual renewal) to Israel (both to the land and to the people).

*Concerning:* The word used here is not the word 'against'.

*The residents of Jerusalem:* This is not only referring to those who physically live in Jerusalem. It is referring to those who are sensitive to the God of Jerusalem, those who worship the One True God.

*I will cut off every trace of Baal:* God is going to purify the Jewish people and purify their land. He is not doing this because they deserve it. He is going to do this because He is a covenant keeping God (Ezekiel 37). Throughout prophecy we see that a covenant makes all the difference, it changes everything. It changes our eternity – not because of who we are, but because of who God is. It is very significant, prophetically, for those who are in a covenantal relationship with God.

*This place:* Jerusalem

*Names:* The character. Pagan attitudes and actions are going to be cut off from the land. God is going to bring renewal. The change that is going to take place will represent the character (name) of God.

*Cut off... the idolatrous...pagan priests:* In the last days, God is going to bring an end to the idolatry that has plagued His people. In the last days, from God's perspective, His people are still in idolatry.

He does not redeem them because they deserve it (He did not redeem us when we were deserving of redemption – Romans 5:8-9), but He redeems them (like us) because of who He is.

**Verse 5:** *“Those who worship on their rooftops the host of heaven, those who worship and swear by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom;”*

*On their rooftops:* They are not worshipping in the temple or in the places sanctified for worship (the places where the Torah is read).

*The host of heaven:* This is the term for an idolatrous place. They are worshipping the host – not the Lord of the host.

*The Lord:* The Lord God of Israel.

*Worship and swear by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom:* This is a people who are utterly confused and lack discernment. They cannot distinguish between the true God and false gods. This is as a result of having turned away from truth. When we are not studying the Word, not living in truth, we can be easily deceived by the enemy.

**Verse 6:** *“Those who have turned back from following the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.”*

*Turned back:* They have withdrawn and moved away from the Lord.

*Have not sought:* They have not been interested in God. They have not wanted anything from Him (Matthew 6:33).

*Inquired:* When we inquire about something it means that we want to know more about it. When we study Scripture, it means we desire to find out more about God (we are ‘inquiring’) so that we can, in turn, draw closer to Him. These people have not wanted to know the only True God, nor have they desired to draw closer to Him.

**Verse 7:** *“Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for close is the day of the Lord, for the Lord is preparing a sacrifice; He has set apart the ones He has called.”*

*Be silent:* Do not speak. Do not act. Be still.

*Lord:* God is our Master. His Lordship is what we need to submit to. This is a call to submissiveness.

*The day of the Lord:* The Day of God’s Wrath. This is referring to the Day when God will set things in order. The day of His judgment gives birth to the establishment of His Kingdom.

*He has set apart the ones He has called:* This is a reference to the enemies of God - those who have no covenantal relationship with Him. These enemies are the ones whom He has invited to participate in the Day of His wrath.

**Verse 8:** *“And it shall come about, on the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will visit the high officials and the sons of the king, and all such as are dressed with foreign apparel.”*

*The Lord’s sacrifice:* This is a sacrifice of judgment. This is not an offering that is going to take place at the temple. It is going to be a sacrifice where the enemies of God are judged and destroyed.

*Visit:* This is a very unique word in Hebrew. In modern Hebrew this word is used for depositing money in a bank. It is a word that speaks of a change (when our money 'visits' the bank our bank balance undergoes a change). When God 'visits' He gets completely involved, He goes to work, diligently and thoroughly, in order to bring about change. Sometimes this change is for good, sometimes this change is for punishment or destruction (This same word is found in Genesis 21:1, Exodus 4:31 etc).

*Dressed with foreign apparel:* These high officials and king's sons have assimilated. They have become like pagans – even down to the way that they dress. They have not wanted to be set apart as God's special treasure, the peculiar people that God had called them to be. They did not want to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16) but wanted to be just like the world. They, therefore, behaved in a way that was indistinguishable from those who were in the world.

***Verse 9:*** *"I will visit upon all those who skip over the threshold, on that day; those who fill up the house of their master with violence and deceit."*

*Skip over the threshold:* This was a pagan practice. It was a ritual that was not Biblically based. These people brought pagan practices into the temple. We see this in many churches today – worship that is not Biblically grounded, sanctuaries looking more like nightclubs than places of worship. Even the word Sanctuary (which is a word related to holiness) is replaced with more socially acceptable words like 'auditorium'. God never compromises. Neither should we (Matthew 7:13-14). We are called to be a peculiar people, strangers and aliens passing through (1 Peter 2:9). We are not called to assimilate and become indistinguishable from the world.

*On that day:* Judgment Day

***Violence and deceit:*** These words describe the character of the antichrist. He loves violence for the sake of violence. He is addicted to seeing the suffering and the pain of others. The tool that he is going to use to get people to suffer and to experience adversity in their lives is deceit (Matthew 24:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, 2 Peter 2:3). A time of deceit is coming upon this earth. Only those who rely on truth will be able to discern what is deceit and what is not.

***Verse 10:*** *"And it shall come about on that day,' declares the Lord, 'the voice of screaming from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second District, and a loud crashing upon the hills.'"*

*Declares the Lord:* A term of promise. This is going to happen.

*The voice of screaming:* This is a term of pain. When people are in great pain they scream. This is not according to God's original purpose. God did not create humanity to destroy it. It was not His desire to be a wrathful God. God created us to be in fellowship with Him. We chose sin. We chose to be separated from Him. He has created a way to restore us back to Himself (Joel 2:32, Romans 10:9-13). This world, steeped in sin, is displeasing to God. He is returning to judge it. His activity of judgment is going to cause people (those who have rejected Him and His plan of salvation) to scream.

*Fish:* On Rosh Hashanah (the first day of the Jewish New Year) a fish or a fish head graces the festival table in many Jewish households. Within the Jewish culture (and there is Biblical basis for this) a fish is related to blessing.

*(Fish) Gate:* A gate is related to judgment (the elders sat at the gates and pronounced judgments – whether they were judgments for good or judgments for punishment). God’s desire is to bless at this gate, but because of impurity, corruption and faithlessness this is going to become a place of judgment – a place where people are going to scream in suffering.

*Wailing:* Lamentation. Howling in pain.

*Wailing from the Second District:* This pain and lamentation is not only going to be found at the gates. It is going to be widespread. It is going to dwell in the homes of people. Comfort is not going to be found for them within their homes. Pain and agony will dwell with them.

*Crashing:* Great destruction

**Verse 11:** *“There will be howling of those who sit in the valley, for all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off.”*

*Howling:* Lamentation due to great pain.

*Valley:* Maktesh. This word in modern Hebrew speaks about a crater. According to the commentators, this is where those who wanted to trade set up their marketplaces.

Nehemiah tells us that the people were so in bondage to money that even when Shabbat would come, they would still bring merchandise into and out of the city (Nehemiah 13:15).

*Merchant:* Depending on the context, this is also the word used for ‘Canaanite’. Instead of engaging in the activity of God, the people have turned away from that which is spiritual, that which is holy and that which is related to worship, and they have become entangled with commerce, business.

*Those who handle money:* Those who have made money their passion (Matthew 6:24).

**Note:** The context here is that this is all happening in the day of the Lord, in the day of His wrath. Believers, who are not going to experience the wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 5:9) will not be here for this day (the rapture takes place before the wrath of God falls). Israel, however, will be on the earth throughout this time of Great Tribulation (Jacob’s trouble Jeremiah 30:7), which is instigated by the antichrist. God will shelter Israel from His wrath (Exodus 8:21-23, Exodus 9:4, etc. Throughout these plagues in Egypt God protected His people from them), but He will not shelter them from the persecution of the antichrist (Exodus 5). As the people of Israel go through this time of Great Tribulation, a separation of those who are committed to the things of this world (wealth, comfort, etc) and of those who are Kingdom minded is going to occur. Those who remain committed to the things of this world will be destroyed (Zechariah 13:8). Those who are committed to God and to His Kingdom will come to repentance and be saved (Zechariah 13:9).

# Chapter 1

## Part 2: Zephaniah 1:12-18

We need to be people who are sensitive to God's timing and timetable (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6). We need to be aware of the times and season we find ourselves in (1 Chronicles 12:32, Matthew 24:32-44).

**Verse 12:** *“And it shall come about at that time that I will search Jerusalem with candles and visit the men who are set in their ways, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’”*

*And it shall come about at that time:* This is usually an expression that is used Biblically for something good being ushered in. God is behind that Day of the Lord. Although God is not the author of the Great Tribulation, He is going to allow very difficult things to take place in this world, using these things for His purposes and for His glory. In the last days, especially after the antichrist has revealed himself (in what is called the ‘abomination of desolation’ – Daniel 12:11, Matthew 24:15), God is going to bring spiritual change to Israel. He is going to use trials and tribulation to capture His people's attention.

*I will search Jerusalem:* Jerusalem is oftentimes used as a symbol to depict those who are interested in worshipping God. God is, at that time, going to be specifically searching for those who desire to worship Him, those who are sensitive to His will and purposes (John 4:23).

*Search... with candles:* Before Passover begins, traditionally, a search for leaven is conducted with candles throughout the house. If these candles reveal any leaven, that leaven is then disposed of (Deuteronomy 16:1-8, 1 Corinthians 5:7). Leaven is symbolic of anything that is contrary to what God says is right and proper for a specific time (Exodus 12:15). Leaven was not forbidden for all of the year, but only for a very specific time within the year.

*Visit:* A word that shows commitment. God is committed to bringing about a change.

*Set in their ways:* They refuse to change their beliefs or their lifestyles. They are unwilling to hear from God. They do not want to have anything to do with His will and nor will they respond to it.

*The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil:* They see God as irrelevant. They believe that He is neither Sovereign, nor actively involved with His creation. They believe He created this world but that He has separated Himself from it. In the last day, God is going to show them how relevant He is and always has been.

**Verse 13:** *“Therefore their wealth shall be for plunder, and their houses for destruction; they shall build houses but will not dwell within them; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.”*

**Note:** The Day of the Lord, although Israel has to live through it, is not for Israel. The Day of the Lord is for the nations. Israel is going to learn about God through the way that He deals with the nations (they saw how He dealt with the Egyptians and that caused them to adjust their perspective of God). The remnant of Israel is going to respond to what God is doing.

They are going to become submissive to the will of God – open to what He will bring about.

*Their wealth:* Referring to the wealth of the nations.

*Build houses but...not dwell within them...plant vineyards, but not drink their wine:* This speaks of frustration. Those who rebel against God do work, but it is of no benefit to them. Those who rebel against God will never know true joy. They will not know contentment. One of the punishments of God is frustration. God desires to give us peace and contentment, but these individuals are going to receive neither.

**Verse 14:** *“For near is the day of the Lord, that great day; it is close and hastens quickly. The sound of the day of the Lord is a bitter scream; there the mighty men shall be consumed.”*

*Mighty:* Those who are strong.

**Verse 15:** *“For it is a day of His wrath, a day of trouble and adversity, a day of holocaust to holocaust, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and fog.”*

*A day of His wrath:* Israel is shielded from the wrath of God (Revelation 7:1-8). However, in the midst of God’s wrath, Israel is going to experience a great persecution from the antichrist.

*Devastation:* The Hebrew word for ‘Holocaust’.

*Holocaust to holocaust:* God is speaking about something that happened in the past that is going to repeat itself. The worst time for the Jewish people was not under Adolph Hitler. Their worst time, their holocaust of all holocausts, is yet to come. God is going to allow this time of intense suffering, under the antichrist regime, to happen again to the Jewish people. Through this time the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> remnant of the people of Israel will experience a great spiritual change (Zechariah 13:8-9).

*Darkness...gloom...clouds...fog:* The sages of old understand this to mean that there will be an inability to see clearly, there will be an inability to discern things correctly. The time to respond to truth is not then (it will be very difficult to discern truth at this late stage), it is now – while there is still some light (John 9:4).

**Verse 16:** *“A day of the shofar and a blasting against the fortified cities and against the high towers.”*

*Shofar:* The shofar (ram’s horn) reminds us of the provision of God – what God has provided for life and for victory (Genesis 22:13-14).

*A blasting:* The sounding of the shofar. This sounding of the shofar will remind God’s people that it is God who has provided their victory.

*The fortified cities...the high towers:* The enemy is strong, and he is prepared, but through God’s provision he is going to be defeated.

**Note:** It is not by chance that the inability to see or perceive things (darkness..gloom..etc) is followed by an ability to hear (the blasting of the shofar). Faith does not come through seeing, it comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

**Verse 17:** *“I will afflict men, and they shall walk like blind men, because against the Lord they have sinned; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.”*

*They:* Humanity.

*Walk like blind men:* These men do not recognise God’s provision - the victory that He has provided - and so they walk in darkness, they are blind to what God is doing.

*Poured out like dust:* If we do not accept God’s provision (Messiah Yeshua) then we are going to be recipients of His trouble. Dust poured on the ground has no more value than manure.

**Verse 18:** *“Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; and by the fire of His zeal all the earth will be consumed, for He will make startled all those who dwell in the earth.”*

*Silver...gold:* Idiom for wealth, their possessions, what they have laboured for.

*His zeal:* God is a jealous God. He is absolutely passionate about and committed to His purposes. He is looking for a people of zeal – people who are committed to and passionate about the things that He is.

*All the earth:* This is talking about all the nations of the world. This is not a prophecy against Israel specifically but is against all those who have rejected the promises and the provision of God. The day of the Lord is upon the nations. Its purpose is to teach Israel that God is a God of judgment. He moves in this world to punish evil. The only hope for any person is to be a recipient of God's grace. Without His mercy and forgiveness there is no hope (assurance). Hope is always rooted in what God has said - what He has promised – it is not based on what we want, our desires.

*Consumed:* This means totally devoured – nothing will be left. God is going to make an absolute end to this world.

*Startled:* When we get a fright, we jump. Being frightened is not a pleasant feeling. What God is saying here is that when His Day comes, people are going to be placed in that condition of being startled. This is not a startling for a moment but is going to be perpetual - eternal.

*Dwell in the earth:* There are two groups of people in the Book of Revelation – those who dwell in the heavens and those who dwell in the earth (Revelation 12:12). This is not referring to their physical location but is referring to their citizenship – their perspective. Some people are heavenly (Kingdom) minded and some are earthly (worldly) minded. Those who ‘dwell upon the earth’ are loyal to this world. These are the ones who are going to experience eternal fear.



## Chapter 2

In Exodus, God made a distinction between the Egyptians and His people who lived in Goshen at that time. The wrath of God did not fall upon the land of Goshen, but it only fell upon Egypt (in Hebrew poetry Egypt is often paralleled with the world) and the Egyptians. We should never underestimate the importance of being in a covenantal relationship with God. The Day of the Lord's wrath is not for those that He is in covenant with – neither for His New Covenant people (believers – 1 Thessalonians 5:9) nor for His Old Covenant people – Israel. God will, however, use His Day of wrath to teach Israel truth and to bring the remnant to repentance and faith. God's judgment fell on Egypt. Likewise, God's judgment is going to fall upon this world. Some Egyptians also came to faith during this time (Exodus 9:20, Exodus 12:38).

**Verse 1:** *“Gather together, gather the nation that is not desired.”*

*Gather together:* God is going to gather the nations together in the same way that sticks are gathered together for the fire.

*The nation:* This is not speaking about one nation in particular. It is speaking about the nation of those who have rejected God.

**Verse 2:** *“(Act) Before the law is birthed, before 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.”*

*(Act) Before:* God is giving these nations an opportunity to act, to repent, before it is too late.

*Passes like chaff:* This day is going to come quickly, and it is going to pass quickly. There will be no time for action when this day is upon them. Chaff reminds us that God is going to make a separation – a distinction between that which is chaff and that which is grain. The chaff represents those who do not have a covenantal relationship with God, the grain represents those who do.

*The Lord's fierce anger...the day of the Lord's anger:* God is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath. If we only embrace the God of love, then we are not embracing the Biblical God. God has repeated Himself in this verse. He has clearly emphasised that there is a need to respond to Him before His anger falls. This invitation is open to all (John 1:12) and it is incumbent upon us to act accordingly if we do not want to receive His anger/wrath/judgment.

**Verse 3:** *“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth, who His justice they do, seeking righteousness. Seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.”*

*Seek the Lord:* This is a commandment.

*Humble:* Biblically there is a connection between humility and trusting God. It is only when we are humble that we are in a spiritual position whereby we can trust in God.

*His justice they do, seeking righteousness:* When we uphold God's justice it shows that we are committed to righteousness. Upholding or executing (doing) righteousness manifests God's glory.

*Perhaps:* This word is not being used to insert doubt into this text. It is through the framework of righteousness, humility and upholding God's justice that we can have an expectation of being hidden in that day.

**Verse 4:** *"For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a place of desolation; they shall cast out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted."*

*Gaza ...Ashkelon...Ashdod...Ekron:* These used to be Philistine cities. The Philistines were enemies of King David. Their descendants are going to be enemies of the son of David - Messiah. David acted mightily against the Philistines. In the day of the Lord, their seed is going to be utterly crushed. Except for Gaza, these are Jewish cities today. A great part of this verse has already been fulfilled. In our generation we can see evidence that the Word of God has proved faithful. God has begun to uproot His enemy from the land of Israel.  
*Gaza shall be forsaken:* Gaza is going to be a recipient of God's judgment.

**Verse 5:** *"Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cretes. The Word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: 'I will cause you to perish; so there shall be no dweller left.'"*

*Woe:* How awful it will be for those who refuse to change their ways.

*The nation of the Cretes:* This is referring to the Greek island: Crete. There is a connection between the Philistines (who were a sea-faring people) and this island of Crete. The Philistines originated from the island of Crete and migrated to the land of Israel during the twelfth century BC.

*Canaan:* Within the context this is speaking of the land of Canaan and is not referring to merchants. The Canaanites would not do what they were called to do. They were not ignorant of what God had done (Joshua 2:9-11), they had heard, but their hearing did not lead them to submit. Fear did not bring about their surrender, it caused them to 'freeze' in position – unwilling to change, unwilling to respond to God.

*To perish:* To be destroyed.

**Verse 6:** *"The seacoast shall be pastures, with caves for shepherds and pens for flocks."*

*Caves:* Relatively simple or modest habitations which the shepherds could shelter in.

*Shepherds:* Shepherds, by and large, want to take proper care of their sheep. They lead them into safe places. This land used to be so dangerous that a shepherd would never take his flock there. God is bringing about a change in this area.

**Verse 7:** *"The seacoast will be for a remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed their flocks there; in the houses of Ashkelon, they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them and return their captives."*

*The seacoast:* This is the third time that the seacoast has been mentioned in this passage.

*Remnant:* This is a word that reminds us about the faithfulness of God. It is a word that shows us that He is working – functioning in a way to bring about change. A partial restoration has already occurred in Israel, but a greater restoration is still to take place.

*Return their captives:* This Scripture has been fulfilled to a large extent. Jewish people (those from the house of Judah) are living in these places today (Ashkelon, Ashdod, etc).

**Verse 8:** *“I have heard the disgrace of Moab, and the blasphemy of the sons of Ammon, with which they have brought disgrace upon My people. They have exalted themselves beyond their borders.”*

*I have heard:* God is speaking. God is going to respond to this.

*Beyond their borders:* These people are out of line in regard to how they have treated the Jewish people.

**Verse 9:** *“‘Therefore, I am alive,’ declares the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. ‘Surely Moab will be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah – overrun with weeds and saltpits, and an eternal desolation. The remnant of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of the nations shall inherit them.”*

*I am alive:* God is living, and He is going to show that He is alive through what He is going to do. The whole purpose of God’s judgment is so that it can be unmistakably seen that God is alive. His judgment is not going to be achieved through man-made weapons or nuclear. God has no need for our weapons of war. His weapons will be unmistakably His (the Day of the Lord commences with the trumpet judgments and ends with the bowl judgments – Revelation 8 and Revelation 16).

*The God of Israel:* Israel is a Kingdom word. In Romans 9:6, Paul uses the word ‘Israel’ twice but in two very different ways. The first reference to ‘Israel’ is referring to the Jewish people. Paul’s second reference to ‘Israel’ is in regard to the Kingdom people. In other words, not all of the Jewish people, simply because they are Jewish, are going to be Kingdom people. God is the God of His Kingdom people (Jew and Gentile).

*Moab ...Ammon:* The Moabites and Ammonites did not want to agree with what God was up to - His plan and His purpose. For this reason, God pronounces a judgment on them.

*Overrun with weeds and saltpits:* The land that was once good and desirable is going to become like a wasteland – good for nothing.

*Saltpits:* The water is so salty that everything in it dies. This water is not living water.

*Eternal desolation:* When we do not want to submit to God, when we do not want to play a role in His purpose and plans, and instead try to thwart what He is doing, we will find ourselves experiencing judgment.

*The remnant of My people:* God works with the remnant.

*Shall plunder...shall inherit:* A transfer is going to take place from the nations to the people of God – the remnant.

**Verse 10:** *“This they shall have in exchange for their pride, because they have wanted to bring disgrace upon and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts.”*

*This:* When this word stands alone it is usually talking about a primary or a foundational thing.

*Pride:* God does THIS as an outcome of their pride. Pride, which originates within a man and is not from God, is rooted in a desire to exalt oneself. These people (just like their father – satan) wanted to magnify themselves above the people of the Lord of hosts.

*The people of the Lord of hosts:* The context (the Day of the Lord – which happens after the rapture) makes it clear this is not speaking about the New Covenant believers. Believers will not be on earth when the wrath of God falls. Within the context this is referring to God's people Israel. God is going to show Himself faithful to His Old Covenant people so that they can be a blessing to the nations, as God promised Abraham they would be (Genesis 12:3, Ezekiel 37:28).

**Verse 11:** *“Terrible is The LORD against them, for He will reduce all the gods of the earth to nothing; they are going to bow down to Him, Each man from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations.”*

*Terrible:* Horrific

*Reduce:* To make thin, to make skinny

*They are going to bow down to Him:* Everything and everyone is going to one day acknowledge God as the only One worthy of worship (1 Samuel 5:1-4, Philippians 2:9-10).

*Each man from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations:* Like the gods are going to bow to God, the men are also going to bow – no matter how far away they live.

**Verse 12:** *“You Ethiopians also, you shall be a carcass by My sword.”*

*Ethiopians:* The Ethiopians have a rich history. At one time they were a powerful empire.

*You shall be a carcass by My sword:* God is going to destroy them (His enemies).

**Verse 13:** *“And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the desert.”*

**Note:** In the last days, God is going to judge all the nations of the earth.

*Nineveh:* The capital city of Assyria. It was a place of power, of buildings and great wealth.

*Dry as the desert:* God's wrath causes the bounty of Assyria to wither and dry out.

**Verse 14:** *“The herds shall lie down in her midst, all the animals of the nation. Both the pelican and the bittern shall roost on her pillars. Their voice shall sing in the windows; Desolation shall be at the threshold; For He will lay bare the cedar work.”*

*Herds:* Cattle. Livestock.

*Pelican:* There is a debate as to whether this is a pelican or a porcupine. In both instances it is speaking of an unclean animal.

*Bittern:* A waterbird that has long legs. It is related to the heron.

*Roost on her pillars:* These unkosher birds are going to dwell in the places that had once been reserved for dignitaries, the wealthy, the powerful.

*Desolation ... at the threshold; ... lay bare the cedar work:* The prized places are going to be destroyed.

**Verse 15:** *“This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely. That said in her heart, “I am it, and there is none besides me.” But it shall be for desolation, a place where animals lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall whistle and shake his fist.”*

*The rejoicing city:* This is still referring to Ninevah. Once upon a time she was viewed as powerful, mighty and wealthy. She had a large military. They never anticipated that God's judgment would come to them.

*Dwelt securely:* They thought, from a human standpoint, that they were secure from all of their enemies.

*I am it:* She claimed that there was no one else but her. She thought everything was about her. She thought no one else mattered except her.

*Whistle:* This is not the word for ‘hiss’. It is a word for a unique kind of whistling – a whistle that someone does in unbelief (eg: a whistle that is given when seeing an item priced too high).

**Note:** In the same way that God destroyed Ninevah, He is going to destroy the antichrist Empire. These empires are both symbolic of wanting what they themselves wanted. They did not (will not) want the things of God.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Part 1: Zephaniah 3:1-13**

We need to understand things from God’s perspective (Isaiah 55:8-9).

**Verse 1:** *“Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!”*

*Woe:* How awful it is going to be for these people if there is no change. They will experience destruction and hopelessness if they do not change.

*Her:* It is always important, in a passage, to know who God is speaking about. For the most part of this chapter, God is speaking about His Old Covenant people – Israel.

*Polluted:* Defiled.

*Opressing city:* From God’s perspective, Jerusalem is rebellious, corrupt and displeasing to Him. This is not a city of blessing but is a city of oppression. This is how the Lord is going to see Jerusalem in the last days. There is no earthly reason, from a human perspective, why this city would be renewed or restored [Just as there seemed to be no earthly reason why the city of Ninevah (wealthy, magnificent and powerful) failed].

**Verse 2:** *“She has not heard His voice, she has not received discipline; she has not trusted in the LORD, she has not drawn near to her God.”*

*Not received discipline:* She has been unable to discern or practice truth. She has not done what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

*Not trusted in the LORD:* She did not believe in the Lord or in His instructions.

*She has not drawn near to her God:* God was not inaccessible to her. She knew how to draw near to Him, but her rebellion kept her away from Him.

**Verse 3:** *“Her high officials in her midst are roaring lions; her judges like wolves in the evening that leave not a bone till morning.”*

*High officials:* In modern Hebrew this is a word that refers to a Cabinet member.

*Roaring lions:* In the last days, the leaders of Israel (those who have authority and who are in power) are going to be like roaring lions – make dangerous, loud and threatening noise.

*Leave not a bone:* These wolves (those who should be concerned with justice) will not stop chewing on this bone. They will chew it until its bitter end.

**Verse 4:** *“Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests profane the Holy Place, they have done violence to the law.”*

*Insolent:* Careless. Reckless. Fickle. They are casual and do not take things seriously. They have no passion or commitment and are careless with the Word of God.

*Treacherous:* Traitors.

*The Holy:* Some say that this should be seen as them profaning what is holy in a general sense. They not only profane the Holy places or places of worship, but they profane all that is holy.

*Done violence to the law:* Many commentators see this as meaning that they have utilised the authority given to them through the Law (the Torah) in order to mistreat people.

**Note:** From God’s perspective, these people are doing nothing good. Based on their actions, they do not deserve redemption.

**Verse 5:** *“The LORD is righteous in her midst; He will not do unjustly. Every morning, His justice He will set to light, and it will not be missing. The unjust knows no shame.”*

*The LORD is righteous:* This verse introduces a change. There is a shift away from the people and their poor spiritual condition, and the focus is turned on God – the Lord, our Master, the One who we are to live in submission to.

*Is...in her midst:* The presence of God in our lives changes everything. His presence brings about a glorious transformation. It is only His presence in our lives that can give us any hope for change.

*Every morning:* Day in and day out. God is consistent.

*His justice He will set to light, and it will not be missing:* This is a promise. God, the righteous God in their midst, is going to make things different.

*Knows no shame:* The one who is unjust does not recognize his shameful position. He does unjustly, he follows his own desires, and he is ashamed about nothing.

**Verse 6:** *“I have cut off nations, their towers are destroyed; I have ruined their streets, there will not be one who passes by. Their cities are destroyed; there will not be a man there, there will not be any inhabitant.”*

*I have cut off nations:* After reading the first few verses in this chapter we would assume that if anyone deserves the wrath of God it is Jerusalem - the city of oppression and rebellion. God does not bring about change in the way that we would expect. His ways are not our ways.

After saying that He was displeased with Jerusalem, the righteous Judge does what we would not expect – pouring His judgment on the nations and not on the nation of Israel. To

our way of thinking this does not make sense. However, what God is doing is revealing His righteousness. He is showing Israel that He is faithful to His covenant that He made with them. He is showing them that He is trustworthy (Romans 11:25-27). God is going to act/ behave in a way to accomplish His purposes. It may not seem right to us, but it is what is going to work to cause Israel to repent and to draw the remnant of Israel to God (Zechariah 12:8-14).

*Their towers are destroyed:* God destroys the nations places of defence.

**Verse 7:** *“For I have said that you will surely fear Me, and you will take discipline; therefore her habitation will not be cut off, because I have visited concerning her: but they rose early, their deeds will be corrupt.”*

*I have said:* God has said.

*You:* Referring to Israel.

*Fear Me:* When Israel sees the wrath of God that falls on the nations it is going to make an impression on them.

*Habitation:* Dwelling place.

*Habitation will not be cut off:* Most commentators see this as referring to Jerusalem, and they also interpret it to mean that Israel will not go into exile again. Israel is going to witness God’s power and His righteous judgment and they’re going to respond in obedience to Him.

*Visited:* Also translated ‘punished’. God has been intentional with Jerusalem (Israel). He has visited her in order to bring about a change. What God has done to the nations is going to have an impact on Israel and is going to bring about a change in their perspective.

*They:* Change in pronoun. No longer speaking about Israel but about the nations.

*Rose early:* Rising early is seen as showing commitment. This is usually a good thing (Genesis 26:31, Numbers 14:40, Mark 1:35 etc).

*Their deeds will be corrupt:* They witnessed God’s wrath and discipline, but it did not lead them to change.

**Verse 8:** *“Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Until the day I rise up for plunder; My judgment is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My wrath, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My zeal.”*

*Declares the LORD:* God is making a promise.

*I rise up for plunder:* A day is coming when God is going to take away the wealth of the world. He is coming to take spoil. When we have a heavenly perspective, we are going to rejoice in God’s righteous judgments (His wrath, His taking of the world’s booty - Revelation 18:20).

*Gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms:* God is going to gather all the nations of the world to one place so that He can pour out His judgment on them when they are all together (Zechariah 12:3, Zechariah 14:2).

*All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My zeal:* This is what is going to happen at the final outpouring of God’s wrath. This is not a mild or a partial judgment, but is a consuming, devouring, judgment (Revelation 16:17-21).

**Verse 9:** *“For then I will overturn the peoples into a clear language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one shoulder.”*

*Then I will overturn:* Good things are going to happen after God's final wrath has been poured out. It is necessary for God to pour it out, in its full measure, because it's going to produce that which is good. Everything that God does is very good. God's goodness will not be established in this world without His wrath.

*Overturn:* A word of change/transformation.

*The peoples:* The word used here in Hebrew is a word that is not necessarily used for people in the broadest sense, but is a term used in regard to the twelve tribes of Israel (His 'people'). God is coming to deal with (turn His attention back to) the Jewish people when, for the most part, He is finished with the nations – the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled or completed (Luke 21:24, Romans 11:25). It is only when Israel gets right with the Lord that the Kingdom of God can be established on earth (Matthew 23:37-39).

*Clear language:* They are going to speak that which is pure.

*They all:* Referring to the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> remnant of Israel who are going to survive the Great Tribulation.

*Call on the name of the LORD:* There is going to be a reconciliation between God and the (remnant of the) Jewish people. They are going to have a Kingdom hope.

*To serve Him:* Those who are saved (ie those who have become a 'new creation' and who are in a new condition) want to serve God. They want to be committed to doing His will and being His servant. If this is not our desire, then we need to search ourselves as to if we are truly saved.

*Serve Him with one shoulder:* This is an idiom. It means that they put their shoulders together (united in purpose) in order to serve God together.

**Verse 10:** *"From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My scattered ones, shall bring My gift."*

**Note:** God is a God of restoration.

*Beyond:* A word that speaks of that which is on the other side.

*Ethiopia:* Cush. A portion of the Jewish people were exiled to Ethiopia. Many have immigrated back to Israel since around the late 1970's.

*Worshipers:* People who make intercession (supplication) within the framework of worship. God has people who worship and serve Him in Ethiopia, and He is going to (and has already done so for many) restore them back to the land of Israel.

*My gift:* There is great debate as to what this gift could be. Some commentators question if it might be a reference to the Ark of the Covenant.

**Verse 11:** *"In that day you shall not be ashamed for any of your deeds in which you have transgressed against Me; for then I will remove from your midst all those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain."*

*In that day:* An expression of judgment.

*You:* The people of God (the remnant of Israel)

*Then:* At that time

**Note:** The final outpouring of the wrath of God is going to bring about a spiritual change, a redemptive change, to the people – the remnant of Israel. God is going to be merciful and forgiving toward them. He is going to no longer remember their transgressions.



**Verse 12:** *“I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.”*

*Meek:* The word used here is a word that refers to something which is meagre. They have a little, but it is barely enough for sustenance. In other words, these are going to be a people who are completely dependant upon the Lord.

*They shall trust:* Being in a ‘meagre condition’ causes these people to display a trust (seek refuge) in the Lord.

*Name:* Character. They will recognise the character of God - what it means to be righteous, holy and just.

**Verse 13:** *“The remnant of Israel shall not do injustice, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed flocks and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”*

*The remnant of Israel:* All of Israel (which is made up of the remnant of the Jewish people and a remnant of the Gentiles – a Kingdom people) will be saved (Romans 11:26). This verse in Romans is not speaking of all Israel as referring to all of the Jewish people (Romans 9:6-7). Only a remnant of the Jewish people is going to be saved.

*The remnant of Israel shall not do injustice:* A change has come about. The people who were rebellious (Zephaniah 3:1) have undergone a transformation after the outpouring of the wrath of God. The wrath of God brings about a glorious transformation. Heaven praises God for His righteous judgments – for His wrath (Revelation 12:12, Revelation 16:7). This is the perspective we need to embrace.

*Nor speak lies:* They are going to be people of truth.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Part 2: Zephaniah 3:14-20**

When we agree with God and base our expectations upon His promises, our problems, difficulties and frustrations lessen. This does not mean that everything is going to be easy, but it means that when we encounter difficult things, we do not have to deal with them alone. When we are walking in trust and faith, the Holy Spirit is upon us. We are, therefore, living under His anointing, having God’s provision available to us so that we can demonstrate what it means to be an overcomer.

**Verse 14:** *“Shout, O daughter of Zion! Sing, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!”*

*Shout:* This is a word that has great emotion attached to it. It is a word that implies unique and supernatural joy – a gladness, a happiness, a contentment, a rejoicing that is beyond the natural.

*Daughter:* A term of endearment. This speaks about a future condition.

*Zion:* Zion comes from a word which means ‘to mark’ – to mark or to set apart for excellence. If we want the excellent things of God, they are not found in this world, but they are found in the Kingdom (Zion is the word for Jerusalem – but Jerusalem in her redeemed state).

*Zion...Israel:* These terms are parallel. They are both Kingdom terms. Israel speaks here of the combination of the Jewish and Gentile remnant – the people of the Kingdom (see comment made in Zephaniah 3:13 regarding Israel).

*Rejoice with all your heart:* With all our heart means to do something with intensity – to do it in a complete manner. Biblically, heart is related to the way that we think. The joy and gladness spoken of here is going to fulfil every thought of our heart. It is going to go beyond what we can think or imagine.

*Jerusalem:* The word for peace (shalom) is one of the words that make up the name 'Jerusalem'. Peace is what we experience (inherit) as an outcome of the will of God being fulfilled. The final state of God's Kingdom is called the 'New Jerusalem'. It is in this place that we will fully inherit all that God has willed for us – His New Covenant people.

**Verse 15:** *"The LORD has removed your judgments. The King of Israel will clear away your enemy. The LORD is in your midst; You shall no longer fear evil."*

*Judgments:* Written in the plural to remind us that the Jewish people received (or will still receive) a double portion of punishment for their sins (Isaiah 40:1-2). One way that this can be understood, from a last day perspective, is that two-thirds of the Jewish people are lost, and one-third are brought to faith (Zechariah 13:8-9).

*The King of Israel:* The title given to the Messiah – the Anointed One. He is the One who is anointed to be King. There is no kingdom without a king.

*Clear away your enemy:* This is one of the purposes for Yeshua's second coming (not referring to the rapture). Yeshua is going to remove all His enemies (even binding satan for a period of time – Revelation 20:1-3)

*The LORD is in your midst:* One of God's chief desires is to dwell with man. From an earthly perspective we think we want to be with God. In fact, He desires, even more, to be with us.

*No longer fear evil:* We can define evil as anything that is in opposition to the will of God. In God's Kingdom we are going to receive the fullness of His will, and all of this comes about because of the fact that God is with us. It is when we encounter perfect love that we will no longer fear (1 John 4:18).

**Verse 16:** *"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak."*

*In that day:* God's goodness in its entirety (the establishment of His Kingdom) comes about after Judgment Day. The primary purpose of God's judgment is to set things in order. Only once things are in order can God pronounce it 'good' (Genesis 1).

*Do not fear:* Repetition shows emphasis. God is emphasising that when He is in their midst (when He is in our midst) there is no need to fear. Fear handicaps people. When we are afraid, we do not function as God intended us to function. Fear leads to a lack of discernment and poor decision-making abilities.

Yeshua warned us that in the last days intense persecution is going to fall on His covenant people (Matthew 24:9-10). We need to be prepared for this so that we (the Kingdom people) do not give in to fear over this period of time.

*Zion:* Kingdom people.

*Let not your hands be weak:* Do not let go. Do not give in. Do not capitulate. Do not compromise. We need to remain committed to doing what God has called us to do in the

last days -passionately committed to living righteously for Him, no matter the consequences.

**Verse 17:** *“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.”*

*The Mighty One, will save:* The Rabbi’s acknowledge that this phrase is referring to Messiah, although they do not acknowledge that He is God - despite this phrase being sandwiched between the truths on either side of it that clearly speak about God. It is only through Yeshua, our Messiah, that we can be saved (Acts 4:10-12, Romans 10:9-10).

*He will rejoice over you:* God, Himself, rejoices over us as an outcome of salvation, as an outcome of receiving His love. From a natural perspective we think of ourselves delighting in God. Here we see a heavenly perspective – He delights in us.

*He will quiet you:* He will make us silent. The word literally means to make deaf, unable to speak - as there is no reason to speak.

*His love:* His sacrificial love (John 3:16) makes us silent/still (“speechless”). It is only through the salvation of Messiah that we are going to be recipients of the love of God.

**Verse 18:** *“The sad ones from the appointed times I will gather up from among you your burden of disgrace.”*

**Note:** This verse is unique (as is the word used for ‘*the sad ones*’ a rare Biblical word). It is a verse that speaks about sadness yet is set within the midst of verses that speak of joy and gladness.

*The sad ones:* Those who are grieved.

*The appointed times:* The festivals (Sabbath, Passover, First fruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles). Although God entrusted these festivals to Israel, they remain His festivals (Leviticus 23:1-2) – His appointed times. There is no temple today, so we cannot keep these feasts in the way that they were required to be kept. However, it is important that we study them and, led by the Spirit, apply the truth of these festivals to our lives. They teach us about different aspects of God’s character. God owns these festivals. He works with them to teach us truth and to lead us closer to Himself and to where He wants us to be. These festivals are important to God. What is important for Him should be important to us. These festivals were (are) special times of worship. The people who are grieved at these festivals are grieved because they realise that they fall short of the truths found in these festivals. They realise that without redemption or restoration they cannot get to where God wants them to be.

*I will gather up from among you your burden of disgrace:* This is a promise. God is going to remove the heavy load of shame from His people.

**Verse 19:** *“Behold, I will deal with all who afflict you at that time; I will save the one who limps, and gather those who were driven out; I will set them for a praise and a name in all the Earth where they were put to shame.”*

*I will deal:* God is going to take action. Not only is God going to deal with His people (to set them in order) but He is also going to deal with those who are the enemies of His people (those who hinder His plans and purposes).

*All: Everyone*

*At that time:* God has marked out a very specific time as to when He is going to do this.

*I will save the one who limps:* This same word ('limps') appears in 1 Kings 18:21. Elijah was frustrated with the people because they kept limping (faltering) between two perspectives – whether to serve God or Baal. These people were weak and not committed to wholeheartedly serving God. God is going to rescue these people who fluctuate in their thinking in this way.

*Gather those who were driven out:* This is God's promise. He is going to gather those who were driven out of the land. The ingathering of Jewish people to the land of Israel in our days is a very important prophetic event. We should in no way minimise this. God is performing an end days miracle before our very eyes.

*Set them:* Position them. Place them (ie the Jewish people – that remnant who are going to come to faith in the last days).

*A name:* A reputation. A character. God's character will become their character (a people who are holy, righteous and set apart – a new creation).

*Shame:* Shame is swapped out for praise and a name. God causes them to change, reflecting the very character of Messiah.

**Verse 20:** *"At that time I will bring you back and gather you up; for I will give you a name and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captivity before your eyes," said the LORD."*

*At that time:* Good things happen after this time.

*I will bring you back and gather you up:* The implication is that He will bring them back, gather them up, to the land that He promised them (Matthew 24:31).

*A name and praise:* The order is reversed from Zephaniah 3:19.

*For I will give you a name and praise among all the peoples of the earth:* God has never given up on His Old Covenant people. He has always been faithful to a Jewish remnant. Once the time of the Gentiles reaches its fullness, the rest of the world is going to observe His faithfulness to the Jewish people – fulfilling the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

*When I return your captivity:* There is going to be a return to the land of Israel for all those who were exiled from it (all those who lived outside of its borders).

*Said the LORD:* This is written in the past tense. From God's perspective this is as good as done. This is His promise to the remnant of the Jewish people. God's primary way of reaching and saving people is through the gospel. In the last days He is going to bring a remnant of Jewish people to faith through that same gospel message. The Old Covenant people are going to recognise Messiah Yeshua and they are going to repent and submit to the Lordship of Christ, therefore becoming a part of the New Covenant people.