

Title: **ZEPHANIAH**
 “*Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD.*”
Text: Zephaniah 3:8
Date: Tuesday Evening—December 28, 2003
Tape # X-98a
Readings: *Rex Bartley — 2 Kings 22:1-20*
Introduction:

There is a word of counsel from our God in the opening sentence of Zephaniah 3:8 that we cannot read, or hear, or think upon too frequently. It is a word of counsel that our God graciously gives us through out the Volume of Holy Scripture. It is a word of counsel and instruction that summarizes the message of the prophets and the message of the apostles. If the Lord God will give us grace to heed it, this word of counsel and instruction will be of immeasurable benefit to our souls as long as we live in this world. — “*Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD.*”

A PROPHECY OF JUDGMENT

The Book of Zephaniah is a prophecy of judgment. The bulk of his prophecy is taken up with identifying the sins for which God would send his wrath upon men and announcing the horror awaiting every rebel (1:1-3:8). Guilt must be exposed before grace can be announced. Sinners must be convinced of their guilt, or they will never seek grace. Therefore God’s prophets pointedly identify our guilt, and convince us of the wrath and judgment of God that we deserve, before declaring his

mercy and grace. Zephaniah follows that pattern. After announcing the certainty of divine judgment, he declares the certainty of God's mercy, love and grace for his elect, and the absolute certainty of God's salvation of them (3:9-20).

IDOLATRY

In Zephaniah's day the professed church and kingdom of God (the nation of Judah) was in a state of unprecedented spiritual darkness. We get some idea of the condition of the land when we read 2 Kings 22:1-20.

- Idolatry was rampant throughout the land. Pagan priests and those men who were supposed to be the Lord's priests (1:4), the priests of Baal and the priests of Jehovah formed a nice, ecumenical ministerial association and worked in perfect harmony with one another to blaspheme God and destroy the souls of men.
- The people of Judah, for the most part, while professing to worship God, worshipped Moloch in the name of Jehovah (v. 5).
- There were apostates throughout the land, people who had abandoned the worship of God altogether, and yet continued to profess faith in him, people who wore Jehovah's name when it was convenient, but never inquired after him (1:6).

MORAL DECADENCE

As is ever the case, wherever idolatry rules, moral chaos follows. Whenever men and women abandon the worship of God, ignore his Word and despise his law, moral degeneracy is the result. It matters not what religion they adopt (And they will adopt some religion.), their religion inevitably brings them into moral degeneracy.

Zephaniah describes his people as a filthy, polluted, and oppressing people (3:1). They were a people, he tells us in verse 2 of chapter 3, who...

1. refused to obey God,
2. refused to receive correction,
3. trusted not in the LORD, and
4. would not draw near, would not return to their God.

CORRUPT LEADERS

After describing the people of the land, the prophet of God faithfully exposes the corruption of Judah's political and spiritual leaders as well.

- Her **political leaders** were self-serving men who used their power and position to line their own pockets while oppressing the people (3:3).
- Judah's **judges** he describes as “*wolves*” (3:3).
- Her **prophets** were “*light and treacherous*” (3:4). They gave no thought to the Word of God, the Truth of God, the seriousness of speaking to men in the name of God. They simply gave out their own opinions in the name of prophesying in the name of

the Lord. That made them treacherous and dangerous men.

- Judah's **priests** polluted the house of God and did violence to (perverted) the Word of God (3:4).

Does all of this seem familiar? It should. Zephaniah's prophecy seems to be written by a man who is describing the day in which we live. His words accurately describe the very condition of the professed church of our day. That is because this little prophecy was written by divine inspiration. It was written for us as well as for the people of Judah in his day (Rom. 15:4).

CALL TO REPENTANCE

Because of the spiritual and moral chaos that was rampant throughout the land, Zephaniah declares that the Lord God will judge the earth, that he will utterly destroy it in his wrath (1:2-6). Yet, the Lord God says to his prophet and all who truly worship him, "*Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God*" (1:7). He tells us what the Lord will do in the day of his wrath. Then, he tells us not to fret about it or murmur against it, but to hold our peace before him. The God of all the earth will do right.

He declares (1:7), "*The LORD hat prepared a sacrifice.*" Let us rejoice, the Lord has prepared a Sacrifice, his own darling Son, to atone for the sins of his people. And he has called sinners to be his guests, to receive his

Sacrifice and all the benefits of it, all the blessings of grace and salvation by his Sacrifice.

(Zep 1:7) "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD *is* at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests."

Yet, **it is this Sacrifice, Christ himself, which shall execute his wrath in the day of his wrath** (1:8). The basis of salvation is the Sacrifice and the basis of judgment is the Sacrifice. It is impossible to think that the judgment Zephaniah describes can find its fulfillment in anything short of that day when Christ comes to take vengeance upon the ungodly and make all things new, that day when in consummates the salvation of his elect in a new heavens and a new earth (Zeph. 1:14-16; Rev. 6; 2 Pet. 3:11-14).

(Zep 1:14-16) "The great day of the LORD *is* near, *it is* near, and hasteth greatly, *even* the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. {15} That day *is* a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, {16} A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers."

(Rev 6:16) "And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

(2 Pet 3:11-14) "*Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, {12} Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? {13} Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. {14} Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Zephaniah 2 opens with a call to repentance. The faithful prophet tells us that the only way to escape the wrath of God in that great and terrible day of his wrath is to seek the Lord and find our hiding place in him, in the Sacrifice he has prepared, before that day comes (2:1-3).

(Zep 2:1-3) "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; {2} Before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you. {3} Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."

SALVATION PROMISED

Zephaniah's name means, "Jehovah hides," or "Jehovah has hidden," or "Jehovah's watchman." All three

meanings are manifest in this prophecy. As Jehovah's faithful watchman, he warns of judgment and wrath, and calls us to flee the wrath to come. He also assures us of the fact that God has his hidden ones in the earth, whose sins he hides and whom he will save by his matchless grace.

He describes the sins of the nations, and exposes the sins of God's people. You and I deserve wrath as much as anyone else. We are as guilty as the rest of the world. What evil have other men done that we have not done in thought, if not in deed?

The nature of the reprobate is our nature. His heart is our heart. His thoughts are our thoughts. And his deeds are our deeds. **Yet, while God pours out his wrath upon others, he pours out his love, mercy, and grace upon his elect** (1 Cor. 4:7).

- There is a people who shall serve the Lord God willingly, with one consent (3:9)
- They will come to him trusting Christ, bringing his offering to him (3:10).
- They will all confess their sins, being ashamed of their doings (3:11).
- This is the Lord's remnant, the remnant of Israel, whom he will cause to trust in his name (3:12).

Therefore, the Prophet Zephaniah calls upon redeemed sinners to sing and rejoice, even in the midst of trouble (v. 14).

(Zephaniah 3:14) “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.”

He says “*to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack*” (v. 16). In verses 15 and 17, the Prophet of God gives us nine reasons to rejoice and sing, nine reasons not to fear, nine reasons to be steadfast and immovable in the work of the Lord. Keep your Bible open on you lap. I do not want you to miss a word.

1. “*The LORD hath taken away thy judgments.*”

The rest of the world, by reason of sin and guilt, is under the wrath of God. But “*the Lord hath taken away thy judgments.*” That is good news. I am not talking about what the Lord wants to do, hopes to do, or has tried to do. I am talking about what the Lord has done. “*The Lord hath taken away thy judgments.*”

By the work of his free, almighty, and sovereign grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, has taken away our judgments.

- **In redemption, by the sacrifice of himself, he has taken away our sins, the cause of judgment** (Heb. 9:26; Psa. 103:12).

(Psalms 103:10-12) He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. (11) For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. (12) As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

That is redemption!

- **In the new birth, he has taken away our spiritual death, the consequence of judgment** (Col. 1:13-14).

(Colossians 1:12-14) Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: (13) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins:

That is the new birth!

- **He has taken away the curse of the law, the sentence of judgment** (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 8:1, 32-34).

REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED — Christ redeemed us from the hands of the law when he died at Calvary (Heb. 9:12).

REDEMPTION APPLIED — Christ delivered us from the bondage of guilt when he gave us faith (Heb. 9:14).

2. **“He hath cast out thine enemy.”**

Satan came into the land of man’s soul by the door of sin as an invading enemy. But Christ, our mighty Man of War, the Captain of our Salvation, has cast him out.

- **God cast Satan out of heaven as soon as he began to oppose God’s purpose of grace toward us** (Ezek. 28:14-17).
- **The Son of God broke Satan’s usurped power and dominion over the nations of the world at the cross, and in that sense, cast him out when he died as our Substitute** (Gen. 3:15; John 12:31; Rev. 20).
- **Our Savior casts Satan out of the hearts of his people in regeneration by the power of his Spirit, so that we are no longer in bondage to and under the rule of the prince of darkness** (Isa. 49:24-25; Matt. 12:28-29).

(Isaiah 49:24-25) “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? (25) But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.”

(Matthew 12:28-29) “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. (29) Or else how can one enter into a strong man's

house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.”

- And the Lord Jesus Christ will cast Satan into the pit of the damned at the last day (Rev. 20:10).

3. “The king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of Israel, the King of his church. And he is in the midst of us. Did you hear that? Child of God, the Lord is with you. That ought to fill us with unspeakable joy, peace, and security (Isa. 41:10).

(Isaiah 41:10) “Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

(Isaiah 43:1-5) “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I

have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west.”

(Philippians 4:4) “Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice.”

Christ is always near at hand (Phil. 4:4). He is near **to support** us and **supply our needs**. He is near **to assist** and **strengthen** us. He is near **to protect** and **defend** us. When Zephaniah says, “*The Lord is in the midst of thee,*” his meaning is threefold:

- He is **essentially present**, because he is the omnipresent God.
- He is **providentially present**, because he is determined to do us good.
- He is **graciously present**, because he promised never to leave us nor forsake us.

4. “**Thou shalt not see evil anymore!**”

What a promise this is! “*There shall no evil happen to the just*” (Prov. 12:21). “*Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him*” (Isa. 3:10). The Lord God will not turn away from you to do you good! As **Bro. Scott Richardson** put it, “There’s been no bad news since I got the good news!”

5. “**The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty!**”

When Zephaniah was delivering this message, after saying, “*The Lord is in the midst of thee,*” seems to think, “Oh, I meant to say not only that the LORD is in the midst of you, but also to say, “*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.*” I’m glad he remembered to put that in! — **He who is in the midst of us is the LORD Jehovah, the Being of beings, the eternal, immutable, all-sufficient God.**

- **He is the LORD thy God!** — He is ours by his own covenant grace. — He is our by his miraculous incarnation - “*God with us!*” — He is ours by his great gift of faith.
- **And he who is the LORD our God is Mighty!** — He is the Almighty God, the Omnipotent Creator, and the All-Powerful Mediator and Savior. All power in heaven and earth has been given to that Man who is our God. Therefore he is able to save us to the uttermost, — deliver us from the hand of every enemy, — keep us in the midst of every temptation, — sustain us in every trial, — and bring us safe into his heavenly kingdom.

6. **“He will save!”**

- The Lord our God is not only able but also willing to save (Micah 7:18-20).
- He readily undertook to save us in the covenant of grace.

- He came in the fulness of time to seek and to save that which was lost.
- He has wrought out salvation for us by his obedience unto death.
- He sees to it that salvation is applied to every chosen, redeemed sinner.
- And he will come again to put us in full possession of that salvation he has accomplished for us.

He saves us freely, fully, and everlastingly. — He saves from sin, Satan, the law, hell, and wrath. — He will save us from every temporal and every spiritual enemy in time and to eternity. *“He will save!”* — Sooner or later, he will save us from all our troubles (Ps. 25:22; 34:6).

(Psalms 25:22) Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

(Psalms 34:6) This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Stay with me. The news good gets better still! *“The Lord hath taken away thy judgments - He hath cast out thine enemy — The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee - Thou shalt not see evil anymore — The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty — He will save!”* Now read the seventh line of our text...

7. **“He will rejoice over thee with joy!”**

Shall God rejoice over us? Indeed he does! He rejoices over his elect with exceeding, great, inexpressible joy. The inspired prophet seems to be searching for words to describe God's joy over his people. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, the Lord our God, Jesus Christ, rejoices over us his people (Isa. 62:3-5; 61:10). And when we stand before him on that great day, he will publicly rejoice over us (Rev. 19:1-9).

(Isaiah 62:3-5) “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. (4) Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. (5) For *as* a young man marrieth a virgin, *so* shall thy sons marry thee: and *as* the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, *so* shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

(Isaiah 61:10) “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels.”

(Revelation 19:1-9) “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: (2) For true and righteous *are* his

judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. (3) And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. (4) And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. (5) And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. (6) And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. (7) Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. (8) And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. (9) And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”

8. “*He will rest in his love!*”

Now hear the meaning of these words — The Lord Jesus Christ finds great complacency, delight, and satisfaction in loving us and in expressing his love to us! It is pleasing to him to love us! He solaces himself in it!

There is not a greater, fuller verbal expression of Christ’s love for us in all the Bible than this, “*He will*

rest in his love.” He says to us, “*Thou hast ravished my heart*” (Song of Sol. 4:9). O what infinite, condescending grace! God not only loves us, but he loves to love us! He is pleased that he chose us as the objects of his love! Oh, my heart, be ravished with his love! Christ’s love for us is...

- Without cause!
- Without beginning!
- Without change!
- Without end!

This phrase might be translated, “**He will be silent, because of his love.**”

- Our Lord will not upbraid us because of our sins.
- He will never speak a word of anger or wrath to us.
- And he will put all of our enemies to silence as well.

As one completely overwhelmed with love for another is often speechless at the sight of the one he loves, when they have been separated for a long, long time, so Christ is speechless because of his love!

9. “**He will joy over thee with singing!**”

Again, the prophet is searching for words to describe Christ’s love for us. He rejoices over us with joy and joys with singing! He is telling us that God himself is delighted that we are his people, his chosen, redeemed,

called ones. We are his Hephzibah, in whom he delights. We are his Beulah, to whom he is married. And he wants no one else!

Now, in the light of these things, I say to you, children of God, *“Be glad and rejoice with all your heart...Fear thou not...Let not thine hands be slack.”*

- Hands of prayer.
- Hands of praise.
- Hands of labor (1 Cor. 15:58).

Zephaniah concludes his prophecy with six “I will” declarations of God himself (3:18-20).

1. *“I will **gather them** that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly.”*
2. *“Behold, at that time I will **undo all that afflict thee.**”*
3. *“And I will **save her that halteth**, and gather her that was driven out.”*
4. *“And **I will get them praise and fame** in every land where they have been put to shame.”*
5. *“**At that time will I bring you again**, even in the time that I gather you.”*
6. *“For **I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth**, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.”*

“Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD!”

AMEN.