

The
Day of The Lord
is coming!

*Studies in the book
of Zephaniah.*

*[With a translation from the
Hebrew].*

By Mike Viccary

Dedication & acknowledgements.

I dedicate this work to the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is worthy of praise for he alone has done all things well.

I would like to acknowledge a number of very key people who have helped me in my efforts over the years. First I want to say a huge “thank you” to my lovely wife Helen. Without her love and great friendship none of my writing and study would have been possible. Then I would like to thank all my five children, their spouses and their children who have been the most wonderful delight and joy for which I thank and praise God. Finally my thanks go out to all who have challenged me and who have made me think, and then think again.

All of this work is the product of my thought but it owes much to that which I have read and interacted with. I have sought to acknowledge those who I have considered throughout this work. All errors and faults are entirely mine. I hope and pray that none would be lead astray but that all would indeed come to see the great goodness of the Saviour and having seen it would embrace him for all they are worth.

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

November 2020.

Contents:

	<i>Page.</i>
<i>Introduction.</i>	
<i><u>A word for our time.</u></i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1. Zephaniah 1:1.</i>	
<i><u>The word of the Lord came to ...</u></i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Chapter 2. Part 1: Zephaniah 1:1-18.</i>	
<i><u>The end of the world is certain and it is coming!</u></i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Chapter 3. Part 2: Zephaniah 2:1-3:7.</i>	
<i><u>Seek the Lord for nowhere is safe!</u></i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Chapter 4. Part 3: Zephaniah 3:8-20.</i>	
<i><u>Comfort for the believing remnant.</u></i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Chapter 5.</i>	
<i><u>Making sense of all this.</u></i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Appendix.</i>	<i>114</i>
<i><u>NKJV and my translation compared.</u></i>	

Introduction.

A word for our time.

What advice and counsel do you think people of our nation need to heed at this time? What type of exhortation or instruction is required for the days within which we live? If you had just one opportunity to say just one thing, what would it be?

Given all the uncertainty of our current political situation, the temptation might be to opt for a positive outlook and say: “cheer up things can only get better!” Or, perhaps, in view of the rapidly changing nature of our culture, which has spiralled into chaos over the last thirty to forty years, you might advise people to simply keep quiet, do their best, and live the best life they can. Or, if you are one who believes the scare stories about climate change, for example, maybe you would exhort people to action with a positive note in your voice. Well, for some time now I have been considering the message that the oft-forgotten prophet Zephaniah had to bring. It seems to me that his message is sorely needed in our time. Perhaps you know the wonderful phrase found in Zephaniah 3:17 where we read:

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.

Such a text may bring hope and succour to the weary soul, but in order to get to it and drink of its beauty we must read what comes before it! You may recoil with horror if you know something of what the prophet brought in the first two chapters, but all of these words in the book of Zephaniah are, I remind the reader, from God!

Since it would appear that the book recounts a single message from start to finish, in these studies we shall be looking at the text in chronological order as we find it. It will be necessary to divide the text into smaller more manageable sections, but this will be done with an eye to preserving the main overall theme. What then is the main theme of the book? We remind the reader that the main focus of *all* Scripture is our Saviour and Lord, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Our task, as ever, is to declare the great, glorious, goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this

¹ Luke 24; John 5:39

will take different forms depending on the book under consideration. In Zephaniah it is very clear that a prime focus is “*the day of the Lord.*” This phrase occurs some 25 times in the Old Testament and six of these can be found in the book of Zephaniah.² Couple this with the general flavour of destruction, consumption and desolation, and the twice repeated phrase which is found at 1:18 and 3:8:

... in the fire of His jealousy the whole earth will be consumed.

And we are surely warranted in concluding that the main theme is one of the judgement of God on all sin and evil.

Historical background.

In order to get the best from this prophecy of Zephaniah it is important to make at least some assessment of the time within which the prophet ministered. We are informed at the start of Zephaniah's prophecy that he received the word of God “*in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.*”³ This settles the time when the prophecy was received, but we really need to see the context prior to this to understand the environment and climate of Josiah's reign. Now although Zephaniah only makes reference to Josiah's father Amon, it will be necessary to go back further to Amon's father Manasseh to get a good view of the times and the issues of the day.

Manasseh was Hezekiah's son and Josiah's grandfather. He reigned for fifty five years in Jerusalem.⁴ Prior to Manasseh, the godly king Hezekiah reigned for twenty nine years, during which time Isaiah prophesied, but the end of his reign is somewhat clouded in controversy.⁵ The general summary statements we find in the book of 2Kings concerning the time that Manasseh governed, leave us in no doubt that his reign was the height of wickedness in the history of the people of God. Manasseh did not simply do “*evil in the sight of the Lord,*” but he did so “*according to the abominations of the nations*” that the Lord had removed from Canaan.⁶ So bad was his reign that it is recorded that it provoked the Lord to anger, as he “*seduced*” his subjects “*to do more evil than the nations*” that God had removed and destroyed.⁷ The list of his atrocities makes sorry reading given all the wonderful things that the Lord had done for this nation:

2 Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9; 34:8; 58:13; Jeremiah 46:10; Lamentations 2:22; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7,8,14,18; 2:2,3; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5.

3 Zephaniah 1:1.

4 2Kings 21:1; 2Chronicles 33:1.

5 2Kings 18:2; 20:14-18; Isaiah 39.

6 2Kings 21:2; 2Chronicles 33:2.

7 2Kings 21:6,9; 2Chronicles 33:6,9.

1. He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah had broken down and destroyed.⁸
2. He erected altars for the Baals and made wooden images just as Ahab king of Israel had done.⁹
3. He worshipped and served all the host of heaven.¹⁰
4. He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord, and he set a carved image of Ahserah which he had made in the house of the Lord.¹¹
5. He made his sons pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom.¹²
6. He practised soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted spiritists and mediums.¹³
7. He shed very much innocent blood.¹⁴

But then after Manasseh had refused to listen to God's warnings about his evil actions, he was taken captive to Babylon by the Assyrians.¹⁵ In such humiliating circumstances, Manasseh *“humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,”* in prayer, and the Lord heard him and *“brought him back to Jerusalem.”*¹⁶ On his return Manasseh sought to alter the wickedness he had perpetrated, but only managed to do this within the bounds of Jerusalem. He removed all the altars that were built in the house of the Lord, and those that were sited in Jerusalem, throwing them out of the city.¹⁷ He repaired the altar of the Lord and reinstituted sacrifices calling all Judah back to serve the Lord.¹⁸ Despite these acts of repentance and reform, the people still sacrificed in the high places to the Lord.¹⁹ Furthermore, despite Manasseh's repentance the judgement of God would still fall upon Judah and Jerusalem. At the end of the account concerning Manasseh in 2Kings, we are informed that judgement would not be turned back:

11 “Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), **12** therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Behold, *I* am bringing *such* calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. **13** And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria

8 2Kings 21:3; 2Chronicles 33:3.
 9 2Kings 21:3; 2Chronicles 33:3.
 10 2Kings 21:3; 2Chronicles 33:3.
 11 2Kings 21:5,7; 2Chronicles 33:5,7.
 12 2Kings 21:6; 2Chronicles 33:6.
 13 2Kings 21:6; 2Chronicles 33:6.
 14 2Kings 21:16.
 15 2Chronicles 33:10,11.
 16 2Chronicles 33:12,13.
 17 2Chronicles 33:15.
 18 2Chronicles 33:16.
 19 2Chronicles 33:17.

and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as *one* wipes a dish, wiping *it* and turning *it* upside down. **14** So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, **15** because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.’ ”²⁰

This unwavering judgement of God is repeated two more times in 2Kings. The first time comes immediately after we read of Josiah's reforms:

26 Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. **27** And the Lord said, “I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’ ”²¹

The second time we read about God's determination to punish the nation for Manasseh's sins comes when Jehoiakim, the second king after Josiah, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon:

3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord *this* came upon Judah, to remove *them* from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, **4** and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.”²²

We must pause and reflect here. Our sins have dire consequences. Although Manasseh's wickedness was fully atoned for and dealt with so that the king was restored to the Lord, the fruit of his wickedness and the troubles it caused could not be left untreated. Thus the terrible wickedness that Manasseh promoted was of such an awful and deep nature, (the people of God having been pushed too far by Manasseh's evil for reform to work), that there was no alternative left except exile into Babylon which would come soon during the reign of Zedekiah and the ministry of Jeremiah.

After Manasseh's wicked reign, and then his partial reform on account of his personal repentance, we arrive at the reign of Amon. Amon was twenty two years of age when he began to reign, but he would only govern for two years before being assassinated by his household servants.²³ We have no idea what caused these servants to murder their master, but it is more than likely that he was a cruel and evil person to be around, for Amon's rule was more wicked than that of his father.

20 2Kings 21:11-15.

21 2Kings 23:26,27.

22 2Kings 24:3,4.

23 2Kings 21:23; 2Chronicles 33:24.

He worshipped and served the idols that his father had made, and He fully forsook the Lord and His ways.²⁴ In the book of 2Chronicles we are informed pointedly that Amon was worse than his father, because he *“did not humble himself before the Lord,”* and instead he *“trespassed more and more.”*²⁵ After Amon's assassination *“the people of the land”* had the servants of Amon *“executed”* and installed Amon's son Josiah as king.²⁶ Thus we come to Josiah, the king who reigned in the time of Zephaniah's ministry. Now Josiah began his reign in 640 BC when he was just eight years old.²⁷ He reigned for 31 years dying in 609 BC after a battle against Pharaoh Necho at Meggido.²⁸

Josiah thus began his reign at a period of time when the nation of Judah had been subjected to, and had therefore experienced, a great deal of apostasy which probably covered more than five decades. Despite Manasseh's repentance, it would seem that his son was bent on evil doing to a far greater extent than his father. In this general apostate climate, Josiah's reign is described for us as a good one:

*And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.*²⁹

In the eighth year of his reign, at the age of 16 (632 BC), Josiah began to seek the Lord.³⁰ What a remarkable thing! Josiah's father was deeply wicked and such a bad master that his own servants murdered him, and his grandfather caused apostasy like none before him. And yet out of such wickedness the Lord brings forth one to follow Him! Manasseh's repentance may have influenced Josiah, but it is also likely that Zephaniah had a positive effect upon the young king.

Four years later when he was 20 (628 BC) Josiah began to *“purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places.”*³¹ He removed the altars of the Baals and all the wooden images, breaking them into pieces and making them into dust which he *“scattered on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.”*³² He burned the bones of the false priests, cleansed both Judah and Jerusalem, and also *“the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, as far as Naphtali and all around,”* and *“cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel.”*³³ Thus purges and cleansing had already begun

24 2Kings 21:20-22.
25 2Chronicles 33:23.
26 2Kings 21:24; 2Chronicles 33:25.
27 2Kings 22:1; 2Chronicles 34:1.
28 2Kings 23:29.
29 2Kings 22:2; 2Chronicles 34:2.
30 2Chronicles 34:3.
31 2Chronicles 34:3.
32 2Chronicles 34:3,4.
33 2Chronicles 34:5-7.

in the temple and throughout the land as we reach Josiah's eighteenth year as king (622 BC).³⁴

In his eighteenth year as king, aged 26 (622 BC), Josiah set about ensuring that the temple would be repaired and restored.³⁵ Now as they were repairing the temple, the Book of the Law was rediscovered and read before the king.³⁶ On hearing the *“words of the Law,”* the godly king tore his clothes as a sign of repentance, and instructed that his close advisers and counsellors should inquire further of the Lord on his behalf.³⁷ The advisers sought a word from God via the prophet Huldah who was *“keeper of the wardrobe.”*³⁸ Huldah gave the following prophecy which was related back to Josiah:

... “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, **16** “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read— **17** because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.’ ” ’ **18** But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard— **19** because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard *you*,” says the Lord. **20** “Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.” ’ ”³⁹

On receiving this prophecy, Josiah gathered everyone together and he read to the people *“the words of the Book of the Covenant.”*⁴⁰ Then Josiah consecrated himself to the Lord in covenant, *“and he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand,”* ensuring that all who were present in Israel would serve the Lord, so that as a consequence *“all the people took a stand for the covenant.”*⁴¹ Following this, Josiah enacted further sweeping reforms in the temple at Jerusalem, in all the land of Judah, and throughout Israel which we outline as follows:

1. All the articles made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven were

34 2Chronicles 34:8.

35 2Chronicles 34:8-13.

36 2Kings 22:3f; 2Chronicles 34:14-18.

37 2Kings 22:11-13; 2Chronicles 34:19-21.

38 2Chronicles 34:22.

39 2Kings 22:15-20. A very similar record of this prophecy occurs in: 2Chronicles 34:23-28.

40 2Kings 23:1,2; 2Chronicles 34:29,30.

41 2Kings 23:3; 2Chronicles 34:31-33.

removed from the temple and burned outside the city in the fields of Kidron.⁴²

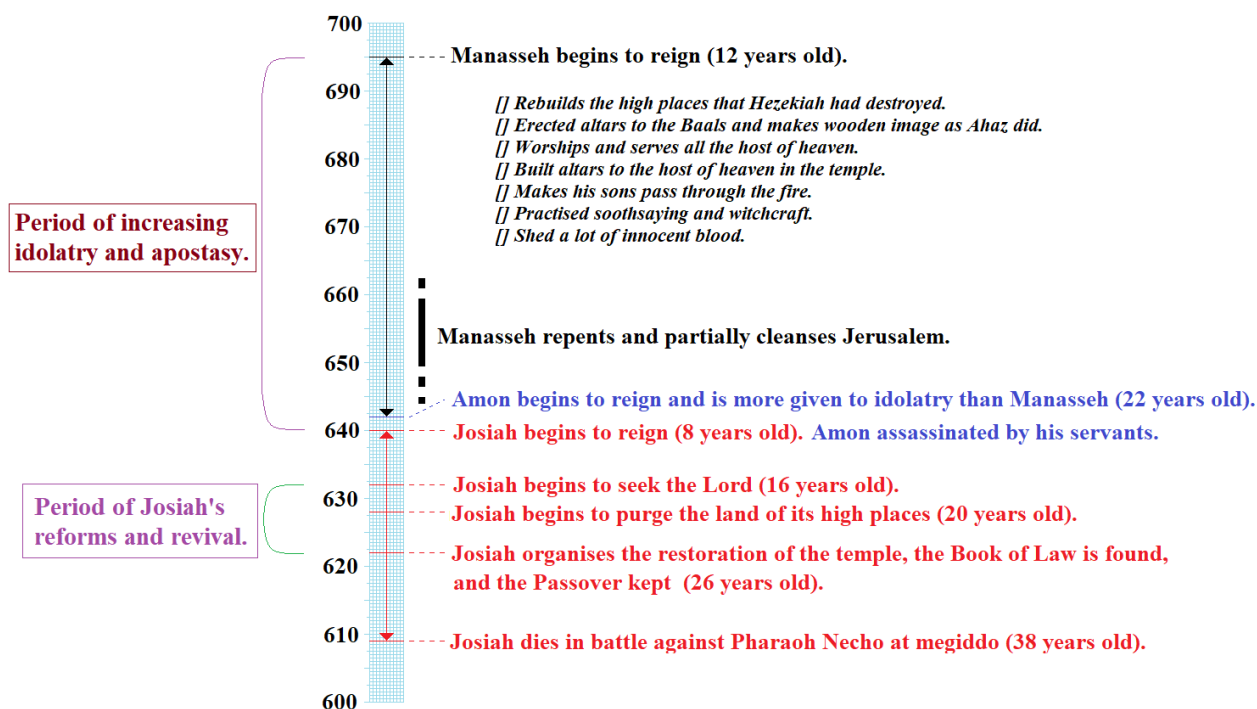
2. All of the idolatrous priests that *“the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places”* throughout the land, and all those who burned incense to Baal, to the stars, and to the host of heaven were removed.⁴³
3. The wooden image that was placed in the house of the Lord was removed and burned at the Brook Kidron where it was ground to ashes and thrown onto the graves.⁴⁴
4. The booths used by the *“perverted persons”* and where women wove hangings for the wooden image were torn down.⁴⁵
5. All the high places where the priests had burned incense throughout the land were broken down.⁴⁶
6. The place where child sacrifice was performed (Topheth in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom) was *“defiled.”*⁴⁷
7. The horses which had been dedicated to the sun at the entrance to the house of the Lord were removed and burned.⁴⁸
8. The altars which *“the kings of Judah had made”* together with those made by Manasseh were broken down, ground to dust and thrown into the Brook Kidron.⁴⁹
9. Still other high places which Solomon had erected for the gods of the Sidonians, Moabites and Ammonites, were destroyed and broken into pieces so that what was left was filled *“with the bones of men.”*⁵⁰
10. The altar at Bethel and the high places which Jeroboam son of Nebat had made were broken down and burned.⁵¹
11. The high places and shrines in the cities of Samaria were destroyed and burned.⁵²
12. All the priests of the high places were executed.⁵³

After these reforms, still in his eighteenth year as king, aged 26 (622 BC), Josiah issued a command to keep the Passover according to the Law. He organised the priests and the sacrifices according to

42 2Kings 23:4.
43 2Kings 23:5.
44 2Kings 23:6.
45 2Kings 23:7.
46 2Kings 23:8.
47 2Kings 23:10.
48 2Kings 23:11.
49 2Kings 23:12.
50 2Kings 23:13,14.
51 2Kings 23:15.
52 2Kings 23:19.
53 2Kings 23:20.

all that had been commanded through David and Solomon, and such a Passover had not been kept “since the days of Samuel the prophet.”⁵⁴ Finally Josiah removed those who relied and consulted the mediums and spiritists, for it was the king's desire to follow the Lord wholeheartedly.⁵⁵

We can summarise these details in the chart of information below:



It is difficult to imagine the devastating effect of Manasseh and Amon's wickedness upon the nation. The length of time for which apostasy and false worship was indulged in, meant that the many spurious and evil practices drawn from pagan nations were deeply ingrained in the psyche and life of the people of God. When Jeremiah prophesied (probably beginning around 627 BC), one of the main issues he brought to light was the great apostasy of the people in the nation:

17 Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?
18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and *they* pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. ... **30** For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,” says the Lord. “They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. **31** And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 2Kings 23:21-23; 2Chronicles 35:1-19.

⁵⁵ 2Kings 23:24,25.

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 7:17,18,30,31.

From Jeremiah's prophecies we also note that the problems of the nation were not new. Ever since they left Egypt the people of God had drifted into sin and rebellion, and were increasingly rebellious refusing to heed the word of God delivered by the prophets:

25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending *them*.
26 Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.⁵⁷

Thus we are not expected to see the nation of Israel (Judah and Israel) as something permanent and fully accomplished in the grace and mercy of God. Rather we are to see the nation as a temporary affair which had other more important purposes, the most important of which was pointing to the Saviour and His permanent salvation. Nevertheless the provision of God in the Law, through the sacrificial system, in the priesthood, and through the prophets, was all intended to keep Israel separate from the nations and meant to provide a place for the Saviour to emerge. Rebellion from God and all the chaos that causes, was all the people's fault. They did not have to fall away repeatedly into sin, and the times of reform under Hezekiah and Josiah, for example, were at least reminders to the people that they ought not to fall into sin so readily. Repeated failure to obey God's commands served to indicate the depths of ingrained sin. So something greater was required – the gospel – which all the outward forms (the temple, the sacrifices, the experiences of the people) and all the inspired revelation given via the prophets pointed to. The essential message can thus be summed up as follows:

1. You must obey God for He is good and righteous.
2. Obey God and do as He requires using all that God has provided to help you (the Law, the sacrifices the temple and etc.).
3. You repeatedly fail in obeying God because you are sold into sin.
4. You cannot do what God requires even given all the help and provision God can bring.
5. You need a much deeper radical change which only God can bring.
6. Having received this radical change you are now able to obey the Lord.

Thus the general decline into deeper and deeper sin and evil is always what one must expect when

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 7:25,26.

viewing the history of mankind in a general sense. External restraints on this decline do stem the fall and flow into evil to some extent. The nation of Israel (then Judah and Israel) for many centuries preserved some stability and goodness compared to the surrounding nations, but this was never going to offer a permanent solution. On occasion there were reforms and returns to what God demanded such as at the time of Josiah, but in general the trend is decline. In the same way in modern times external adherence to Biblical principles by the UK and other western nations (through the law and various institutions such as the church) has kept evil at bay to some degree. At times also in our history there have been revivals where there is a return to godly principles within the nation. These were brought about by God, but in His sovereign rule He made use of godly preachers and preaching which declared the gospel and warned the people in full. Thus all the while time goes on the job of all godly people (who have experienced the radical inner change given of God) is twofold. At one and the same time we must not only point all towards the Saviour to be fully changed internally, but we must also call for reform. We know that reform (such as Josiah and Hezekiah brought about) will not ultimately work. Nevertheless without such reform chaos and evil will run rampant and destroy the lives of many. Do we not see this in our day? Wicked belief derived from evil teaching enables people to glibly destroy human life by abortion for the sake of convenience. Drug taking and the so-called entertainment industry brings other horrors we hardly ever acknowledge. We could add many other examples in the realm of family life, the workplace and so on. How we need to sound the note of warning to bring the nation we live in back to a good order which only God's revelation can provide! We know this will not ultimately save or bring to life, but unless we call for reform the only other choice is anarchy, chaos and deep evil. But then also our more important task is to preach the gospel. We shout loud and clear to one and all that they need a Saviour. The Bible and all its principles are the only ones by which we ought to organise our lives as a nation, but people need a radical inner transformation – the new birth – to reap the fruits of a permanent solution to the problems they face.

Brief outline of the book of Zephaniah and the arrangement of this work.

After the opening statement which informs us of what to expect ("*the word of the Lord*"), the prophecy can be divided up into three main sections.

1. The final destruction is coming – the day of the Lord. [1:2-18].
2. The call to seek the Lord, as the four corners of the world are to be judged. [2:1-3:7].
3. A message of comfort to the remnant who truly believe. [3:8-20].

The first chapter of this work will be limited to a discussion of the opening verse of Zephaniah, because it is (sadly) necessary in this day and age to establish the fact that what we have here is none other than a word from the living God whom is presented to us frequently in Scripture as “the word of God.” In chapter 2 we find the first major section of the book of Zephaniah opening with a blockbusting declaration of the final judgement which is similar in description to the flood of Noah's day (1:2-6). The final judgement is also illustrated by the forthcoming judgement on Jerusalem (1:7-13), and we are given a graphic depiction of the final “*day of the Lord*” (1:14-18). Chapter 3, which deals with the second major part of the book, begins with a call to repentance (2:1-3), and then presents a message to the nations at all four points of the compass of this coming judgement, (2:4-3:7). Finally, in chapter 4 there is a message of encouragement to the faithful, believing remnant (3:8-20). In chapter 5 we shall conclude with some comments on the implications of this very important prophecy.

Rationale and the issue of translation.

I must begin by stating that my prime purpose has been to make plain and expound the book of Zephaniah because it is a very needed message for our day. To that end I have set about to translate the Hebrew first. I must immediately qualify that last statement by adding that I have been guided and helped by a variety of sources to aid my work, such as commentaries, lexicons and Hebrew grammars. I do not claim to be a good or an expert Hebrew scholar, (I studied Hebrew for two years at WEST), but in that the Scriptures have been given to us in Hebrew I felt it necessary to go back to the original language, rather than rely on our English translations.⁵⁸ I hope that in my efforts to understand God's holy word I have not been amiss. I take what others have said and offered very seriously but have felt it important to come to the text personally rather than second hand. But in order not to appear over confident I have also made extensive use of my preferred English translation, the NKJV, (although other translations are also considered).

A note on the format of this work.

Apart from chapter 1, for which my translation is identical to that of the NKJV, the pattern of these studies is to provide my translation from the Hebrew alongside the NKJV rendering, so that the reader can see easily where slight differences can be observed. Where there are differences these have been explained within the body of the work. It will be noted that I have shown the text in a form which attempts to highlights how the passage ought to be viewed grammatically. Thus in

⁵⁸ WEST: Wales Evangelical School of Theology in Bridgend Wales. Now known as “UNION.”

general the text is set with subordinate themes indented, and in some instances some words and phrases might be highlighted. Having given a translation of the Hebrew, what follows in the body of the work is an attempt at explaining the main meaning and the provision of suggestions for application and points of teaching. This work is intended to be a devotional commentary, and so the most important thing is to see Christ in all His glory and thence come to love Him more and more doing all that He asks.

Although I have translated the whole of the book from the Hebrew as I have made clear, I do also make use of other translations to get the best meaning from the text. Quotes from the NKJV will appear in **red**, quotes using my translation will be given in **blue**, and where my translation is identical to the NKJV the quote will be left in black. Quotes taken from third parties will appear in **purple**.

Chapter 1.

Zephaniah 1:1.

The word of the Lord came to ...

NKJV	My translation
#1 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.	#1 1 The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah, son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. In the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah.

We begin our brief studies by noting the opening verse of the book which informs us of three important things.

- [1] The origin of his message,
- [2] The background and origins of the prophet, and
- [3] The time in which he ministered.

[1] The origin of his message.

The opening two words in Hebrew (דְּבַר-יְהוָה – the word of the Lord) are pregnant with instruction. We must not skate over them and simply assume that they are mere shorthand for saying “this is the message from God.” The first time we come across this phrase in Scripture occurs in Genesis 15 where we find Abram in a state of deep sadness and despondency. The interesting thing we note in Genesis 15 is that “*the word of the Lord*” is not simply an ecstatic vision, but a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be worth looking at the text a little more closely to see the full significance of this phrase. Remember Genesis 15 is the first time we come across the phrase “*the word of the Lord*” in Scripture, and so it is instructive as to how we should interpret it elsewhere. The text of Genesis 15:1-6 reads as follows:

1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” **2** But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my

house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" 4 And behold, **the word of the Lord came to him, saying**, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Verse 1 informs us that "*the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.*" This might be taken to mean simply that a message was imparted in some ecstatic way to Abram's mind. However the remainder of verse 1 reports the actual speech of the one titled "*the word of the Lord.*" In other words we have a conversation, for after the Lord speaks, Abram responds! The same construction is found in verse 4, but what clinches the idea of an appearance of the pre-incarnate Lord comes in verse 5 where we are informed that "*the word of the Lord,*" (referred to by the pronoun "*He*"), brings Abram outside and then speaks to him about the stars in the heavens. Clearly the text of Genesis 15:1-6 can only be understood if we see two people talking face-to-face.

A similar experience is to be found in 1Kings 19 where the prophet Elijah meets with "*the word of the Lord*" in person.

9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, **the word of the Lord came to him**, and **He** said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **10** So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." **11** Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord."⁵⁹

Elijah is despondent after all that has transpired in his contest with the prophets of Baal. Note that the word of the Lord is described as "*He*" again, and this person tells the prophet to go out of the cave (verse 11).

As just another example consider the experience of Jeremiah in his call. In Jeremiah chapter 1 we find that "*the word of the Lord*" signifies more than just a message imparted to the prophet, for it includes the very presence of heavenly messenger too. In Jeremiah 1:4 we read that:

... the word of the Lord came to me, saying.

and then in Jeremiah 1:9 we are informed that:

59 1Kings 19:9-11.

... the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me.

The word of the Lord must therefore have been present to touch Jeremiah's mouth.

Now in Zephaniah 1:1 we find the same basic Hebrew construction as found in the above examples namely (דְּבַר-יְהוָה). Significantly, though, in Zephaniah 1:1 the two Hebrew words which follow and which are translated as “*which came*” can be rendered as “*that is,*” or, in other words, “*which exists.*” A literal rendering of the opening words might go something like this:

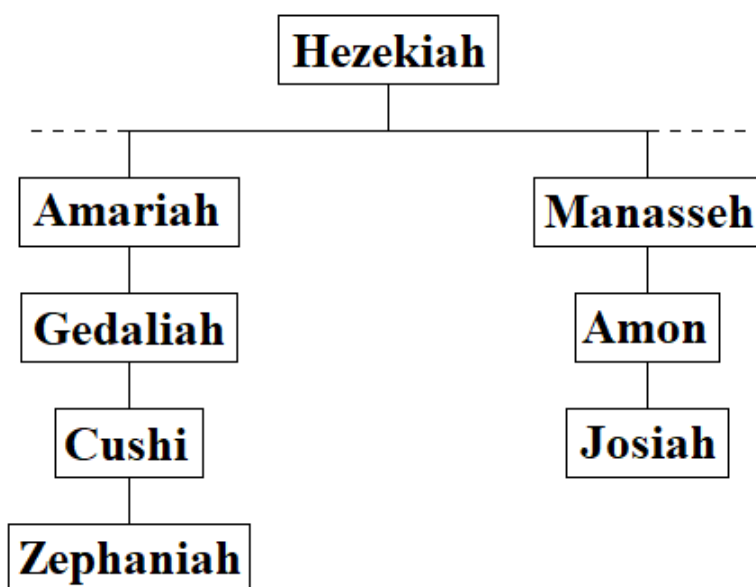
The word of the Lord – that/which – He is – to Zephaniah, the son of

Bearing in mind what we know already of the idea of the word of the Lord from Genesis 15, 1Kings 19 and Jeremiah 1, it is not surprising that the apostle John uses this title to refer to the pre-incarnate Christ in his opening chapter.⁶⁰ Consequently we must pause and consider that when a prophet speaks the very words of God, it must be because he has had a real encounter with the Word of God.

Throughout Zephaniah we are reminded that the words being uttered (and thence committed to writing) are indeed the very words of God, for six times we come to face the phrase “*says the Lord.*”⁶¹ Such a phrase serves to point us back to the real source of the message., the Word of God.

[2] The background and origin of the prophet.

Unusually the prophet tells us not just whom his father and grandfather were, but his great-grandfather and his great-great-grandfather as well. Why is this? Well it is clear that the intention is to show that Zephaniah was of the royal household. We are not entirely sure whom “*Cushi*” and “*Gedaliah*” may have been, but “*Hezekiah*” is (undoubtedly) the godly king of whom we read about



in the book of Isaiah. Zephaniah is thus the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah. After Hezekiah came

⁶⁰ John 1:1f.

⁶¹ Zephaniah 1:2,3,10; 2:9; 3:8,20.

the wicked king Manasseh, and then his son (who was even more wicked) Amon, followed by the godly reformer Josiah who came to the throne aged 8!⁶² In mentioning Hezekiah the king, it is certain that the prophet is identifying with the times when God was honoured. Perhaps it was thence an encouragement to Josiah the young king, for Hezekiah was his great grandfather.

Now Zephaniah's name is significant and it means: “the Lord stores up” or “the Lord hides.” We shall see why this is significant later on but there is a twofold application to be applied. The Lord will store up His wrath for the day of the Lord, and He will also keep and preserve a remnant for Himself.

[3] The time in which he ministered.

We have already outlined the historical circumstances to Zephaniah's prophecy in the introduction. Here we simply recall the fact that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah who was the son of Amon, king of Judah. Dates for these kings (and their predecessors) are shown in the table below. Josiah, of course, enacted many reforms both within the land and in the temple in Jerusalem after his conversion aged 16 (632 BC), particularly when he was 20 years old (628 BC), and then again aged 26 (622 BC).⁶³

It is highly likely that Zephaniah preceded Jeremiah as prophet and probably ministered during the opening years of Josiah's reign. From what we read in Zephaniah 2 we find that Assyria and its major city Nineveh were not yet conquered.⁶⁴ Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, rebelled against Assyria in 625 BC and then in 612 BC Nineveh was finally destroyed making Babylon the major power in the region. The final death knell for Assyria came in 609 BC at the battle of Carchemish resulting in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian rule being most prominent in the world of that time.

<u>King</u>	<u>Dates BC</u>
<i>Hezekiah as sole-regent</i>	715-695
<i>Hezekiah co-regent with Manasseh</i>	695-686
<i>Manasseh as sole-regent</i>	686-642
<i>Amon</i>	642-640
<i>Josiah</i>	640-609

62 2Kings 22:1. See introduction.

63 See introduction pages 5 to 8 for details.

64 Zephaniah 2:13.

Thus Zephaniah probably prophesied in the early part of Josiah's reign (640-628 BC). After Josiah's untimely death at Megiddo whilst fighting Pharaoh Necho in 609 BC, we find that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, makes Judah subservient. From then on it is only a matter of time before Judah is finally taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar with Jerusalem meeting its final destruction in 586 BC. During these final years Jeremiah is the main prophet bringing forth God's word.

Chapter 2.

Part 1: Zephaniah 1:2-18.

The end of the world is certain and it is coming!

The remainder of Zephaniah chapter 1 draws our thoughts to a doctrine which is surely completely forgotten in our day, namely the final judgement of God upon all sin and evil at the end of the age. But before we embark on unpacking these verses, a word is in order concerning how the doctrine of final judgement ought to be viewed. We cannot, and must not separate the theme of final judgement from the doctrine of the atonement. All sin and evil must be judged and dealt with. Not one iota of sin and evil will be left untouched. This is the message we read throughout the Scriptures, and in Zephaniah in particular. However we need to remember that what Christ came to do was to bear the punishment due to sin on behalf of His people – all those who put their trust in Him. In short, what Christ faced at Calvary for His people, will also be faced by those who are not a part of His company and who reject His offer of salvation. The atonement is often viewed as an achievement of grace and salvation, and so it is, but it also depicts the righteous judgement of God against sin and evil. In Zephaniah the prime emphasis and focus is on the coming judgement. The offer of salvation and the hope of redemption is present, of course, but it is not something that comes early in the book. We have to wait until the very last section of Zephaniah 3 for this hope.

In stating these thoughts it is vital that we recognise the Lord's order. We need first and foremost to recognise that rebellion, sin, and evil are truly truly wicked and deserve judgement. The passage of Zephaniah 1:2-18 can be split up into three parts as follows:

- [1] A universal destruction for the entire world. [1:2-6].
- [2] The Lord's sacrifice on the day of the Lord centred on Jerusalem. [1:7-13].
- [3] The great day of the Lord described in detail.[1:14-18].

[1] A universal destruction for the entire world.[1:2-6].

NKJV	My translation.
2 “I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,” says the Lord; 3 “I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land,” says the Lord. 4 “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the <i>pagan</i> priests— 5 Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; those who worship and swear <i>oaths</i> by the Lord, but who <i>also</i> swear by Milcom; 6 Those who have turned back from <i>following</i> the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.”	2 Gathering to destroy I will certainly cause everything to perish from the surface of the ground says the Lord. 3 I will cause to perish both man [Adam] and beast, I will cause to perish birds of the heavens and fish of the seas, and both that which causes offence and the wicked, and I will cut off man [Adam] from the surface of the ground says the Lord. 4 I will stretch out My hand upon Judah and upon all those dwelling in Jerusalem and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests. 5 and those that worship the host of heaven on the roof tops, and those that worship swearing to the Lord and swearing by Malekām. 6 and those that have slipped away from following the Lord and those which have not earnestly sought the Lord and have not gone regularly to Him.

I wonder if you would be as bold as Zephaniah to start your opening gambit by making such sweeping statements as we find here in verses 2 to 6? No holds barred and no punches pulled. It is instructive to note that the NASB version supplies the word “earth” in place of “land” found in the NKJV. The implication, then, is of a **universal** judgement and not one localised merely to the promised land.

Now the opening words of verse 2 are, in fact, “*utterly consume*” in the NKJV rendering. In my translation I have translated the words literally (“*gathering to destroy*”). The two Hebrew words used (אָסַף אֶת־) are the same consonantal form (’sp) but derive from different verbs. The first is from the verb “to gather,” but it can be taken in the sense of gathering to destroy. The second word is the verb “to consume” or “to perish/make an end of.” It is significant that the same two identical Hebrew words are to be found in Jeremiah 8:13 (“*I will surely consume them*”). The reduplication of the same words in Hebrew serves to emphasise the point made. But in this case although the words **sound** similar because they have the same three consonants, they are from different roots.

Such a construction suggests the idea of two actions occurring simultaneously. The Lord will gather to destroy and in so doing will utterly consume. Most English translations opt for some form of emphatic representation. It is not just that the Lord will destroy all things, but He will **utterly** destroy them. Now the consonantal form of these two verbs (**'sp**) can also be found in Genesis 8:21 where we read of the Lord's response to Noah's sacrifice following the universal flood. In the NASB version it reads like this:

The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will **never again** curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will **never again** destroy every living thing, as I have done."⁶⁵

The Hebrew words used translated "*never again*" in Genesis 8:21 are: לֹא-אֶסָּף, where the לֹא signifies the negative particle. It can be seen that the consonants are the same (**'sp**). John De Yong has suggested that Zephaniah, by using this same consonantal form as found in Genesis 8:21 for the two opening words of Zephaniah 1:2, means to emphasise the exact opposite of what we find in Genesis 8:21. Hence instead of "never again," we have an emphatic "I certainly will!"⁶⁶ Of course the Lord promised never again to judge the world with the waters of a flood, and this promise He has kept. Now we discover a promise that God will utterly judge the whole earth. But this time we shall discover that judgement will come by fire, not through water.⁶⁷

I wonder also if you observed further clear allusions to the story of the flood in Genesis in these words of Zephaniah? In verse 2 and at the end of verse 3 we have an expression which also appears in Genesis 6:7; 7:4; 8:8, namely "*from the face of the ground.*" In Hebrew the words are identical (מִעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה) in all five verses. The NKJV renders the last word in the phrase as "*land*" but the Hebrew word is better rendered "*ground*" because it is linked closely to the name "Adam," who was made from the dust of the ground.⁶⁸ In other words the utter consumption that the Lord is bringing is like the sweeping of the ground – He will wipe the face of the ground free from all things. Notice the comprehensive reference to the creatures to be destroyed. First it is "*man and beast,*" but then next we read that "*the birds of the heavens*" will be consumed and will perish, then the "*fish of the sea,*" and finally the idols ("*stumbling blocks*" or "*that which causes offence*"). Thus from the heavens (birds) to the depths of the seas (fish) and finally to the utter depths of degradation (idols), all will perish.

⁶⁵ Genesis 8:21, NASB.

⁶⁶ John De Yong. Making Sense in Zephaniah: An Intertextual Reading. PhD thesis. 2015. Auckland University. P62f.

⁶⁷ Zephaniah 1:17; 3:8. See also 2Peter 3:7,12.

⁶⁸ Genesis 2:7.

That such an utter destruction will be forthcoming is emphasised at the end of verse 3 by using the language of covenant: “*I will cut off man ...*” [literally: Adam]. The word translated “*cut off*” can be rendered as “covenant.” Adam was banished from the garden of Eden for his sin, but mankind will be cut off completely from the very surface of the ground. This covenant theme is continued in verse 4 where we find that the Lord will “*stretch out*” His hand. The first time this phrase is used comes in Genesis 22:10 where Abraham stretches out his hand to slay Isaac, a very clear picture of the atonement. Then also this idea of stretching out the hand comes throughout the book of Exodus and it seems to signify an act of judgement. For example,

So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do
in its midst; and after that he will let you go.⁶⁹

The same idea of judgement can be found in the following expression which is repeated five times in Isaiah:

For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still.⁷⁰

Then to emphasise the point even more, we note that the Lord will also “*cut off*” six things in verses 4 to 6. What is surely most striking though is that from verse 4 we switch from a whole earth viewpoint, to focus on “*Judah*” and “*Jerusalem*.” We note therefore, that the final judgement is the back-drop and template from which all temporal judgements must be viewed. Judah and Jerusalem face judgement, and this judgement is to be seen both with final judgement in view, and as a type of the final judgement to come. There is no escape. Even the people of God must be judged. How can this be? Where is the gospel? Has God forgotten grace? Not at all! Zephaniah is stressing the fact that sin and evil must be judged. In this case the reason is sixfold as we have already noted, and these six things are comprehensive. Six is the number that represents man, and these depict the six main failures evident in Judah and Jerusalem's rebellion, both of whom stand as a type for all man in his (or her) rebellion. We are thus brought face-to-face with our condition in a state of sin. What do we learn? The Lord takes issue with the following six things:

- [i] The remnant of Baal.
- [ii] The name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.

69 Exodus 3:20.

70 Isaiah 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4.

- [iii] Those that worship the host of heaven on the roof tops.
- [iv] Those that worship swearing to the Lord and swearing by Malekām.
- [v] Those that have slipped away from following the Lord.
- [vi] Those which have not earnestly sought the Lord and have not gone regularly to Him.

It is vital for us to consider the backdrop to Zephaniah's prophecy here by looking at the careers of king Manasseh and his grandson Josiah. Manasseh began his reign following on from his father (the godly Hezekiah), at the age of 12. The Chronicler sums up his reign like this:

1 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. **2** But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. **3** For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. **4** He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem shall My name be forever.” **5** And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. **6** Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practised soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. **7** He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; **8** and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.” **9** So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.⁷¹

It can be seen that the highlighted features are some of those that Zephaniah explicitly denounces. Josiah the grandson of Manasseh would seek to remove these abominations starting in the eighth year of his reign when he was sixteen. The details can be found in 2Chronicles 34 and 2Kings 23:

3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the moulded images. **4** They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which *were* above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the moulded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered *it* on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. **5** He also burned

71 2Chronicles 33:1-9.

the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.⁷²

3 Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. **4** And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. **5** Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. ... **10** And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. **11** Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who *was* in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. **12** The altars that *were* on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, the king broke down and pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron.⁷³

Again the highlighted sections cover the six areas that Zephaniah mentions in Zephaniah 1:4-6. These reflections on Judah's history from 2Kings and 2Chronicles reinforce the idea that Zephaniah prophesied in the very earliest years of Josiah's life. It is possible that Josiah's turning to the Lord may well have been influenced by Zephaniah's message. But how does this relate to us? Well whether you are a believer or not all six things characterise the problem of man. That is the problem man has, and continues to have.

[i] The remnant of Baal.

In the first place the Lord will judge and cut off what is described "*the remnant of Baal.*" Baal was the god of Canaan. There were, in fact, a number of Baals (for example: Baal of Peor, Baal Berith, Baal Zebub).⁷⁴ Each had a distinct mythology and set of rituals. However the chief deity was simply known as "Baal." This name means "lord," or "master." When we reconsider the opening words of the ten commandments and then reflect on the very nature of God, we must humbly acknowledge that, in the words of Isaiah:

72 2Chronicles 34:3-5.

73 2Kings 23:3-5,10-12.

74 Numbers 25:3; Judges 8:33; 2Kings 1:2f.

O Lord our God, masters besides You have had dominion over us.⁷⁵

What “lords” and “masters,” have we placed ourselves under? What “rulers” and “governors” have we served? These are sobering thoughts but we remind ourselves that the essence of all life starts with sin and iniquity. David declared that:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.⁷⁶

And whilst we know also from Genesis 1 that man was made in the very image of God, what we observe is that no man seeks God, and no man considers God to be Lord exclusively by nature. To a man we all have other “masters” and “lords.” Idolatry is ingrained in our sinful nature. It is not part of our created being, but it is what we all default to by (sinful) nature.

Idolatry starts off from the assumption that we are autonomous individuals with the right to self determination. The problem with this is, that although we are all individuals, we were not created to be isolated and self-determining. There is, in fact, an order to our created beings. We were made male and female in God's image primarily, so that we can reflect the trinity. This means that we are made to be in a relationship to God. We were made to be subordinate to the Lord. Further we were made in relation to one another because God made us male and female. Then finally we were made in relation to creation, over which (originally), we were meant to have dominion. All of these relationships have changed dramatically because of the fall into sin. Originally made to be ruler and have dominion over creation, now (following the fall and the flood) the animal kingdom lives in fear of man and our relationship has changed.⁷⁷ The one who now has dominion and rule over all creation is the second and last Adam.⁷⁸

This created order of, man in relation to God, man in relation to man, and man in relation with all creation, was broken at the fall, and now each individual operates from a different starting point. Instead of beginning with God and deriving all from knowing Him, we live and move from a base that we have constructed. The problem is that what we base our life on, is that which we worship and invest true value and meaning to. We do this because that is how we are created. We are created to worship what we value and give meaning to. If my life is based on the love I have for my wife, she becomes the centre and purpose for all that I do. However when she disappoints or

75 Isaiah 26:13.

76 Psalm 51:5.

77 Genesis 1:26f; 9:1f.

78 See Hebrews 2:5-9; Psalm 8; 1Corinthians 15:45,47.

when she grows old and fails to provide my life with meaning what will I do? If my life is based on money and possessions then where is the humanity and personality? If I ground my life on science then what does beauty and grace mean other than some mathematical equation or form of energy and matter in motion? Of course I must love my wife and please her! Of course I need money and certain possessions! Of course it makes sense to observe the world and mark the regularities God has put in place and make use of these! But these (and many other lords and gods besides) must not be the base, ground or first port of call. They ought not to be our “go-to,” our reliance.

Now the fact of the matter is that we were born in sin and rebellion, or, in other words, out of relationship to God, and so we have constructed a world view and gods to suit ourselves. We may have changed these from time to time, or we may have developed our idols and dressed them up to continue their worth to us. But when we become Christians all of these idols are shown up for what they are worth – nothing. The things God has given to us for our enjoyment and blessing (like a wife, money and possessions, knowledge and so on) are now put in their correct place. They are blessings, or tools, or co-workers and so on. When we are in right relationship to the Lord nothing else can take the throne and nothing else may have the pre-eminence.⁷⁹

[ii] The name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.

Now this second feature may seem somewhat puzzling. What have priests to do with man and his condition? Well let us unpack the precise words we have in our text for they reveal something which features in all of us. Literally rendered the text reads like this:

And I will cut off from this place, namely, the remnant of Baal, namely the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.

In my translation I have not translated the signs of the definite direct object which are sometimes put as “namely” because there is no need for them in English.

The Lord would remove completely and comprehensively all idolatry, (“*the remnant of Baal*”), as we have already noted, but He is also concerned to remove something else described here as “*the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.*” Transliterated this phrase would read in Hebrew:

’et šēm **haḵmārîm** ‘im **haḵōhănîm**

79 Colossians 1:18.

The two main words (highlighted in yellow) are close in sound form as shown by the consonants (***h-k-m-r-m*** and ***h-k-h-n-m***). The idea then is that the priesthood (the true and legitimate priests) were mixed up and intermingled with the false priests of Baal. There was no distinction nor separation between the two. Both were deeply co-mingled. More than this, the reputation or “*name*” of the idolatrous priests comes first, and the true priests are put at the end of the phrase almost as an aftermath. The principle is clear. When we mix true worship and practice with false, the false takes over and becomes that which is reputed and first and the true is left behind. Eventually it will be removed.

As an illustration of this general principle allow me to recount my experience teaching teenagers in a Christian school. I was employed to teach science from a Christian perspective. I will not elaborate here, but basically I had free reign to teach the students how to engage in the discipline of science from a Biblical starting point. Since Christ is the Creator and creation was not only through Him but for Him and to Him, this was an exciting opportunity.⁸⁰ The problem came when I was teaching those students who wanted to sit GCSEs. I organised all the material required for their exams on a Christian base, but because the emphasis of the required syllabus was anti-Christian (this shone through both in the selection of topics, the omissions of others, and the emphasis on evolution), there was a great tension. My students were wonderful, but when it came to the exams and revision they simply dumped any of the Christian base and elements and worked on what was required for the exams. To say that I was disappointed would be to make the greatest of understatements. What was really needed was to build an examination that agreed with the base and ground which I was building. However the tension between the godless and secular ethos and motivation of the GCSE syllabus with my Christian based teaching was stretched, and when push came to shove the default was to jettison the Christian element. Well you could say the fault was mine and I would be happy to accept that. However the point I am making is that when you try to mix a Christian emphasis with a godless system the outcome is always negative as far as the Christian element goes.

Coming back to the statement in Zephaniah the positive point to be made is that we need to be pure. We need to be separate and distinct. This is a difficult doctrine because we also need to be amongst people and within the world as a witness. We are a city set on a hill and a lamp that needs to be observed.⁸¹ But we need to be pure and separate. Our worship cannot be adulterated. We cannot worship the Lord in any compromising way. When a Roman Catholic, a liberal minded “Christian,” or one who denies the Son of God comes along and asks to officiate or lead in our

80 Colossians 1:16.

81 Matthew 5:14-16.

worship services we must respectfully decline the offer. People of all types, creeds and dispositions would be welcome to come to a worship service for these are public meetings, but we cannot allow a worship service and witness where the leaders are of different faiths!⁸²

[iii] Those that worship the host of heaven on the roof tops.

How many people do you know that worship the heavenly bodies whilst on their rooftops? I venture to guess that the number would be vanishingly small. But do not think for one moment that these words have no relevance to us. We might superficially speak of those who follow their horoscope or who dabble in astrology. There may not be many who dip their toes in these benighted and muddied streams, but for those that do, beware the dangers you are opening yourselves up to! Superstition is never a beneficial option, but grounding your life in the motion of the stars is even worse.

But perhaps you are not among the foolish who follow astrology. Do these words have nothing to say to you? Perish that thought! Consider the events following the flood. After a few brief years we find the rebel Nimrod leading a group into a new way.⁸³ The building of the tower was grounded in the establishment of a new religion and science. You might baulk at these words but pay attention to the story of Genesis 11. It is clear from the narrative that the aim of these rebels was to make a name for themselves. They used the latest technology and engineering to construct a tower the purpose of which was to reach the heavens. From this beginning we find later that the great civilizations of Egypt and Babylon were star-gazing and star-worshipping nations. Indeed the ancient megalith builders who built Stonehenge, Callanish, Carnac and countless other monuments, grave sites, and stone circles, did so with an eye to the heavenly bodies.⁸⁴ In these ancient times the science (knowledge base) of the nations were inextricably melded with the myth and religious beliefs which were held. These days, following Greek ideas, it is believed that faith and science ought never to mix.⁸⁵ The problem with this view is that we are created to believe, and, in point of fact, it is impossible to do or say anything without first having some form of belief. Even modern science starts with belief.⁸⁶ Consequently our modern scientists who deny faith any place in their

82 In my selection of examples the Roman Catholic leader has a message of salvation by works not by faith, whilst the liberal “Christian” is not Christian at all but wedded to the prevailing fashion of the times.

83 Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1f.

84 Professor Alexander Thom and many others have documented the remarkable alignments with sun, moon and stars at most of the ancient megalithic sites.

85 Thales of Miletus (circa 600 BC) was perhaps the first to divest knowledge from religion and those who succeeded him continued in the same path. Modern science picked up the theme and has pressed to separate belief from fact ever since.

86 Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld outline the belief basis of science in their work, “The Evolution of Physics.” Most histories of modern science acknowledge the faith basis of science.

thinking (and especially Christianity), have actually formulated a myth and religion of their own. For most modern scientists this mythology is grounded in humanism, reductionism and materialism. Like the Sadducees they declare that there is no spiritual existence, and neither can there be any resurrection. As atheists their first assumption is to declare that God does not exist and cannot alter the laws of science. There are many other things they believe without any justification, and with pride they inveigh against all who protest.

Now today modern science has made a great deal of the heavenly host! It is impossible to ignore the generally held view of existence which modern science has dictated, that the universe is about 13 billion years old and began in what is usually described by the phrase: “The Big Bang.” This phrase was coined by the astronomer and physicist Fred Hoyle. However Hoyle used the phrase dismissively because he believed that the idea was “irrational” and was outside of science!⁸⁷ In discussing the origin of the phrase, one writer has noted that:

It is “well known” that Hoyle coined the term “big bang” in a pejorative sense, to make fun of the idea of an exploding universe.⁸⁸

Hoyle, who believed in an eternal universe, was side-stepped by mainstream science and the current wisdom has adopted his term, pinning all their hopes on this new mythology. Please be assured that whatever else it may be, “Big Bang Cosmology” is nothing but an idea. We do not have the time, nor the space to establish this, save to say that modern science always operates with evidence and ideas inter-twinned. There is no neutral stance from which an observer can deduce truth from an observation. Each observer brings to his (or her) observations their own ideas and world view. You cannot view the universe without wearing some form of interpretive spectacles. The current set of goggles is the big bang paradigm.

Thus wherever you turn the modern assumption is that the universe is incredibly old and it is constantly evolving. Such a myth leads to the obvious conclusion that it will last a long time and things will change but only very slowly! Given that the average man (or woman) accepts this idea (because that is what is taught in schools and reinforced continually through the media), the outcome is a life based on what science has declared, a life based on a slowly changing ancient universe. Modern scientists go much further. Because of a belief in evolution, scientists like Brian Cox, David Attenborough and others hold the stars and what they refer to as “nature” in great esteem. Here is what one science writer, Lawrence M. Krauss, states:

87 <https://www.popsci.com/big-bang-term-origin-fred-hoyle/>

88 Big Bang: the etymology of a name: <https://academic.oup.com/astrogeo/article/54/2/2.28/302975>

The amazing thing is that every atom in your body came from a star that exploded. And, the atoms in your left hand probably came from a different star than your right hand. It really is the most poetic thing I know about physics: You are all stardust. You couldn't be here if stars hadn't exploded, because the elements - the carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, iron, all the things that matter for evolution - weren't created at the beginning of time. They were created in the nuclear furnaces of stars, and the only way they could get into your body is if those stars were kind enough to explode. So, forget Jesus. The stars died so that you could be here today.⁸⁹

I am, quite frankly, appalled that a man made in God's image can say "*forget Jesus*" because "*the stars died so that you could be here today.*" Of course the writer of these words is only talking about life on earth. He is wrong, of course, for the idea of evolution from stars is patent nonsense. What the Bible declares in its presentation of the good news is that Christ died that we might have life – eternal life.⁹⁰ Krauss is not the only scientist to venerate created things. The biologist David Attenborough points to our so-called ancestors as those to whom veneration is due:

We owe our existence to the first creature that walked out of the oceans.⁹¹

Whilst Brian Cox, the (surprisingly) popular TV science presenter has made the following statements:

From the smallest mote to the largest star we owe our existence to gravity which has sculpted who we are.⁹²

Our story is the story of the Universe. Every piece of everything, of everything you love and everything you hate, of the thing you hold most precious, was assembled by the forces of nature in the first few minutes of the life of the Universe, transformed in the hearts of the stars or created in their fiery deaths. And when you die, those pieces will be returned to the Universe in the endless cycle of death and rebirth. What a wonderful thing it is to be part of that Universe. What a story, what a majestic story.⁹³

Going back 13.3 billion years, there were no stars, planets or galaxies, just clouds of hot matter gravity hadn't clumped into stars. But ancient light reveals some regions of space were denser than others and acted as seeds for galaxies to form. We owe our

89 Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*. Simon & Schuster. 2012.

90 John 3:15; 6:54; 10:28; 17:2,3.

91 David Attenborough. The following quote comes from an article on Attenborough: 'wildly alive... we owe our existence to those ice-dwelling extremophiles... they hung on for 100 million years...'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8090747/David-Attenborough-in-the-beginning.html> David Attenborough: in the beginning. For his new TV series, *First Life*, Sir David Attenborough returns to the subject that first fired his imagination as a boy: fossils. By Rebecca Tyrrel. 9:00AM BST 29 Oct 2010.

92 Brian Cox. Trailer advertising this Sunday's (20/3/11) episode by Brian Cox on the universe.

93 Brian Cox. *Wonders of the Universe*. Harper Collins. 2011. P136.

existence to this. This light is called the cosmic microwave background. When emitted from the hot gases of the early universe, it would have been visible to our eyes.⁹⁴

The scientific creation story has majesty, power and beauty. and is infused with a powerful message capable of lifting our spirits in a way that its multitudinous supernatural counterparts are incapable of matching. It teaches us that we are the products of 13.7 billion years of cosmic evolution and the mechanism by which meaning entered the universe, if only for a fleeting moment in time. Because the universe means something to me, and the fact that we are all agglomerations of quarks and electrons in a complex and fragile pattern that can perceive the beauty of the universe with visceral wonder, is, I think, a thought worth raising a glass to this Christmas.⁹⁵

Such viewpoints amount to the idea of pantheism. This is the notion that whatever we may like to invest in the idea we refer to as “God,” is to be limited to what we observe, namely the universe. Thus “nature” has taken on a life and existence of its own, independent of the God of Scripture.

Do we laugh at and ridicule those who sit on top of their houses worshipping the stars? What then do we make of Cox and others whose testimony is that our existence is all down to gravity, star dust, and creatures that scrambled out of the seas? By giving the stars and the universe the honour of our creation, we end up worshipping them. Such is the culture and world view of those all around us, but God is not mocked! The Lord will cut off those that worship the stars like Brian Cox and all those that follow his lead. One day they will be struck by the terror of the Lord when He returns. They will cast their idols and ideas to the moles and the bats as Isaiah foresaw.⁹⁶ Oh how vital it is that we bring the gospel to bear and show up these wicked ideas for what they are!

[iv] Those that worship swearing to the Lord and swearing by Malekām.

This next feature which the Lord will cut off from man (and from Judah and Jerusalem) is one which is, perhaps, a bit more recognisable. Essentially it can be summed up in the expression “hedging ones bets.” The NKJV text reads as follows:

those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom

Once again the prime focus is our worship. What do we value and esteem? What do we give our lives to? What do we expend energy, time and money on? In this case the people had become

94 <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/389289/lights-fantastic-trip-back-in-time/>

95 The Atheist's Guide to Christmas. The Friday Project (Harper-Collins). 2009. The Large Hadron Collider: A Scientific Creation Story. Brian Cox. P83.

96 Isaiah 2:10f,20.

schizophrenic and had a divided heart. In my translation I have arranged the text to show the idea that the people were worshipping the Lord and “Malekām” *at one and the same time*:

and those that worship
swearing to the Lord
and swearing by Malekām.

The Hebrew word rendered “swearing” comes from the word that means “complete” or the number “seven.” The idea seems to be to “seven oneself,” or, in other words, to declare something seven times suggesting a complete and thereby total acceptance of what one is valuing or honouring. One other difference between the NKJV and my translation is that I have rendered the prepositions literally. The people were “*swearing to the Lord*” but they were also simultaneously “*swearing by Malekām*.” The NKJV does not distinguish the prepositions but the ESV and the NASB versions do. I think this is important. It would appear that the people still had an *outward* reverence for the Lord. They worshipped, swearing *to* Him. That is they spoke the right words and they offered the right outward obeisance to the Lord. However their worship *in practice* was *by* Malekām.⁹⁷ In other words their practice and action took on the rites and rituals of the false god Malekām. They compromised.

Who was this foreign god? Malekām was the god of the Ammonites who were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew.⁹⁸ In the NKJV this god is referred to as “*Milcom*” and “*Molech*” which names signify the idea of a king. This deity was one to whom child sacrifice by fire was offered.⁹⁹ Amazingly it was Solomon who accommodated to this practice at first in Judah.¹⁰⁰ Most images of the god Molech feature a large bronze statue of a seated man with a bull's head and outstretched arms. In some there are open compartments in the torso. The worshippers would light fires all around and beneath the statue and place their children in the arms or vacant compartments. To drown out the screams of the babies being scorched to death, the worshippers would bang loudly on drums and play flutes. Evidence of child sacrifice in ancient times is not hard to come by. There is evidence of child sacrifice at Carthage where the Phoenicians worshipped, and Tertullian, a north African church father of the the second and third centuries AD (155-220 AD), wrote about such practices.¹⁰¹

97 This is the transliterated form of the god's name.

98 Genesis 19:36-38; 1Kings 11:5,33; 2Kings 23:13.

99 Leviticus 18:21; 20:2; 2Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35.

100 1Kings 11:7.

101 James B Rives. “Tertullian on Child Sacrifice.” *Museum Helveticum*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1994, pp. 54–63. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24818326.

Such “worship” is disgusting and heinous of course. That Israel, the chosen of God, should indulge in it is worse than diabolical. But what of us? How can this be something which modern man is guilty? Well the answer to the question is obvious. Our age, at least since the late 1960s in the UK and from 1973 in the USA is witness to the worst form of human sacrifice imaginable. I refer, of course, to the wicked practice of abortion.¹⁰² In 2017 there were 679,106 live births recorded in England and Wales.¹⁰³ In the same year 197,533 abortions were performed.¹⁰⁴ Thus 22.5% of all pregnancies in 2017 ended in abortion. According to the Department of Health and Social Care, there were 205,295 abortions performed in England and Wales in 2018, which amounts to a 4% increase.¹⁰⁵ In the USA there have been somewhere between 52 million and 61 million abortions since 1973.¹⁰⁶ In the UK there have been almost 9 million abortions since 1968.¹⁰⁷ Thus somewhere between 60 and 70 million babies have been slaughtered in England, Wales and the USA! What about the rates of abortion in other countries of the world? These numbers are horrifying and we cannot point the finger at our forefathers of Biblical times in judgement.

But apart from such horrific sacrifice what about those who do make it into life in our realms? If we do not sacrifice our children to the god of women's rights and convenience, what do we do with our young? Instead of nurturing them in the ways of the Lord and in righteousness and godliness we offer them up to the god of entertainment and education. To what am I referring? Well how many children are stuck in front of the TV or plugged into some form of device? Is this not a sacrificing of our children to the gods of entertainment and our convenience? Children are given to us not for indulgence and not for abuse nor neglect. They are loaned to us so that we can develop them in all the godly ways of the Lord. Maybe you are a good parent and you would not dream of letting your precious ones go like this, but what education do you give them? If you are not educating your own children (I say this to my shame), you are abrogating responsibility to others

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2544728/Ancient-Greek-stories-ritual-child-sacrifice-Carthage-TRUE-study-claims.html>

102 Abortion was legislated on in David Steele's bill passed in 1967, and in the USA the famous Roe vs Wade case made abortion an option in 1973.

103 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2017>

104 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/763174/2017-abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-revised.pdf

105 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/808556/Abortion_Statistics_England_and_Wales_2018_1_.pdf

106 <https://eu.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/reality-check/2015/03/06/million-abortion-claims-checks/24530159/>

<https://nrlc.org/uploads/factsheets/FS01AbortionintheUS.pdf>

107 https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/uk_abortion_statistics/

whose aims and methods are certainly not godly these days. By allowing our children to be indoctrinated by the secular view of life enshrined in the National Curriculum – a document crafted from the fires of atheism and humanism – we are simply offering them in passive sacrifice to the god of this world. It is no wonder that so many children growing up abandon all hope of faith in God. Anecdotally I can report that in my father's era Scripture study and even memorisation was normal in most schools. We had some dear old friends now with the Lord who grew up in the early part of the twentieth century, who told us that their Scripture knowledge came from school not from church attendance! Nowadays such a notion is unthinkable. Instead our children are pushed into view points that not only flatly contradict Scripture, they hold such views in utter contempt! Why send your child to such a place?

It is time for Christian people to take a stand. We need to remove our children from the clutches of the secular gods and train them in the ways of the Lord. Currently we are guilty of this censure and sin as expounded by Zephaniah. We have worshipped swearing to the Lord as we attend our churches and speak about our faith, but we have also worshipped swearing by Molech as we allow our children to be taught by the godless, and entertained by the devil.

[v] Those that have slipped away from following the Lord.

Life is dynamic. When you realise that you cannot last three minutes without oxygen, you cannot survive three hours in an extremely harsh environment, you cannot survive three days without water, and you cannot survive three weeks without food, we begin to understand that life is not just fragile it is highly dependent. Unless we have oxygen, water, food and shelter we cannot survive. All of these factors show us that life operates only within set parameters. We constantly need a supply of oxygen, water and other elements, and we are constantly in need of warmth. Furthermore we also need to get rid of many things too! Life is not just dynamic – reliant on input and output – it is also dependent. But perhaps the most important thing of all that we are dependent upon, which we all miss, ignore or take for granted, is the Lord God Himself. Without God we would not exist. Without God we could not continue to exist. Without God life becomes meaningless. Brian Cox from his understanding of physics declares:

My view is that we humans represent an isolated island of meaning in a meaningless universe, and I should immediately clarify what I mean by meaningless. I see no reason for the existence of the universe in a teleological sense; there is surely no final cause or purpose. Rather, I think that meaning is the emergent property.¹⁰⁸

108 <https://www.discardedimage.com/?p=8746>

How can meaning emerge? Exactly what does such a statement mean? And yet the whole of creation screams: God Is! The heavens declare God's glory, and all of creation witnesses to God and His infinite nature.¹⁰⁹ And in the words of the God who can be known:

The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; *but* Israel does not know,
My people do not consider.¹¹⁰

They do not know Me!¹¹¹

Such thoughts are beyond incredible. How is it that man does not know God? Given all the evidence, including creation, the cross, and our fallen nature, how is it that we do not know God? The only answer is that we “*suppress the truth in unrighteousness*” as Paul put it.¹¹² Thus all mankind drifts and wanders in a sea of unknowingness.

But what about the believers and those who fear God? The danger of drifting from God's presence and love is ever present. So many things in life need to be re-calibrated and re-set. Think of your car, its tyres, and how the wheels are balanced. Think of various instruments and measures which need to be checked against a standard. So too we as believers need to re-calibrate and re-set ourselves because the tendency in the fallen world is to drift. Heed what the apostle wrote to the Hebrews:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.¹¹³

Elsewhere in Scripture we are instructed to *set our minds on things above* (i.e. heavenly things), to *keep our minds stayed on the Lord* and to *keep ourselves in the love of God*.¹¹⁴ Further we read exhortations to *lay hold on the hope of eternal life* set before us, to *press on towards the goal* and upward call of Christ, and to *guard our hearts and minds* and that which has been committed to us.¹¹⁵ The idea that we can simply coast and allow things to go along without any effort on our part is woefully short of the mark. The other side of this injunction not to drift, is, of course, to seek with earnestness and vigour. Do we not want to know the Lord? Do we not eagerly await His voice as we

109 Psalm 19; Romans 1.

110 Isaiah 1:3.

111 Jeremiah 9:3.

112 Romans 1:18.

113 Hebrews 2:1.

114 Colossians 3:1; Isaiah 26:3; Jude 1:21.

115 1Timothy 6:12,19; Hebrews 6:18; Philippians 3:12,14; 4:7; 1Timothy 6:20.

open His word, hear a sermon or come to prayer? The natural tendency of the fallen nature is to drift away from the Lord. Sin always likes to keep company with its own and it cannot abide the holiness of the Lord. But then the new regenerated nature is equally determined but in the opposite way. The new nature says:

O God, You *are* my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. ¹¹⁶

My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. ¹¹⁷

I spread out my hands to You; my soul *longs* for You like a thirsty land. ¹¹⁸

Or think of the many statements where the apostle Paul outlines his determination to know Christ, His crucifixion and His sufferings.¹¹⁹ Are we so determined? Do we strive to enter through the narrow gate? Are we willing to set and re-set our minds? Do we put before us the glories of the King? These are the attitudes of the new nature.

In my translation I have opted to translate the preposition often rendered simply as “from after” by the word “*following [after]*.” I have done this because this is the positive opposite of the statement made about drifting from. The ESV agrees with this idea offering the following rendering of verse 6:

those who have turned back from following the Lord ...

The Lord Jesus called many to come and to follow after Him. This is what is missing often times. Do we forsake all and follow after the Master? If we do not, then be assured that we are drifting and slipping away from truly knowing the Lord. In my early days as a Christian I was often being told that if I was not growing in the grace and knowledge of God then I would be falling away. You cannot keep on an even steady course doing neither one thing or the other. Somehow we have lost this earnestness in truly seeking after the Lord Jesus!

116 Psalm 63:1.

117 Psalm 84:1.

118 Psalm 143:6.

119 Galatians 6:14; 1Corinthians 2:2; Philippians 3:10.

[vi] Those which have not earnestly sought the Lord and have not gone regularly to Him.

This leads us naturally into the positive aspect of truly seeking the Lord. It is worth comparing the NKJV translation with my attempt. The NKJV suggests the following translation:

and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.

My translation fleshes this out a bit as there are clearly two ideas contained in the Hebrew clause:

and those which
have not earnestly sought the Lord
and have not gone regularly to Him.

In the Hebrew we have:

וְאֵשֶׁר “and those which”
לֹא-בִקְשׁוּ אֶת-יְהוָה “have not earnestly sought (namely) the Lord”
וְלֹא דָרְשׁוּהוּ “and have not visited Him”

The idea is of making a long journey to visit someone with the aim of interviewing them and inquiring of them. I wonder in our flippant, quick-fix, instant lifestyle, if we ever have time for this type of earnest seeking and inquiring of the Lord? Oh! I am not talking about filling your head with knowledge of what Calvin or Lloyd-Jones or ... may have said so that you can look good to your peers or answer someone in a debate. What I am talking about is through your diligent study of Scripture on your knees (i.e. in earnest prayer and supplication) you find sweet fellowship with the King! For those of you who know this wonderful experience of God – press on, keep pursuing Him! Bear in mind that fellowship with God is fellowship with the “Holy One” and fellowship with true light! I am sometimes rather bemused by those who speak often of the Spirit and their ecstatic experiences when they seem to have forgotten that the Spirit is really the **Holy** Spirit. We are to be very concerned with the pursuit of holiness, because that is the very character of God. The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this:

Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.¹²⁰

120 Hebrews 12:14.

Do you see the twofold instruction here? Be at peace with all. Do everything you can to be at peace with all men. But then equally important is to pursue holiness because without this we cannot be in the presence of God. You dare not come in your own strength, and you dare not come as a sinner who is happy to remain in the practice of sin. The Lord is gracious to forgive those who confess and repent of all sin, but He seeks worshippers who desire to know Him in spirit and *truth*.¹²¹

[2] The Lord's sacrifice on the day of the Lord centred on Jerusalem. [1:7-13].

NKJV	My translation
7 Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests. 8 “And it shall be, in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. 9 In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit. 10 “and there shall be on that day,” says the Lord, “the sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crashing from the hills. 11 Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off. 12 “And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’ 13 Therefore their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit <i>them</i>; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.”	7 Be quiet! Before the face of the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is drawing near. For the Lord has established His sacrifice, He has consecrated those whom He has called out. 8 And it shall be in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice that I will punish (upon) the princes, and (upon) the king’s sons and all those clothed with foreign clothing. 9 And I will bring punishment upon all that leap upon the threshold in that day, those that fill their master’s house with violence and deceit. 10 And it shall be in that very day, says the Lord, a voice exclaims from the fish gate, and a wailing from the second quarter, and a great breach from the hills. 11 Howl! You who sit in the Mortar! For all the merchant people (Canaan) were cut off/undone (struck dumb). They were cut off all who were laden with silver. 12 And it shall be at that time, I will investigate Jerusalem with searchlights. And I will punish (upon) the men who are congealed/settled upon their lees, those that are saying in their hearts, “He will not do good nor will He do evil.” 13 And it shall be that their strength/wealth will be for booty, and their homes (given) to desolation. They shall build houses and not dwell in them, and they shall plant and they shall not drink the wine (produced).

¹²¹ John 4:24.

We come now to a new subject in the overall theme which has as its prime focus: the judgement of God. In this section the emphasis is on sacrifice. A word is in order at this point concerning sacrifice which many modern writers fail to observe. It is fashionable to state that the Lord has *accommodated* Himself to the practice of sacrifice as observed by the ancient Near East cultures.¹²² In other words, the ancient Near East cultures like Egypt and Babylon probably adapted a more ancient practise from primal tribes who sought to placate their concept of the gods (whomever they may be) by sacrifice. This type of argument owes everything to an evolutionary framework and an acceptance of all things that modern scholarship (in particular archaeology) can muster, and nothing whatsoever to truth. The truth is that the concept of sacrifice is a God-given notion. To start with, we note that the coming of the Saviour into our world was not only for the express purpose of sacrifice, but was, in point of fact, a plan foreordained before all creation.¹²³ The very first sacrifice was performed by the Lord in the garden of Eden to provide clothes for fallen Adam and Eve.¹²⁴ Some argue that this is not what was intended there, but in response we must reply: how else would you get skins except through the killing of an animal which necessitates the shedding of blood? Following this Abel showed that he offered a **better** sacrifice than Cain, because he offered from the firstborn of the flock and of their fat, whilst Cain offered from the (cursed) ground.¹²⁵ We know that Abel's offering was better because it was a sacrifice that involved the shedding of blood, and the New Testament writers tell us that his offering was preferred.¹²⁶ The next time we read of sacrifice is when Noah leaves the ark. His first act is to worship the Lord with burnt offerings.¹²⁷ All of these instances derive from the instruction that the Lord gave the patriarchs. First to Adam and Eve, then to Cain and Abel, and thence further to all their posterity. Noah brought the teaching through the flood to the new washed world, and at the time of Moses some eight centuries later it was all formalised and set down in Scripture by the Lord's own hand at Mount Sinai. Thus the concept of a blood sacrifice is an idea that was formulated and taught by the Lord Himself, and not something He borrowed from cultures who had decided this was a good way to placate the forces of nature.

What, then, exactly is meant by “*the Lord's sacrifice*”? From what follows in verse 7 onwards it would *appear* to be a slaughter of judgement on the people of God for their sin and evil. It would seem that in the overall scheme of material in Zephaniah, that whilst he is prophesying the

122 Modern scholarship speaks of the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt as the “ancient Near Eastern” cultures.

123 Matthew 25:34; Mark 10:45; Acts 2:23; 1Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8.

124 Genesis 3:21.

125 Genesis 4:1f.

126 Hebrews 9:22; 11:4; 12:24; 1John 3:2; Jude 1:11.

127 Genesis 8:20.

final destruction of the entire earth, we are to note here that judgement begins at the house of the Lord. Looked at in another way, we see that the judgement upon God's representative comes first as the great means of deliverance. Taken in this way, we must see this as a pre-figuring of the atonement of Christ on Calvary's cross.

We shall consider our text under the following four headings, which arise from our analysis:

- [i] Quiet!
- [ii] The day of the Lord – a day of punishment.
- [iii] The characteristics of those to be offered up to judgement.
- [iv] The searchlight of God.

[i] Quiet!

7 Be quiet! Before the face of the Lord God!

Verse 7 begins with a single word, the form of which comes as a command with an intensive active voice. I have rendered the term “*Be quiet!*” But it could equally be translated as “Hush!” or “Silence!” The Hebrew word is not often used. Another example can be found in the book of Habakkuk where it is given as “*silence*”:

But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him. ¹²⁸

Thus here we have the imperative command to silence. And then we are given the reason for this, it is because the Lord is making an appearance. We are commanded to be quiet because “*the face of the Lord God*” has come! In the presence of God none can offer advice or make excuses. When He appears it will be in so much light and glory that the idea of anyone having an objection or of raising a query is not only unthinkable but preposterous. When the Lord's presence is near who would dare to speak?

Thus when the Lord appears finally at the end of time, none will be able to answer Him, raise objections, or ask questions, because He will appear in the fullness of light and with a flaming fire to burn all that is evil and wicked.¹²⁹ Before He returns to judge the living and the dead there is opportunity to question, to inquire and to wrestle with the truths of God. I do not mean that we can call anything God says in His word into question as though it may be wrong. Not a bit of it! What I

¹²⁸ Habakkuk 2:20.

¹²⁹ 1Thessalonians 1:7,8.

mean is that now, at this time, we can inquire and seek and be challenged and ask questions with the aim of coming to an understanding concerning the things of God, but when the Lord returns there is no more room for this. Time is up! Silence! Do you not think that the infinite God has thought of all things? In providing salvation through Christ and in making the offer freely available to all mankind, is it not the height of presumptuous folly to come to the end of all things and make an objection? Who are you O man that you think that you can out-think God? Preposterous! When the Lord returns in flaming fire to bring all evil and sin to an end there can be no objection and no query.

In Psalm 46:10 we read the following words which have found their way into a popular chorus:

Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

The chorus applies this to the Christian in a positive manner, with the idea of a promise. If we still ourselves (our hearts and minds) then we can know the Lord.

Be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

However the Psalmist is not making this connection. Rather the idea is that the nations and peoples who have caused havoc and ruin through war and strife will be brought to a point of hanging down their hands, of giving up and of ceasing to strive. The word rendered "*be still*" in Psalm 46:10 may be better translated as "let be," or "give up." Such a sentiment may be part of what is being expressed in Zephaniah 1:7 but the idea is more of a command which cannot be disobeyed. Imagine a very strict headmaster entering a room of rowdy boys in the nineteenth century where simply the appearance of the headmaster would be enough to bring all to attention in absolute silence. That is the picture here.

[ii] The day of the Lord – a day of punishment.

Whilst the sacrifice and the punishment inflicted appears to focus on Jerusalem, we often find in Scripture a mix of the universal nature of judgement with the particular.¹³⁰ These verses we are now considering follow on from the universal nature of the judgement upon the earth given in the first six verses. The judgement is particularised here, but Jerusalem is put as an example to us and as a warning, not as an isolated instance about which we might care less.

At first reading the natural man recoils from the words found in Zephaniah 1:7f. However we must bear in mind the fact that the idea of the Lord's sacrifice centring on the judgement of sin and evil is also to be found in the major prophets. Isaiah speaks of judgement against Edom, the nation which depicts fallen sinful human nature.¹³¹ The prophet declares that the sword of the Lord will fall *"on the people of My curse."*¹³² This sacrifice is described as the *"day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion."*¹³³ In Jeremiah the same idea of the Lord's vengeance is described, but this time judgement falls in *"the north country by the River Euphrates,"* that is the nation responsible for capturing Jerusalem and Judah.¹³⁴ In Ezekiel the picture is of judgement not against one country or nation but against *"the nations."* In this prophecy the judgement is depicted as a *"sacrificial meal"* which the Lord sacrifices for His people.¹³⁵ In Zephaniah the judgement falls upon the people of Jerusalem. Thus none can escape this full and final judgement of God. The same type of prophecy is also to be found in the last book of the Bible, Revelation:

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "come and gather together for the supper of the great God, **18** that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great." **19** And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. **20** Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. **21** And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.¹³⁶

130 Micah 1:2-5; Habbakuk 3:3-15.

131 Isaiah 34:5f.

132 Isaiah 34:5f.

133 Isaiah 34:8.

134 Jeremiah 46:10.

135 Ezekiel 39:17,19,21.

136 Revelation 19:17-21.

However we must not rush our reading and understanding of this text because there is a lot more to be said, and the popular concept of a God who judges and takes delight in slaughter is something we must avoid at all costs, because it is simply grotesque. The issue confronting us is this: sin and rebellion have been flaunted against a good, holy and righteous God. Sin and evil can never be accepted alongside holiness and purity. Think what care is taken when sensitive electronic equipment is being made, or when foodstuffs are being prepared. When silicon chips are made the workers are isolated in “clean rooms” and are covered with overalls and masks to prevent them from contaminating the components. If we take such care with mere consumer goods how much more must we take with the pure and holy God? Furthermore, we must fully take on board and consider wisely just whom it is we have affronted and rebelled against. We discount and belittle sin and rebellion, but the fact of the matter is that whilst to wrong another requires justice, the wronging of one who is infinite in holiness and purity demands even greater justice – infinite in extent.

Now apart from these thoughts we need to consider the text and what it has to say to us particularly. First, we note that the way in which this sacrifice is presented to us reminds us of the circumstances of David's anointing found in 1Samuel 16. Saul has been rejected as king and the Lord tells Samuel to go to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice. When he gets there the elders are terrified because they are not at all sure why Samuel has come. Samuel's response is pertinent to our text because it shows us how sacrifices were a means of fellowship. Samuel responds to the elders in the following way:

And he said, “peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.¹³⁷

To come to this sacrifice, which was offered to the Lord, the people invited must be sanctified or consecrated. Now in Zephaniah 1:7f we find that in this sacrifice of the Lord, those invited (“*His guests*”), have actually been set apart, in other words, made holy or consecrated. The NKJV translation is weak in the second half of verse 7. A comparison with my translation and other modern versions shows this clearly (see table on the next page). Thus, this judgement is truly a sacrifice. What then do we learn from these words? There are four key points we need to consider from verses 7 to 9.

137 1Samuel 16:5.

NKJV	My translation	ESV	NASB	NIV
For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests.	For the Lord has established His sacrifice, He has consecrated those whom He has called out.	The Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests	For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests.	The Lord has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.

First we must consider that this is the “*day of the Lord.*” This is not a day for man, or a day of man, or a day in which man is centre. The days of the week created by God in Genesis 1 were for man. Many confuse things in attempting to appease the world of science by calling the days in Genesis “days of God.” Such a notion is nonsense because God does not have any need of days since He is eternal.¹³⁸ Here, however, the day of the Lord is a time that God has set for final judgement. We note then that this day will be set by God, and will be a time in which God will be glorified universally. There is no room whatsoever for the pride or arrogance of man. That is why the passage begins with the command to silence.

Second we learn that this day of the Lord is a day of “*His sacrifice,*” and “*the day of the Lord's sacrifice.*”¹³⁹ Immediately on hearing these words we cannot but be reminded of the sacrifice at Calvary. Surely, the sacrifice which stands head and shoulders supreme above all others, is that of the promised One prophesied since Adam and Eve's fall.¹⁴⁰ What other sacrifice does the Lord really have? Since before the creation the incarnate Word has been the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*”¹⁴¹ The Father sent the Son to be a ransom for many, a sweet smelling sacrifice, and a propitiation for sinners.¹⁴² Thus the Lord in His infinite purity and holiness will bring to judgement all sin and rebellion once-for-all at the end of time. If we know anything about the nature of God, we know that He cannot tolerate sin and evil. They are an affront to His beauty and truth – to His holiness – and sin, rebellion and evil must not be allowed to exist in the face of the beauty and glory of God. Of course the prime intention of this passage in Zephaniah is to convey the idea of dealing with sin and rebellion by judgement. So how can I point our thoughts to the sacrifice on Calvary? What right and merit do I have for this? In answer, what I would suggest is that because the holiness of God demands that all sin be judged, any vestige of it cannot be allowed space or existence. The Lord prepared before creation to come as a willing sacrifice for sin. His great act of being the

138 Those who favour poetical or framework views of Genesis suggest such an interpretation. Genesis 1, however, is an historical account and must be taken literally with regard to the days.

139 Zephaniah 1:7,8.

140 Genesis 3:15. See, for example Psalm 22; Isaiah 53 etc.

141 Revelation 13:8.

142 Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1Timothy 2:6; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 4:18; Romans 3:25; 1John 2:2; 4:10.

willing victim and offering achieved fully the judgement upon all sin once-and-for-all. However here in Zephaniah (and also in Isaiah and Revelation) the prime focus is not so much on the substitute but on the need for true justice to be done. Think then of the judgement depicted here as being on all who disobey God and who rebel, but the supreme example of judgement came upon the Lord Jesus at Calvary who, as a type of Jerusalem, was representative of the nation and who carried the sins of those whom He saves to be dealt with utterly. Just as Jerusalem was being offered as a sacrifice with all within its bounds being judged, so too the Lord Jesus who bore all His people to the cross, was judged for their sin. In such an act, all who trust in Christ and who are united in Him have been punished once-and-for-all. I would also suggest that the phraseology used is intended to point us to the sacrifice of Christ even though that isn't the main thrust. What I believe we must see here is the fact that Christ's sacrifice was for the punishment and judgement of sin. We tend to think mainly of Christ's death on the cross as a work of salvation *for us*. This is wonderfully true, of course, but here we are presented with the notion of the need for all sin and evil to be righteously judged. When sin and evil is properly dealt with, this is glorifying to the Lord. Even man in all his rebellion and sin sees the need for justice to be done. Usually such a call for justice is only ever heard when it concerns a single individual. How sad it is when we forget that all sin deserves justice. And so the Lord has brought "*His sacrifice*" which will deal fully and finally with all sin and unrighteousness. In Christ's death the Lord has dealt with all sin and evil for those who will have put their trust and hope in Him. Those who continually refuse to trust to Christ for forgiveness must have their sin and evil judged on this final day of the Lord.

The third feature we shall focus on is the idea that the Lord has some whom He has consecrated and called out to partake of this sacrifice. To whom is the Lord referring? Most commentators assume that the Babylonians who would conquer Jerusalem are being referred to. But surely in this case the instruments being set apart for the work of God are by no means those whom the Lord has chosen as His elect? We learn elsewhere that often the instruments of God's judgement sometimes act in excess, (although continually under the sovereign guide and control of God), but here we note that the Lord sets apart the instruments of His choice.¹⁴³ These instruments can be vessels for honour or dishonour depending on how the Lord uses them.¹⁴⁴ Given that the language used here is akin to that used in 1 Samuel 16 where (as we have noted) Samuel calls Jesse's family to consecrate themselves before coming to the sacrifice, it seems best to think of these words in Zephaniah as referring to the Lord's chosen who will partake of the feast accompanying the

¹⁴³ Even though it may look like excess from a human perspective, none can overstep the mark as far as God has determined because all is under His care and sovereign hand. Zechariah 1:15.

¹⁴⁴ 2 Timothy 2:21,22.

sacrifice.

Now if we turn our thoughts instead to the great sacrifice on Calvary, we are brought face-to-face with the Lord's supper. This is the meal which celebrates Christ's offering of Himself – the Passover meal. It seems best then, to have in view here God's full and complete judgement of sin and evil which occurs in two closely linked parts. First at Calvary where the sins of the world are judged (that is all those who truly believe from all nations and families on earth), and then second at the final judgement where all who have rejected Christ will reap the rewards they deserve. If our focus is on the final judgement day, we cannot help but think of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Our Saviour spoke of this great marriage feast in parable. For our purposes the key point in the story is when the king comes among the guests:

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. **12** So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’¹⁴⁵

Even though he was among the guests, because this one man did not have any wedding garments – indicating his right to be there – he was cast into the “*outer darkness*.” It is vital that in receiving Christ we are consecrated and sanctified by the Lord. If we come to Christ and do not agree to be clothed in Christ (His righteousness, His life, His truth, His goodness and so on), we will be no better than this man in our Saviour's parable.

The fourth and final aspect is that it is a time of punishment (“*I will punish*”).¹⁴⁶ The word used essentially means “to visit” and can be used either positively or negatively. In other words it can mean “to appoint” and it can also mean “to punish.” The main idea seems to be an inspection of something to see what it deserves. Just as Belshazzar was “*weighed in the balances, and found wanting*,” so all must face the inspection of God, and the holding to the standard.¹⁴⁷ Why then not face it now where there is a willing substitute who will take the punishment and give in exchange the righteousness we need? We all need to recognise that we do not measure up! There is only One who does – Christ Jesus the sinless One.

145 Matthew 22:11-13.

146 Zephaniah 1:8.

147 Daniel 5:27.

[iii] The characteristics of those to be offered up to judgement.

Verses 8 to 11 tell us precisely whom is about to face this punishment and judgement. Remember that Jerusalem is put here as an example. They are to be judged for their wickedness, but all who follow Jerusalem in sin will face the same outcome.

First we are informed of the types or identities of the people to be judged, namely, “princes,” “king’s sons” and “all those clothed with foreign clothing.” The term “princes” indicates leaders and rulers. These tended to be the “king’s sons” and so were true princes. However, even though these two terms are synonymous, it would seem that the intention is to cover all types of leaders and rulers including those related to the king.

Then we find a change in thought. The Holy Spirit next introduces a very general category of people defined by their *outward* appearance. Now since we have been considering sacrifice, it is natural to be reminded of coverings (clothing) from the first ever sacrifice found in Genesis 3:21, where Adam and Eve were clothed in animal skins. Here the people were not covered with that provided by the Lord – the righteousness which He brings, but instead were dressed in the apparel of the nations. This may have been glittering and gorgeous to the eyes, unlike mere animal skins worn by Adam and Eve, but they were hopelessly inadequate. Whenever we adopt foreign practices alien to the Scriptures we are dressing ourselves in sin and error. When a church thinks its main focus ought to be entertainment and social justice rather than declaring the gospel from the word of God then it is guilty of wearing “foreign clothing.” How stupid we are! The clothes provided by this world may seem to be appealing and fine but they do not cover us! Only that which the Lord has supplied does.

In verse 9 the characteristics depicted concern outward actions and behaviour. Two chief actions are given here. One is a superstition based in Philistine culture, and the other is a general disposition of selfishness illustrated by aggression and lying. The first phrase (“all that leap upon the threshold”) points us back to the occasion when the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant through the folly of the elders of Israel. The reader may remember that things in Israel had come to a very low ebb and that the high priest’s sons (Hophni and Phinehas) were despicably evil. Thus in order to battle against the Philistines the elders thought that the mere presence of the ark of the covenant would clinch the battle. The truth was that their hearts were far from God. Hophni and Phinehas, for example, were “corrupt,” “they did not know the Lord,” and they had perverted the sacrifices.¹⁴⁸ The elders of Israel had no thought of seeking the Lord. They were puzzled as to why the Lord had allowed them to be defeated by the Philistines, and strangely they reasoned that if they

148 1Samuel 2:12f.

only brought the ark of the covenant to the battle then all would work in their favour!¹⁴⁹ The outcome was terrible. The high priest and his sons died, and the wife of Phinehas died in childbirth naming her son *“Ichabod”* because the glory of God had departed from Israel.¹⁵⁰ It is true that the Philistines feared this action, but it only served to help them to raise their game and put steel into their determination.¹⁵¹ And so, when the Israelites were utterly defeated, the Philistines took the ark of the covenant and placed it into the their temple to Dagon, setting it besides the idol.¹⁵² Obviously this was a prize capture, but the Philistines did not realise what was about to happen! The next morning the idol Dagon was fallen flat on its face *“before the ark of the Lord.”*¹⁵³ After they picked it up and set it back in place again, the following morning they discovered that Dagon was not just fallen again before the ark of the Lord, but that *“the head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold.”*¹⁵⁴ Now as a direct consequence of this curious incident the Philistines establish a new custom. They would now jump over the threshold of the entrance to the temple (*“therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day”*).¹⁵⁵ And so it turns out that at this time when Zephaniah was preaching, the Israelites had taken this Philistine custom into their lives and practice. It was a superstition born out of respect for a fallen and smashed idol! The Israelites were honouring the god of the Philistines! To compliment this following of a Philistine superstitious custom, the Israelites did what the Philistines were notorious for. They filled their Lord's house with the fruits of their violence and their deceit. Thus Israel had fallen for the ways of the world. Instead of devotion to God and all that He had said, they opted for the pagan god Dagon and the way of selfish acquisition by force and through deception.

Finally in verses 10 and 11 we discover what motivated and energised the people who dwelt in Jerusalem. They were, in effect, materialist merchants concerned with possessions and money rather than the worship of God. The description of the coming judgement on Jerusalem is meant to show us that all walks of life and all quarters of the city would be effected. Four sites are mentioned within which the horrors of judgement would be felt:

- In the *“fish gate”* a voice would exclaim.
- From the *“second quarter”* there would be wailing.

149 1Samuel 4:3,4.

150 1Samuel 4:11,18,19-22.

151 1Samuel 4:9.

152 1Samuel 5:2.

153 1Samuel 5:3.

154 1Samuel 5:4.

155 1Samuel 5:5.

- From the “*hills*” a great breach would be heard.
- Those who sat in the “*Mortar*” are told to howl.

The “*fish gate*” probably gained its name from the fish market which stood nearby. It is identified by some as standing on the NW of the city convenient for transport of fish to the city, either from the Sea of Galilee in the north, or from the Mediterranean in the west. Apparently it was a place of vulnerability to attack. The “*second quarter*” seems to be where a certain prophetess named “*Huldah*” resided, and who was “*keeper of the wardrobe.*”¹⁵⁶ After the book of the Law was rediscovered, king Josiah sent Hilkiyah the priest and Shaphan the scribe to consult her concerning what they had read. She prophesied judgement to come mingled with mercy for the king. The site thus appears to have been a place of learning where prophets gathered. The AKJV translates the Hebrew word used in the two other places where it is mentioned as “*college*” because the basic meaning of the Hebrew word means “to repeat.” Thus the term signified the idea of students repeating the lessons heard from their masters. It is worth noting that the Hebrew word is similar in form to the word “*mishnah*,” which is the word used for the oral traditions of the Jews. The “*hills*” probably signified the upper region of the city where those in high office and position resided. In later times the High Priest had his residence in the upper city of David to the south of the city. There are, however, seven hills in and around Jerusalem and it may be a reference to these sites. Places where an enemy could easily be seen. Finally the “*Mortar*” was the place of major trade. The name comes from the idea of a depression or hollow, and it is thought that grain was ground here in earliest times, (hence the reference to those who “*sit*” in this region in verse 11). Some suggest that it was a depiction of the city as a whole which would be pounded and crushed by the soon coming enemies.

The four regions thus depict the fishermen merchants and traders in the north, the schoolmen, prophets and instructors who resided near the temple, those who held high office and an elevated position, and the main merchants in goods and services. The four corners of life were each to suffer disaster that would elicit screams, howls and wailing in exclamation and sorrow. Those in the hills would suffer a tremendous “*breach*” or fracturing. And then we are given the reason for this terrible picture of sorrow and disaster at the end of verse 11. Those who sat in the “*Mortar*” where the major trade occurred were to howl because the “*merchant people*” were literally struck dumb and cut off completely. All who were “*laden with silver*” either by way of procuring goods or through having made their sale were “*cut off.*” Suddenly the very basis of life was removed in a

¹⁵⁶ 2Kings 22:14; 2Chronicles 34:22.

swift moment. Such a picture illustrates very clearly what the Israelites were concerned with. Their livelihoods, their money, their possessions and their trade were uppermost and any gods or beliefs they held too were subsidiary.¹⁵⁷

[iv] The searchlight of God.

Despite the arrogance and hubris of the people, we read in verses 12 and 13 that *“it shall be,”* so that no matter what people may say or think, what God will do is that which will undoubtedly happen. Be assured that the same is true for us today. It will most certainly be that the Lord will require us to give a full account of our lives. Thus verses 12 and 13 press the depth and breadth of this coming judgement even further. No one will be enabled to escape. In many disaster films you often find the rich enabled to wriggle out of harm and danger through their money and position. But such will certainly not be possible in this event. And so in verse 12 we have the Lord pursuing every nook and cranny to root out those who might have thought they could hide. The Lord would *“investigate Jerusalem with searchlights”* so that all would be called to give an account. These, along with all the others, making up the total population were to be punished for their sin. At the end of verse 12 we are taught further concerning the type of people we see in this disaster. These are ones who were *“congealed,”* or *“settled upon their lees.”* The image is of the sediments of fermented wine resting undisturbed at the bottom of the bottle. The NKJV version interprets this (correctly I believe) as indicating a complacent attitude. These were comfortable and had all they required. Their view of God was that He was impotent, and would not bother them! God would neither *“do good, nor will He do evil.”* What a presumption! This highlights an incredible pride. To consider that you are quite comfortable thank-you-very-much and that no one, not even God Himself, should disturb nor interfere with you is the height of folly. God will search us out! He will inspect every nook and cranny of the city of our being. Are we complacent and apathetic? Do we feel as though we have the right to be left alone? Do we think God so impotent that He will bring nothing into the situation? The people described here are hard as nails! To be in such a position that you could declare that God would let you continue in your course of (ungodly) action unabated and would do nothing at all is sheer arrogance.

Verse 13 ends the theme of judgement and destruction by pointing out that self preservation

¹⁵⁷ As I write these words we are in the sixth month of the sever restrictions imposed by the government to curtail the spread of coronavirus. Many people have lost their jobs and means of earning a living. The rich remain wealthy and have probably made large profits through the sale of medicines, protective gear and tests for the disease. What is prophesied here in Zephaniah is far worse than what has been experienced of late because no section of society will escape. There are no exceptions. The rich may be able to protect themselves and their lifestyle from this current pandemic but when the final day comes they will be throwing away all their trinkets and treasures with abandon.

is pointless. The booty and strength, the houses and provisions will all be taken away. A similar statement can be found in the prophecy of Amos, and both stem from the prophetic statement given at the time of Moses in Deuteronomy.¹⁵⁸ Whatever strength and wealth we may have it will avail nothing! Whatever provision we may have laid up for ourselves it will all fail. Do we think that the fortress we have prepared, the cordon of defences we have arranged, and the money we have sprayed liberally to ensure protection will make any difference? Oh you may be as poor as church mouse, but still you build your life with defences and battlements against God in your heart, mind and life. None of that will help. The protection and provision you have laid up on the earth, whether it be true real estate on some distant mountain or island, or an inner fortress to fend off any rights that God has, will all come crashing down. You will never make it to that safe haven on a distant island. You will never find that place of inner peace and settlement. You will not be enabled to drink of your store of wines. You will never be able to draw from any inner sources of delight. All will come under the hammer blows of a good, righteous, and holy God. Self preservation is folly. It cannot be done. God will search you out. There is no escape from His inspection.

It is worth noting that we get a more detailed description of such a searching inspection from the earlier prophet Amos who prophesied during the reign of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam II king of Israel before the northern kingdom fell, around 150 years before Zephaniah:

1 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: “strike the door posts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. **2** “Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; **3** and though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them; though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them; **4** though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good.”¹⁵⁹

None can escape the coming judgement. Why then do we not flee to the Lord?

158 Deuteronomy 28:20; Amos 5:11.

159 Amos 9:1-4.

[3] The great day of the Lord described in detail. [1:14 -18].

NKJV	My translation.
14 The great day of the Lord <i>is near;</i> <i>it is near and hastens quickly.</i> The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. 17 “I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.” 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; <u>but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire</u> <u>of His jealousy,</u> for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.	14 Nearby is the great day of the Lord! Nearby and exceedingly swift is the sound of the day of the Lord. In that place the mighty man cries out bitterly. 15 A day of wrath is that day. A day of distress and oppression. A day of tempest and desolation. A day of darkness and thick darkness. A day of clouds and thick clouds. 16 A day of the trumpet and the sounding of the trumpet, upon the fortified cities and upon the great battlements. 17 And I will distress men, and they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against the Lord and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. 18 Most definitely their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. <u>The whole earth will be consumed in the fire of</u> <u>His jealousy.</u> For an end, a certain and terrible one will He make for all who dwell on the earth.

Following on from the graphic portrayal of judgement to come upon Jerusalem, which is depicted as a fore-runner to the last and final judgement on the world, we are next given an extended description of this “*day of the Lord.*”

Verse 14 impresses upon the reader and hearer of the word that the “*day of the Lord*” is both awesome (“*great*”) and its sound is incredibly near. The approach of the day of the Lord is so near that the sound is swift and can be easily heard. Have you ever heard the sound of an approaching steam train? Or the coming of a herd of cattle? This day is approaching and its sound can be heard moments before the day arrives. In my translation I have emphasised the closeness of this incredible day by placing the word “*nearby*” at the head. At the end of verse 14 we have mention of a single person, “*the mighty man.*” The NKJV is faulty at this point. It stands only with the ESV amongst translations in rendering the second part of the verse as though the day of the Lord was bitter. Why the NKJV goes against the AKJV is a mystery:

AKJV	<i>even</i> the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.
NKJV	The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.
ESV	the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there.
YLT	the noise of the day of Jehovah, bitterly shriek there doth a mighty one.
ISV	The sound of the Day of the Lord there includes the bitter cry of the mighty soldier.
CSV	Listen, the day of the Lord—then the warrior’s cry is bitter.
HCSB	Listen, the Day of the Lord—then the warrior’s cry is bitter.
NASB	listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly.
MWV ¹⁶⁰	is the sound of the day of the Lord. In that place the mighty man cries out bitterly.

However the sense is that the mighty man, the warrior, is the one crying out in bitterness. This lone figure, who is the champion warrior, the strongest amongst his peers, does not take a stand or brace himself for the imminent battle. No! He “*cries out bitterly.*” The picture is stark. The strongest, mightiest warrior who had seen much battle and difficulty before now is reduced to weeping in bitterness.

We must pause at this point. Can you see here a pre-figuring of the One who took upon Himself the sins of the world. The mighty champion bears the full brunt of the wrath of God. Our Lord and Saviour cried out with the words of Psalm 22:1 as He hung on the cross and bore our punishment:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”¹⁶¹

Of course this Mighty Warrior in bearing the punishment of sin won a glorious victory as He soaked up all the wrath of God. Well, for now, the picture in Zephaniah depicts for us the greatest (human) warrior breaking down in bitter weeping. There is no hope!

Then in verse 15 we have a single statement that describes this day of the Lord, followed by a series of statements each of which give us a twofold depiction. In the dual depictions we are given a first description and then a second which emphasises or reinforces the original idea. The effect is to illustrate an incredibly and truly awful day. The verse begins by telling us that this is the “*day of wrath.*” God is angry, and He has every right to be so. Let us recognise that God made all things, including man. We do not have any rights before God. Then remember that God is perfect and the

160 My translation.

161 Matthew 27:46.

essence of good. What He says and what He instructs is, therefore, perfect and good par excellence. But we (all of mankind in all ages from the fall) have not only gone astray, but have openly defied God and rebelled against Him and His ways! But then we realise, as we read our Bible history, that God is incredibly patient not willing that any should perish and taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked.¹⁶² And so He gives, for example, the pre-flood generation over 100 years to repent.¹⁶³ He does not deal with the Amorites and their sins for several centuries.¹⁶⁴ The Lord is patient and long suffering. We learn this repeatedly, but in Exodus on the occasion where the Lord instructs Moses to bring a second set of tablets up the mountain for Him to re-inscribe the Law, we read these wonderful words:

5 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. **6** And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, **7** keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”¹⁶⁵

We have hardly begun considering the gracious mercy of God! We rush to point out that from the very beginning of time the Lord has been prepared to carry out His eternal plan of salvation. At the right time the Lord came and gave Himself up for our sin!

4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.¹⁶⁶

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.¹⁶⁷

What awesome truths! God is good! God is gracious! And yet the world ignores Him, ridicules Him, and rejects His people. Why would the Lord not be angry? On that final day when people are still rebelling and rejecting God and His ways, the Lord will bring His wrath to deal with all the sin and evil that remains. He has poured out His wrath upon the Lord Jesus so that we might be saved from this great day. But for those who continue in rebellion what else is left? All sin and evil must

162 2Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11.

163 Genesis 6:1f.

164 Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 31:4; Joshua 2:10.

165 Exodus 34:6,7.

166 Galatians 4:4,5.

167 Romans 5:8.

be dealt with. There must be payment made. We have offended an infinite God! If we receive His forgiveness in what Christ has done, and become His once again, then the wrath has passed from us to Christ. But if we neglect this offer of forgiveness in Christ, then we must face the wrath of God for ourselves. It is that simple.

Imagine you were a rebellious youth with nothing much to do and you go along and scratch the door of an ordinary common car. You are caught by the police and must pay for the repairs. Now imagine you do exactly the same wicked deed to a Bugatti Veron! The cost is surely going to be much greater! Well in offending an infinite God we incur greater debt than if we had offended a compatriot. Now multiply this with countless sin and evil perpetrated against the holy and infinite God. We deserve great punishment. But Christ has taken it upon Himself and now He calls us to come to Him who is the only one who can offer true rest and forgiveness.¹⁶⁸

And so this coming day is a “*day of wrath.*” But it is more. It is also a day in which there will be immense distress and depression. There is to be trouble and despair, wasteful destruction and wasteful ruin, darkness and gloominess, dark clouds and deeply thick clouds. And then we read in verse 16 that there is a day when the trumpet call will come to bring the alarm and to signal the end! We can declare this as a sounding note and not a warning note because warning after warning has passed, and now this is the final day. This is to be a day which will fall “*upon*” the “*fortified cities*” and the “*great battlements.*” These are the cities and battlements whose warfare is against God and His ways. All of us in our single minded ways and in our selfish lives have set up cities and battlements against God. Do you baulk at this? Do you think I have overstepped myself? Not at all! All of us have built our own citadels and our own towers in defiance against God. We have not just neglected God and what He says, we have downright rejected Him into the bargain. In fact we have gone further. We belittle and demean the ways of God. They are considered foolishness and beneath modern man. Mankind looks down upon the simple ways of God. Mankind declares in arrogant pride that he knows best and how dare anyone suggest otherwise. The Lord, according to modern man, knows neither good nor bad and cannot do either! Well be aware dear reader that there is a day coming when the wrath of God – the God who made the entirety of creation – will bring down the hammer of His wrath upon your sin!

In verse 17 we discover what happens to individual people. Men (all men who reject Christ) will be distressed, compressed and straitened. They will be constrained and incarcerated. They will be unable to see and will be what they truly are already “*blind men.*” And the reason? As we have been saying all along it is “*because they have sinned against the Lord.*” Those who prefer self-rule

168 Matthew 11:28-30.

which ultimately leads to violence and deceit in the pursuit of that which self desires, will have their blood spilt and their flesh thrown as refuse. Because they disdained the right, true and good way, preferring the way of error, evil and depravity, they will be confirmed in the fruits of their depravity. We may wince at these things because we are so convinced that we as individuals have the right to self-determination – we think we are in charge and that we are God! – but the fact is that God will allow us to go the way we have determined and will simply confirm our choice. Do you think a life of sexual perversion ought to yield blessings, happiness, and fulfilment? Are you sure that your selfish pursuit of power, of money, of fame will yield the good life? Will the drugs you depend upon for your highs and fixes really result in truth and wisdom? If you are bent on these things then the Lord will confirm them for you. As the apostle Paul made clear in the first chapter of Romans, God's wrath abides on all error and sin, and even though He has made plain the truth about Himself by His word and even within creation, nevertheless men rejected Him and suppressed the truth choosing rather to follow their own darkened minds. In consequence of this further hardened rebellion we read twice that God “*gave them up*” to the horror and awfulness of their sins, and once that He “*gave them over*” to a “*debased mind*” in doing that which was “*not fitting*.”¹⁶⁹ Be assured of this one thing. God will not allow sin and error to last. Oh the great patience and kindness of God! He is truly long suffering. But when the time comes (and only God knows when this has arrived) He will by no means clear the guilty.¹⁷⁰ Given that the Lord God has provided the only way possible to escape the wrath that is coming, to be brought into God's love and care, and to be made new and like Christ – the man above all men (sinless, spotless, godly and true) – why is it that we delay? What holds us back? Run to Christ for cleansing and healing!

In verse 18 we find that those things which people have put their trust in will utterly fail. Most translations, like the NKJV, simply assert that “*neither their silver nor their gold*” will save them, but I have suggested that there is a greater emphasis in the text in my translation. There will be “*most definitely*” no help from these pieces of metal! It is vital that we realise this. Nothing in all the world can save, deliver or help in this day. Of course if you have money you can get a better car, a nicer house and better holidays. But what is that when the Lord approaches to judge? How will your house protect you if the Lord can search out the inner depths of your heart? How far will your super-car get you when pursued by an infinite God who is angry?

The end of verse 18 brings our attention back to the global picture. Many modern translations render the Hebrew word **הָאָרֶץ** (*ha'arets*) as “*the land*,” which is perfectly possible, keeping the focus local to Judah and Jerusalem. The NASB, NIV and ESV opt for “*earth*” which

169 Romans 1:24,26,28.

170 Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18.

translation I have adopted as it seems to be correct given the opening salvo in Zephaniah 1:2,3. Zephaniah 1:4-13 has centred on Jerusalem, but now we are to consider that it is *“the whole earth”* which *“will be consumed in the fire of His jealousy.”* These words are, (surely) picked up by the apostle Peter in his second letter:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.¹⁷¹

And also by the apostle Paul when he wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians:

7 ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.¹⁷²

Make no mistake. There will be no universal flood as many environmentalists fear. But there will be an awful conflagration of the entire earth such as has never been known nor can be truly imagined. Nuclear holocausts envisioned do not even begin to depict this disaster. This day of the Lord's wrath, the final day, brings all of this age and world to its inevitable and sorry conclusion. The end is final and it will be *“certain”* and it will also be *“terrible.”* None on the earth will escape, for *“all who dwell on the earth”* will be brought to this end.

It is worthwhile summing up the entire scope of the first chapter of Zephaniah. What we have here is a warning of the coming judgment which is particularised and exemplified by the final judgement on Jerusalem which occurred in 586 BC. The details are shown in the table on the next page. Given that the particularised section of 1:4-16 is bracketed by the universal references (judgement upon the entire globe), we are justified in applying the detail of this section to all people. We should perhaps see first that the city of Jerusalem is a type of Christ who died for sin and suffered the full wrath of God. Then further, we could take the city of Jerusalem as representative of an individual person. The Lord will come and search our hearts to deal with wickedness. Either we run to Him for salvation and He delivers us or we will suffer these terrible punishments ourselves.

171 2Peter 3:10.

172 2Thessalonians 1:7b-10.

Text:	What is in view:	Additional notes:
1:2,3.	The entire globe, the whole earth.	• Everything will perish from the surface of the ground. • Reference to all types of beast and even man (Adam) will be cut off from the surface of the ground – alluding to both creation and the flood.
1:4-16.	Judah and Jerusalem as a pre-example of what is to come on all the earth.	• Judah, Jerusalem (with four regions mentioned: fish gate, second quarter, hills and Mortar). • Jerusalem investigated with searchlights.
1:17,18.	The entire globe, the whole earth.	• The whole earth to be consumed by fire.

Chapter 3.
Part 2: Zephaniah 2:1-3:7.
Seek the Lord for nowhere is safe!

After such a devastating opening chapter, the Lord through Zephaniah does not hold back. This second division of the book of Zephaniah covers all of chapter 2 and the first seven verses of chapter 3. So, after a general declaration of the end of all things (the destruction of the entire earth) in 1:2-6, and a focus upon the sacrifice for punishment in Jerusalem in 1:7-13, followed by a graphic description of the “*day of the Lord*” in 1:14-18, we come in Zephaniah chapter 2 to how this judgement affects the world both in Zephaniah's time, and thence prophetically to the whole world at the end.

In this section the Lord brings judgement to bear upon the entire world represented by the four closest neighbours, east, west, south and north, concluding with a judgement issued against the “*rebellious*” city.¹⁷³ It can be organised into three rather unequal but separate parts.

[1] A call to seek – maybe the Lord will answer. [2:1-3].

[2] A word against all nations. [2:4-3:5].

[a] The Philistines destroyed. [2:4-7].

[b] Moab and Ammon to be reduced to nothing. [2:8-11].

[c] Ethiopians to be slain. [2:12].

[d] Assyria to be destroyed. [2:13-15].

[e] Woe to the “*rebellious*” city (Jerusalem). [3:1-5].

[3] A dreadful conclusion – mankind is so hard. [3:6,7].

¹⁷³ Zephaniah 3:1.

[1] A call to seek – maybe the Lord will answer. [2:1-3].

NKJV	My translation
#2 1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, 2 Before the decree is issued, <i>or</i> 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! 3 Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.	#2 1 Gather yourselves together, yes gather, nation not shamed. 2 Before the decree is brought forth like chaff <i>before</i> the day is passed. Before it will come upon you the anger of the wrath of the Lord. Before it will come upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. 3 Seek the Lord all you meek of the earth, those who perform His justice. Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the wrath of the Lord.

The instruction to “gather” issued in the first verse is addressed to the “*undesirable nation,*” but to whom does this refer? In my translation I have opted for the idea of a “*nation not shamed*” which is a rendition followed in the main by modern translations. It is tempting to limit the reference to Judah and Jerusalem because Zephaniah's message came to Judah in the days of king Josiah. But given the general world-wide references it would be better to consider this a general call to all, or any, nation of the world. In a few verses we will see judgement meted out to four nations representing the four points of the compass.¹⁷⁴ But before we reach these judgements we are offered the general appeal to “gather” and then to “seek.”

The opening instruction in 2:1 is emphasised by using the word “gather” twice. In other words this is a serious call. The idea is for the one addressed to stop and consider together very carefully what is being instructed. We might imagine a serious misdemeanour has occurred at school or in the office where we work. The headmaster or MD (CEO if American!) has instructed everyone to meet in the great hall or assembly rooms so that the problem can be addressed. No one can be excused. Lessons stop and classes are drilled to the hall. All business ceases and employees are ushered into the assembly rooms. Now these scenarios do little to illustrate the intense and earnest injunction to stop and consider. I write these words in the middle of the Covid-19 lock-down in Wales at the end of October 2020. We have all been instructed to work as a nation together to attempt to prevent the spread of the virus by remaining at home. But this instruction, which comes from God, is one offered now to every nation.

Thinking about the current situation we find ourselves in, we ought to recognise that we are

¹⁷⁴ Moab and Ammon were two distinct nations but are bound together because of their origin via Lot – see Genesis 19:30-38.

the “*undesirable nation*” or a nation of no shame. How we have sinned! It is perhaps needless to illustrate this fact. All of us know it. Even those who have no thought of God in their minds surely know that life is not what it ought to be? We are selfish to the point of stupidity. We pursue our own agenda and lifestyle to the detriment of others, and to the ruin of our collective existence. How long can a society exist where the very fundamentals of living are disputed and argued over? If we cannot agree on simple things such as the nature and responsibility of man in general, what hope is there? I have been deliberately general in my description of the problem of sin and our nation in order to cover all eventualities. I do not want the attention drawn to one issue where disputes and arguments will rage and mislead us concerning the main point. Essentially all sin (whether it be lying, adultery, covetousness or whatever), amounts to rebellion against God. Although we are built and constructed to be in good relationship with God and our fellow humans, our pursuit of individual goals, aims, and lifestyles shows our disdain for God and His ways. Pause and reflect a moment. Understand that God is absolutely perfect. He is the very definition of what is good, substantial and wholesome. Nothing He ever does can be tainted with evil, error, or wickedness. If there was even a hint of evil or error or wickedness associated with God and His work then He would cease to be God. Given this truth, why would anyone at any time reject God and go their own way? This is the problem with sin. We do not see things as they really are. We are deceived by our sin into thinking that we are actually alright, or that we occupy some *neutral* ground and can step back and make an 'informed' decision about the truth or error of any subject. But surely a moment's reflection will demonstrate the falsity of such an idea? How can a mere man (or woman) stand as arbiter over things as they stand today? Who knows all things about our situation? None! We hardly have a fraction of the details pertaining to the issues of the day. Who can trace the history that has lead to our current situation? None! We are impossibly arrogant if we think we can stand as judge concerning the situations we all face today. But God, who is good – and perfectly so – can make a good judgement. And so we are called to gather together and to take stock.

There is a great deal of urgency in this because we must gather before it is too late. Three times we read the word “*before*”:

Before the decree is issued, *or* 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!

These three statements are all one in reality, but expressed as a triad for two reasons. First, as ever

with groups of three in Scripture, it is as though the trinity are all saying one and the same thing. Get ready before the end comes! A second reason for the three-fold nature here is to emphasise the point. Have we heard? Have we really grasped this? We must gather together to give serious consideration concerning God's imminent judgement before it is too late.

In the first statement we are told to gather and consider before *“the decree is issued,”* which is then explained as being when *“the day passes like chaff.”* In Psalm 2 we read these words:

7 “I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, ‘You *are* My Son, today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ” ¹⁷⁵

Paul suggests that the statement of verse 7 concerning the Son being *“begotten”* refers to Christ's resurrection.¹⁷⁶ Now the Scriptures teach us that the Son of God was begotten of the Father in eternity. The Son of God is God forever.¹⁷⁷ But when Christ came to the earth in the incarnation, was sacrificed on Calvary's cross to fulfil the mission of the atonement, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and poured forth the Spirit – all events which took place over a thirty year period in earth time – then these all begin the great day of the Lord. Remember that when Christ died for sin He bore the very wrath of God. His sacrifice was not the end, but the beginning of the end. God brought down the judgement due to sin upon His Son, and we are called to accept this and run to Him before the final day approaches. The day of the Lord began, then, when Christ came, died, rose again, ascended and then poured out the Holy Spirit. We need to gather before this day *“passes like chaff.”* The day of the Lord has begun and it will not last forever – it disappears in time just as the chaff is blown away by the wind.

The second and third statements highlight the *“anger”* of the Lord coming upon us! We ought to gather and consider these things in great earnest before that day comes to its completion so that the *“Lord's fierce anger”* will be upon us! We live at a time somewhere between the beginning of that day when Christ came and went back to heaven, and the end of that day when the Lord returns for that final judgement. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians to grasp the grace of God in earnest because there will come a time when there can be no repentance. In issuing this urgent appeal he declared that the time for repentance was *“now”*:

175 Psalm 2:7-9.

176 Acts 13:33.

177 John 1:1-18.

1 We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.¹⁷⁸

Now apart from the call to gather together and consider things before it is too late, a second imperative is added in verse 3:

Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.

Once again we have the imperative command issued three times, so we must understand that all three persons in the Godhead are speaking the same thing. The three things the Lord urges to seek are:

The Lord.

Righteousness.

Humility.

It is so interesting how the same ideas are repeated in various forms throughout Scripture. Matthew 6:33 speaks of seeking first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. Micah 6:8 speaks of justice (doing the right thing), mercy, and humility to walk with God as being uppermost. We could look at other places in Scripture where we will see the same general things repeated. Sometimes emphasis is placed on one aspect, and then at other times a slightly different angle is stressed, but always the central theme is to seek God!

Seeking God is sometimes reduced by modern man to having some spiritual input which makes a person feel content or satisfied, with the emphasis being upon what we need for our fulfilment. There are many spiritual outlets which give a person great satisfaction without any real salvation. Now I do not say that true seeking does not bring blessings. True seeking surely does. But true seeking of God is also a search for *righteousness*. We know things with us are not right. Thus, the true seeker is one who seeks righteousness, and this seeking is not to establish personal righteousness, but to discover what is solid, true, right, and wholesome in a world full of variation, wickedness and darkness. The true seeker is also one who knows their own sin and limitations, and so is a seeking of contriteness and lowliness. It is a cry for help. A call for mercy. Those who truly

¹⁷⁸ 2Corinthians 6:1-2.

seek, do so in humility.

We are to observe in this opening section of Zephaniah 2 that it is not the nation as a whole which does this seeking. The nation of shame must gather and consider before the day has passed, but the nation as a whole does not seek. What are we to make of this distinction? Well I believe that the general call concerning God's imminent judgement which began when Christ died and will be completed when He returns, must be openly declared to the nations as a whole. That is the import, I believe, of Zephaniah's opening chapter. The entire globe must be made aware of the coming judgement, the coming day of the Lord. But only *"the meek of the earth"* and those who uphold so as to perform *"His justice"* are called to seek. In other words, there is a remnant amongst the nations. There are those within every nation who will seek, who will call upon the Lord in truth and righteousness. It is the lowly, the contrite, the meek, the ones in need, who call and who seek. It is those who agree that God is good and right, and who, knowing their own sin, long for forgiveness, grace, mercy and a change of heart. It is those who long to be like Christ, for He is the glory of God and altogether lovely.

And so this section, which continues the general theme of judgement upon the entire earth (represented by nations from the four points of the compass), gives us an interlude of hope. In that it is only the meek who are called to seek the Lord, we observe that those among the nations who do not seek Him, have nevertheless still been called to *"gather."* However, in not seeking they are thence being called to account at that day of reckoning. They are to gather to face the coming judgement upon the whole earth. Those who seek are not given a 'free pass,' or an escape, but instead a faint hope: *"it may be"* or *"perhaps."* This is not to deny the frequent statements in Scripture of a sure and certain hope of salvation. But here in the context of judgement upon the world, we are not to expect special dispensations or escape from difficulty. Thus the hope is couched in less than certain terms to avoid any idea that there could be an escape from the coming destruction. The idea that Christians will be 'raptured' out of the great tribulation is thus ruled out. Right up to the very moment of Christ's return there will be believers suffering the same difficulties (and perhaps more through persecution) as all peoples in the world.

[2] A word against all nations. Zephaniah. [2:4-3:5].

The choice of nations mentioned here was probably dictated by the political scene of the time. It is interesting that there is no mention, for example, of Egypt. Instead we get Ethiopia. The order in which the nations are mentioned goes from the Philistines in the east, to the Moabites and Ammonites in the west, then to the Ethiopians in the south, and finally to the Assyrians in the north. Thus all four compass points are covered, and this must surely be representative of the four corners of the world. Looked at another way we might say that all the nations surrounding Judah have been referenced. In the same way all the nations of the earth are set against the Lord and His anointed one.¹⁷⁹ The amount of space devoted to each of these nations varies greatly. The running theme throughout Zephaniah 2:4-3:7 is one of judgement as indicated by the use of the words “desolate,” “desolation,” “destroy,” “destroyed,” “forsaken,” and “uprooted.”¹⁸⁰ The judgements mentioned are temporal, falling upon the nations mentioned, but (as with all Biblical judgements), point towards the final day of judgement yet to come.

The judgements begin with Philistia in the west, proceed to Moab and Ammon in the east, briefly point south to Ethiopia, then swivel north to Assyria before we come back to Jerusalem.

[a] The Philistines destroyed. [2:4-7]. WEST.

[b] Moab and Ammon to be reduced to nothing. [2:8-11]. EAST.

[c] Ethiopians to be slain. [2:12]. SOUTH.

[d] Assyria to be destroyed. [2:13-15]. NORTH.

[e] Woe to the “*rebellious city*” (Jerusalem). [3:1-5].

179 Psalm 2.

180 From the NKJV, “*desolate*” or “*desolation*” occurs at: 2:4,9,13,14,15; 3:6; “*destroy*” or “*destroyed*” occurs at: 2:5,13; 3:6; “*forsaken*” occurs at: 2:4; and “*uprooted*” occurs at: 2:4.

[a] The Philistines destroyed. [2:4-7].

NKJV	My translation
4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted. 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord <i>is</i> against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: “I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant.” 6 The sea-coast shall be pastures, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. 7 The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed <i>their</i> 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.	4 For Gaza will be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation. They shall drive out Ashdod at noon and Ekron shall be uprooted. 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites (Philistines). The word of the Lord is upon you Canaan, land of the Philistines. I will even destroy you so that there will be no inhabitants. 6 And the sea coast shall be for pastures and shelters for shepherds and sheep folds for their flocks. 7 And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah where they shall feed, for they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon in the evening, for the Lord their God will visit them and turn back their captivity.

That the Philistines are intended here is unmistakable. Four of the five cities of the Philistines are noted (Gaza, Ashkelon, Asdod, and Ekron), with Gath the only one omitted. In verse 5 we have mention of “*the Philistines*,” as ones who occupied the land of Canaan. The “*Cherethites*” were a group occupying the coastal regions of southern Palestine that neighboured



Judah and are equated with the Philistines.¹⁸¹ Together with another group called “*Pelethites*” these were David's bodyguard and couriers.¹⁸² The term “*Cherethites*” is interpreted as meaning “executioners” (those that cut-off), whilst the term “*Pelethites*” apparently signifies “couriers,”

181 1Samuel 30:14,16; Ezekiel 25:16.

182 2Samuel 8:18; 15:18; 20:7,23; 1Kings 1:38,44; 1Chronicles 18:17.

deriving from a root which indicates swiftness. The cities mentioned, begin from the southernmost Gaza reaching the northernmost at Ekron (Gath lying slightly to the south of Ekron – see map).

First we discover that Gaza will be “*forsaken*” or bereft so that there would no left within it, then we find that Ashdod will be “*desolate*” so as to become an astonishment due to it being utterly deserted and a waste. The inhabitants will be driven out of Ashdod, and then Ekron will be overthrown and turned over. These descriptions indicate both a destructive action that destroys the cities but also suggests that the inhabitants will all be removed.

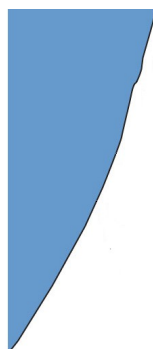
Next, “*woe*” is uttered over those who dwell by the coast who are described as the “*nation of the Cherethites*.” The statement which follows this at the end of verse 5 is the centrepiece. God's unalterable word will be “*upon*” the Philistines who occupied the land of Canaan. The Lord speaks and His word does not change. The Lord will “*destroy*” these peoples so that there will be dwellers left in these regions.

Verses 6 and 7 describe what will happen subsequent to the destruction of the Philistine cities and regions. The picture is graphic. The destruction will remove any settled organised city states and will return the land in general to pastureland. The word I have rendered as “*shelters*” can indicate small depressions which may have resulted from the destruction of the cities. It is significant that what will replace the Philistine nation will be “*shepherds*” and “*flocks*,” where the “*remnant of the house of Judah*” will be able to “*feed*.” Those dwelling places which remain in Ashkelon will be used as sleeping places for the shepherds who pasture their flocks in that overrun region. All of this will occur because the Lord will “*visit them*” and “*turn back their captivity*.” Thus we see that what has been depicted here focuses thought on the return from exile which is some one hundred years in the future. It will not be the entire nation but a “*remnant*.”

[b] Moab and Ammon to be reduced to nothing. [2:8-11].

NKJV	My translation
8 “I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders. 9 Therefore, as I live,” says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah — overrun with weeds and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation. The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them.” 10 This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts. 11 The Lord <i>will be</i> awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; <i>people</i> shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations.	8 I have heard the taunt of Moab and the reproaches of the sons of Ammon by which they have taunted My people, and they have made themselves great upon their border. 9 Therefore, as I the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel live, you shall be like Sodom and you shall be like the sons of Gomorrah, — a possession of nettles and salt pits, and a desolation and spoil forever. The remnant of My people will take them as spoil and those remaining of My people shall possess them. 10 This is to them instead of their pride, for they have taunted and magnified (themselves) upon/against the people of the Lord of hosts. 11 Fearful will the Lord be to them, for the gods of the earth will waste away, for they shall bow to Him a man from his place (even) every island of the peoples.

Moab and Ammon are placed together because these were the “*children of Lot*.”¹⁸³ When Lot was rescued with his two daughters from Sodom, he eventually fled to the mountains whereupon his two daughters became pregnant by their father. The eldest brought forth the father of the Moabites, (“*Moab*” means “seed of his father”), and the younger daughter gave birth to the father of the Ammonites



(“*Benammi*” means “son of my people”).¹⁸⁴ Lot was Abraham's nephew, and, according to Peter he was a “*righteous man*,” but he “*tormented his righteous soul*” by dwelling amongst the wicked Sodomites.¹⁸⁵ The story of Lot's life is a salient one. Whilst Lot was undoubtedly a true believer, he nevertheless indulged the flesh and failed to train and discipline his family. Unlike Abraham who

183 Psalm 83:8.

184 Genesis 19:30-38.

185 2Peter 2:7,8.

was commended by the Lord for raising his family in godliness, the record of Lot's descendants makes for tragic reading.¹⁸⁶ The Moabites and Ammonites were always against Israel. Maybe it stemmed from jealousy? It appears that both nations which had been provided for by the Lord as regards a place to dwell, treated Israel's entrance into Canaan from the wilderness with taunts and reproaches.¹⁸⁷ So bad was the treatment dished out by Moab and Ammon to Israel that the Lord banned people from these nations from entering the assembly:

3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever, **4** because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. **5** Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. **6** You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.¹⁸⁸

Their continued hatred and opposition to Israel is a feature we find repeated in other prophecies. The Ammonites would later rejoice over Israel's captivity and the ruination of the sanctuary.¹⁸⁹

Thus in Zephaniah the Lord begins by noting that He had “*heard*” what these distant relatives had been saying. They had reproached and insulted the people of God's choosing. It would appear from these words that it was an on-going hatred because it included “*arrogant threats against*” the borders. In my translation I have gone for a more literal rendering (“*made themselves great upon their border*”) which suggests that maybe there had been incursions or skirmishes and disputes to gain back some land. There are three different Hebrew words used in verse 8 to express the utter hatred of these distant relations. They had contempt and derided the people of God, they vilified them with reproaches, and they carped at and dismissed them with scorn. In looking down on Judah the Moabites and Ammonite magnified themselves. They displayed arrogant pride counting Judah of little value.

In view of their terrible arrogance, the Lord pronounces judgement upon them as signified by the “*therefore*” of verse 9. The way in which this judgement is offered is very significant. In my translation I have suggested the following: “*as I the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel live.*” However the first phrase after the “*therefore*” is, literally, “alive/living I,” which establishes the basis upon which the Lord can speak. Only He is the source of life. We have two titles issued here.

186 Genesis 18:19 is to be compared to Genesis 19:30f.

187 Deuteronomy 2:9,19.

188 Deuteronomy 23:3-6.

189 Ezekiel 25:3,6

The first points us to the self-existence and sovereign rule of God, for He is Yahweh (Jehovah) and He is Lord “*of hosts.*” The second reminds us of His immense power as Creator, for He is Elohim of Israel – the nation whom He created and rescued from Egypt. Now the Lord delivers what we might term an “oracle” or speech of truth which is sure and certain (“*surely*”). Moab and Ammon will be like the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Both were destroyed after a detailed enquiry by the Lord.¹⁹⁰ The ruination of Sodom and Gomorrah was total. In the same way Ammon and Moab will suffer such devastation that their lands will be merely replaced by “*nettles and salt pits,*” and will be unrecoverable, or spoilt forever.

Those who would return from exile, that is “*the remnant,*” and “*those remaining*” will despoil their taunters and will “*possess them.*” Instead of their arrogance and pride, they will suffer ignominy and loss. The proud and arrogant will be humbled and humiliated. Because they have ridiculed, taunted, scorned and belittled God's people in their pride, and have magnified themselves against God's people, the Lord will be a terror and a fear to them. In the last verse of this section we are catapulted into thinking on a global scale, for the Lord will make “*the gods of the earth*” to become nothing. As a result there will be no more idols and idolatry, and every man from all the distant lands (“*(even) every island of the peoples*”) will “*bow to Him.*” We might consider this prophetic of gospel success, for true people will “*bow*” in each man's “*place,*” but in view of the general theme of judgement upon pride and sin, it is better to take this in the sense of a sudden realisation that God alone is God and must be feared through a sense of terror.¹⁹¹ The KJV renders verse 11 using the word “terrible”

The Lord *will be* terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and *men* shall worship him, every one from his place, *even* all the isles of the heathen.¹⁹²

The coming of Christ will be such a terror-stricken event for those who have refused to turn to God. In each man's place they will suddenly see the One who was pierced coming to bring judgement to all who have rebelled. The terror of that day is something we must make clear to people in this day. I do not say that we must frighten people into believing, but if we do not warn people of what is to come then we are surely guilty of their blood.

190 Genesis 19:24,25.

191 See Isaiah 2:10,11,19-21.

192 Zephaniah 2:11, KJV.

[c] Ethiopians to be slain. [2:12].

NKJV	My translation
12 “You Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by My sword.”	12 You also Ethiopia, they shall be pierced by My sword.

The Hebrew for this verse (reading from right to left) is as follows:

הֵמָּה תְּרַבִּי חֲלָלִי כּוֹשִׁים גַּם-אֶתֶּם ←
they My sword they will be pierced Ethiopia you also

It will be seen that there is a repetition in the English literal translation of the word “they.” The last word in the sentence (הֵמָּה) is not really needed but has been added for emphasis.

In the KJV the name “*Ethiopia*” occurs 37 times in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament.¹⁹³ The term “*Cush*” appears eight times in the KJV Old Testament.¹⁹⁴ Now the name “*Cush*” is synonymous in Hebrew with “*Ethiopia*” (both in Hebrew are: כּוֹשׁ, *kûš* but more often transliterated as “*Cush*”). Cush, of course, was the son of Ham and the father of Nimrod.¹⁹⁵ At some point following the Tower of Babel incident the Cushites moved west into Africa and lived west of the Egyptians. The Ethiopians were a warlike nation that had at one time an army of a million men.¹⁹⁶ They are often associated with Egypt (presumably because of their family heritage), were stubborn and unchanging by nature, and careless.¹⁹⁷ During the reign of Asa, (911-870 BC), who succeeded Abijah and was followed by Jehoshaphat, the Ethiopians suffered a crushing defeat at the hand of the Lord on account of Asa's appeal.¹⁹⁸ Now this was some 250 years before Zephaniah prophesied, so clearly they managed to regain some strength.

The sword of the Lord was God's instrument used to carry out punishment.¹⁹⁹ In Ezekiel chapter 30 we have a prophecy of doom from God's “*sword*” levelled against Egypt and her allies, one of which was Ethiopia. The sword is also an instrument of deep conviction dividing asunder the thoughts and intentions of the heart.²⁰⁰ Perhaps the main intention in mentioning Ethiopia here is

193 Genesis 2:13; Numbers 12:1; 2Kings 19:9; 2Chronicles 12:3; 14:9,12,13; 16:8; 21:16; Esther 1:1; 8:9; Job 28:19; Psalm 68:31; 87:4; Isaiah 18:1; 20:3,4,5; 37:9; 43:3; 45:14; Jeremiah 13:23; 38:7,10,12; 39:16; 46:9; Ezekiel 29:10; 30:4,5,9; 38:5; Daniel 11:43; Amos 9:7; Nahum 3:9; Zephaniah 2:12; 3:10; Acts 8:27.

194 Genesis 10:6,7,8; 1Chronicles 1:8,9,10; Psalm 7:1; Isaiah 11:11.

195 Genesis 10:6,8.

196 2Kings 19:9; 2Chronicles 14:9; 16:8; Isaiah 37:9; Jeremiah 46:9

197 Psalm 68:31; Isaiah 20:3; 45:14; Jeremiah 13:23; Ezekiel 30:4,9; Nahum 3:9.

198 2Chronicles 14:11-13.

199 Deuteronomy 32:41; Isaiah 27:1; 34:5; 66:16; Jeremiah 12:12; 47:6.

200 Hebrews 4:12. See also Isaiah 49:2.

that the relentless attack on the people of God by war will be put to a complete stop by the sword of the Lord. This will only finally happen when the Lord returns. Now the Hebrew verb used in verse 12 (חָלַל) ought to be rendered as “*pierced*” not as “*slain*,” for the root idea is “to bore.” The Ethiopians will be run through with the sword to their destruction. When Christ comes again those who have not repented will be pierced through, but for those who have turned to God in faith, they ever look to the One pierced for their transgressions, pierced through in their place.²⁰¹

[d] Assyria to be destroyed. [2:13-15].

NKJV	My translation
13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness. 14 The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation. both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge on the capitals <i>of her pillars</i>; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation <i>shall be</i> at the threshold; for He will lay bare the cedar work. 15 This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, “<i>I am it, and there is none besides me.</i>” How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss and shake his fist.	13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north, and He will destroy Assyria, and He will appoint Nineveh to desolation, dry as the wilderness. 14 And the flocks shall lie down in the midst – every living thing of all nations, both the pelican and the hedgehog and they shall lodge in the capitals. A voice shall sing in the window. Desolation in the threshold, for He will make bare the cedar-work. 15 This is the joyful city, the one dwelling in confidence who says in her heart “I am and no other is.” How has it come to pass again that she has become a desolation, a resting place to all creatures? All who go towards her and pass by shall hiss and shake his hand.

Having slain the Ethiopians with His sword, the Lord now turns north to deal with Assyria. The Lord looked first to the west, then east, then south, and now north, moving in a type of cross fashion (first horizontally west-to-east and then vertically south-to-north), covering all four points of the compass. Although the major civilisations of the region (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek) had their origins from after the Tower of Babel when the families of the earth spread across the globe, their various fortunes and dominance waxed and waned throughout the ages. Initially the Babylonian kingdom exercised power under Nimrod. Later the Egyptian empire rose to the fore.

²⁰¹ Isaiah 53:5 the Hebrew word rendered “wounded” in the NKJV is the same used here (חָלַל) and ought to be translated as the KJV does as “pierced.”

These powers vied for influence and attention throughout the ages, but, the Assyrian empire was to have its heyday during the eighth and seventh centuries BC. For example, Assyria features most often in the book of Isaiah which covers the period from about 740 to 686 BC.²⁰² Eventually Assyria would come to a crushing end when in 612 BC Nineveh the capital would be overrun, and then in 609 BC at the battle of Carchemish when the Babylonian empire came to prominence. Zephaniah most probably ministered from the beginning of Josiah's reign in about 640 BC.



Dunstanborough castle.

The Lord is about to bring Assyria to an end, and the beginning of this end will come to Nineveh, the capital city. The city will be desolate and will end up being like a desert “*dry as the wilderness.*” As a consequence of this coming destruction and desolation the city would become fit only for animals to take up residence. The “*pelican*” was a desert

bird and one of the unclean variety.²⁰³ The term I have rendered as “*hedgehog*” is also given by some translations as the “*bittern*” or as the “*porcupine.*” The root idea in the Hebrew word is “to draw together” or “to shrink,” and so suggests the idea of a hedgehog because of its rolling up into a ball. If a bittern or other bird like the heron is intended then this would suggest marshland or a reed-bed type of environment. Viewing the term as the hedgehog gives variety to the sense of the text. From the pelican which can inhabit elevated sites to the hedgehog which dwells in the ground, “*every living thing*” from other regions will find their rest in what was once a thriving city. Whatever the true identity of the terms the point is clear. Animals which normally dwell in deserts and marshlands, which are not typical of a city, will come and lodge in the deserted and destroyed city. The animals find their nest and habitat in the ruins and can be found on the “*capitals*” which no longer support the temple or other building roofs, but which stand alone. What were once decorated and resplendent windows shielding residents from the wind, now sport several creatures which utter their calls (“*sing in the window*”). The doorways and the woodwork carved with skill

202 The name “*Assyria*” occurs in 46 verses of Isaiah at: Isaiah 7:17,18,20; 8:1,4,7; 10:1,5,12,24; 11:11,16; 14:24,25; 19:18,23,24,25; 20:1,4,6; 23:13; 27:13; 30:27,31; 31:8; 36:1,2,4,8,13,15,16,18; 37:4,6,8,10,11,18,21,33,36,37; 38:6; 52:4. Only 2Kings has a similar number of references to Isaiah (the name “*Assyria*” is found in 41 verses in 2Kings) as might be expected since it records the reigns of the kings through which Isaiah prophesied. The next highest frequency is 2Chronicles with 13 verses and then Ezekiel and Hosea with 9 verses.

203 Psalm 102:6.

are all exposed and lie desolate and empty. The descriptions here are graphic. We might have the same thoughts when we walk through castle ruins such as at Carew in Pembrokeshire, or Dunstanborough near Embleton in Northumberland.

Then in verse 15 we are given a description of the dramatic contrast between what Nineveh was and what it would become. It was once a *“joyful city”* which was so through arrogance and pride. The city dwelt in secure self-confidence declaring *“I am and no other is.”* Such a declaration flies in direct opposition to God who alone can claim the title *“I AM.”*²⁰⁴ None can ever declare self-determination and self-reliance. We are dependant created beings. We rely on God for every breath! How dare we get to such a state where we believe that we can rule our lives and determine the course of action as though we are God! Perhaps we feel the need to throw off the shackles of oppression – and this may be fully legitimate – but Nineveh proudly declared that it was great and was able to do as it pleased with no holds barred. But it will come to a



Carew castle.

stark end. It will become desolate and end up being only fit as *“a resting place to all creatures.”* The stark reversal in fortunes will be an astonishment to all who observe it (*“all who go towards her and pass by shall hiss and shake the hand”*). People will not be able to walk by Nineveh without comment nor will they be able to stay silent or immobile. It has become dystopian and overrun by creation.

204 Exodus 3:14.

[e] Woe to the “rebellious city” (Jerusalem). [3:1-5].

NKJV	My translation
#3 1 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! 2 She has not obeyed <i>His</i> voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the Lord, she has not drawn near to her God. 3 Her princes in her midst <i>are</i> roaring lions; her judges <i>are</i> evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning. 4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. 5 The Lord <i>is</i> righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame.	#3 1 Woe to the rebellious and she who has been polluted, to the city that is greatly oppressive! 2 She did not listen to the voice, she did not grasp correction by the Lord, she did not trust her God and she did not draw near. 3 Her princes within the midst of her are roaring lions. Her judges are wolves of the desert. They shall not gnaw in the morning. 4 Her prophets are light/frothy/wanton and men of treachery. Her priests have profaned that which is holy, they have done violence to the law. 5 The Lord is righteous in her midst. He will not do unrighteousness. Morning by morning He brings His justice to light. It does not fail but the unjust do not know shame.

Having denounced the four corners of the world, (Philistia, Moab/Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria), the Lord next returns to the centrepiece of the world, Jerusalem. This “*rebellious*” city is the only region to receive the word “*woe*” amongst all those whom the Lord judged.²⁰⁵ First we need to consider the nature of this city. Bear in mind that Josiah had enacted some tremendous reforms to restore godly worship and life.²⁰⁶ The city is described in three ways. She is “*rebellious*,” she is one that “*has been polluted*,” and she “*is greatly oppressive*.” We can see a progression here. Any who rebel and who turn away from God's good order and rule will end up in pollution. God's ways are truly the best, for He is good and alone does what is good. If we run from God and seek our own ways we will simply end up doing evil and will become polluted and filthy. The apostle Paul charts the decline of fallen man in several places but the description in Romans 1

²⁰⁵ Zephaniah 3:1.

²⁰⁶ 2Kings 23; 2Chronicles 34:29f.

is, perhaps, the most arresting:

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Professing to be wise, they became fools, **23** and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.²⁰⁷

The rejection of God (whom we all know) to follow empty, futile and vacuous thoughts always ends up in darkness and foolishness. Paul goes on to speak of the decline following rejection as being something God confirms in mankind, with mankind's rebellion affecting human relationships to the point of producing horrible outcomes, of which truths we are all witnesses in these days.²⁰⁸ If we reject God we need to reckon with our lives becoming polluted, by which we mean filthy, degraded and spoilt. Why do we continue in such rebellion?

Now such pollution inevitably leads to oppression. If we act on our own, in our own way, we will be acting selfishly. The consequences of doing what we want will have a dramatic impact on others. This is why James speaks about sinful behaviour leading to war!

1 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? **2** You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.²⁰⁹

Oppression comes where one person or group dominates or 'lords it over' another. Perhaps it is by virtue of being more powerful, or in having greater resources, or in being more charismatic and attractive than another. It is not that such inequality inevitably leads to oppression, but that the selfish heart that has the advantage will ensure that it keeps the advantage and will push down those who have not. What is often neglected in political discussions of oppression is the niggling problem of sin. The left demand the government enforce equality to remove oppression. The right demand that the government keeps their hands off private enterprise and progress. But in either case, if the people involved act from their sin nature then oppression is inevitable. The left enforcing their diktats results in a totalitarian state which seeks to destroy difference as unfair and oppressive. The right by denouncing any intervention allowing people to thrive in pursuit of personal gain run the

207 Romans 1:21-23.

208 Romans 1:24-32.

209 James 4:1-3.

risk of setting up competitive structures which mirror the natural world of predator versus prey. The multinationals and great enterprises control what the masses eat and consume, all the while ensuring massive profits for a few. Of course if sin was not operative then either case may be truly beneficial. If we act as God would have us to, then we would prefer each other's needs and would be willing to give to share so that none will be in want.²¹⁰ If, on the other hand we live in a place where there is little government intervention and people acted according to God's law, then again there would be freedom to pursue different lines of enquiry and enterprise as each person is enabled to develop talents and gifts, for the purpose of God's glory. The problem is sin. When we go our own way and fail to follow the good way as revealed by God, then our rebellion leads to pollution and inevitably to oppression. The world becomes ugly, despoiled, ruined and a horror to behold. This pattern is shown time and time again. As just one example, read Genesis 6 to see the same decline in the pre-flood world.

Now Jerusalem was supposed to be God's representative on earth. But she had failed. The text of Zephaniah 3:2 tells us four things that Jerusalem “*did not*” do. She did not:

1. *Listen to the voice* (of God).
2. *Grasp correction by the Lord*.
3. *Trust her God*.
4. *Draw near*.

If we are failing (as believers) to actively listen and heed the voice of the Lord we will fail and fall. God has spoken. He has spoken often, clearly, from the beginning of time, and for every eventuality. We need to ensure that we hear and do not let slip the things we have heard.²¹¹ Otherwise we will drift and fall. How vital it is to listen to God's voice! We ought to be frequently in God's word! But note, we must be in the word to do as God says!²¹² The natural inclination is to forget and to forsake the word of God. Consequently we need to rouse ourselves and stir ourselves up. We need to speak to our souls and instruct ourselves to attend to the things of God. And we ought to encourage one another to consider God's words and ways.

Perhaps one of the problems we face is that in going to the Lord's word we find that we receive correction! How we hate to be corrected! We love it when people flatter and nurse our pride.

210 Acts 2:44,45. See also Exodus 16:18 which describes the gathering of manna in the wilderness where everyone had sufficient.

211 Hebrews 2:1f.

212 James 1:21-23.

But when someone points to the blemish in our character how we recoil! The Lord is concerned for the truth. He will not let sin remain in us. He has done such wonders in dealing with the sin problem – all paid for! But He is still working our salvation out within us. We are justified by Christ's death on the cross, but we are being sanctified by the Lord day-by-day. This means that the Lord will have cause to speak of our sins. The word I have rendered “*grasp*” is more usually translated as “take” in the sense of receive. I used this word “*grasp*” to give the sense of readily receiving from the Lord. We might take something from someone in a variety of ways. Imagine a person working in an office who has a large pile of folders in the “in tray” and someone comes in and says “here are some further documents to review”! The person has to receive them, of course, for that is their job, but they will simply be added to the pile in the “in tray”! That is one level of receiving or taking in things. Then we could imagine a person who is told that there is some free food at a party. They go to the party and they take some food. Their receipt of this will depend on their state of hunger and the condition of the food. Sometimes you go to a party and the sandwiches are like cardboard! At other times (less frequent) there might be rich and amazing delicacies. We receive these blessings in varied ways. But now imagine someone says to you: “you are to inherit a fortune that a distant relative has left”! I can imagine such a person would grasp at this news! Now that is how we ought to take God's correction. It is, after all, for our best interests. God is concerned to fit us for heaven where there is no hint nor taint of sin, error, wickedness or falsity. He must deal with sin in us! So why would we not run to Him when He corrects us? Just as a father chides his son when he misbehaves, we ought to take correction from God as from a true and loving heavenly Father.

Now the essential point here is trust. True faith in God means a reliance and a dependence upon the Lord. The people of God did not trust Him. This is startling. God, who had demonstrated His faithfulness in the most amazing of ways was not trusted by the people! Instead they trusted to themselves, or to the Egyptians, the Assyrians or other worldly powers and aides. This is man. He will not relinquish control and place his trust fully upon God. But this is what is needed. Will we give up our self-trust? Will we recognise both our created nature – we are contingent and dependent – and will we also recognise our lost condition – in desperate need of a Saviour? The thing is that we are constructed to be in right relationship with God, and to be in harmony with both other fellow men and women and within creation. But we are also in desperate need of help, of repair, of strength and comfort, and of rescue from difficulties. In whom can we trust? God alone. And yet in his wicked folly man will not give up self-reliance and trust the faithful and good God. How we need the Lord to revive and energise us! Trust Him!

The last thing that Jerusalem failed to do was to “*draw near*.” There were (and are) far too

many distractions all of which appeal to the fallen sinful human nature. Now in order to draw near we cannot come in pride and self-sufficiency. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector points out the fallacy and idiocy of thinking that God will accept the self-righteous.

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” ²¹³

Therefore, to draw near, we need to come in humility, for “*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*”²¹⁴ Thus to draw near to the fountain of life, to be brought to correction and receive healing in our souls, we need to submit to God. We need to resist the enemy of souls and we need to be washed by the Lord and all that He has provided in His death on the cross. ²¹⁵

The trouble with Jerusalem was that her leaders were all rogues. Applied to what passes for the church today we can see that our church leaders are no different. Applied to ourselves as individuals we note that our wills (“*princes*”), our discernment (“*judges*”), our knowledge and understanding (“*prophets*”), and our consecration and worship (“*priests*”), are all shot through and riddled with holes and putrefying sores.

For Jerusalem the princes within were “*roaring lions.*” These folk gave a good shout and brought terror and fear to bear, but they were not effective nor fruitful. A lion arouses fear, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb slain.²¹⁶ He brings peace.²¹⁷ He offers rest.²¹⁸ Thus those who must be obeyed ruled only by fear.

The “*judges*” who ought to bring wise decisions and offer good discernment were no better than “*wolves of the desert*” who sought simply to devour. Their appetite was voracious devouring their prey instantly so that they did not leave even a bone for the morning (“*they shall not gnaw in the morning*”). Wicked leaders seek to devour people. They rob them of their time, their appreciation, their money, and their desires. Those fed on by the ravening wolves, ought to have

213 Luke 11:9-14.

214 James 4:6.

215 James 4:7-10.

216 Revelation 5:5,6.

217 John 14:27; 20:19,21,26.

218 Matthew 11:28f.

been fed so that they could be productive. Instead the leaders devour and prevent any growth. This was true of Jesus' day. The leaders did not only fail to enter in to all that God had for them, but they also prevented others from entering as well.²¹⁹ We see this in our day. Take for example those who prey on people's minds with regard to the truths of Scripture. Disreputable men who cannot abide to be ridiculed by accepting creation and who favour evolution so as to be thought well of, end up destroying the faith of many. Others who discredit the gospel as mere child abuse or as a wicked story (who ever would condemn their own son?) are equally wicked.²²⁰ These ravening wolves devour us by their subterfuge, their playing with God's word, and their desperation to be seen by men. Likewise those who ought to bring God's word to us unadulterated in all its greatness (true prophets), would rather tamper with it by interpreting it through science, tradition, psychology or whatever. Those who mangle the word of God are frivolous, vacuous, weak, and frothy. They may appear to be something, to have reputation, to be great, but they are *"men of treachery."* It would be time consuming to name names. There are too many who fall foul in one way or another. But remember that Paul called some to account and we ought to as well.²²¹ Who knows whether a frivolous and treacherous leader may repent and seek forgiveness?

Finally the *"priests"* had profaned what was to be sacred. They had *"profaned that which is holy,"* and they had *"done violence to the law."* How this is repeated today! Think of the many wicked and awful things that spoken about Christ. I do not mean to say that this occurs among unbelievers, but among those who claim to be Christian leaders. They ridicule Christ by saying that He is not the only way. They demean Him by discrediting the work of His substitution for us and His atonement propitiating sin. How many simply say that all we need do is look to Jesus as an example, as a good man. They demean Him by not bending the knee to Him and giving them all. Then what of the belittling of God's word, of His law! How can we in this day continue to be silent when the national church agrees to perverse behaviour among men and women as though it were endorsed by a loving God? What sort of God do these so-called leaders worship? Certainly not the holy and righteous God of Scripture (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God forgives! God is gracious! But His forgiveness and His grace come at the expense of the Son of God who took the righteous wrath of God in the sinners' place. When people discount aspects of the moral law, they do violence to God's character, and they do violence to the gospel. What utter wickedness!

What we need to uphold and to boldly declare is that the *"Lord is righteous"* in the midst of

219 Luke 11:52.

220 The liberal Steve Chalke has promoted the wicked idea that God offering His own Son as a substitute is a form of child abuse. But he is not alone in saying this.

221 1Timothy 1:20; 2Timothy 4:14.

Jerusalem and in the midst of His church. The Lord can never condone sin. He will not merely wink at sin or brush it under the carpet. He is utterly holy. No taint or hint of sin is to be allowed. We either accept what Christ has done on our behalf in condemning sin by His death and receiving His righteousness for life (which conforms to God's holy and unchanging law), or we will have to pay the full penalty for our own sin and rebellion. There is no neutral ground, and the ideas and schemes invented by man today will simply be swept away. God can never be unrighteous, but on the contrary He consistently and insistently brings to light His justice (*“morning by morning He brings His justice to light”*). Do you think He might let us off a little sin? Never! Do you think that because two women who (supposedly) marry and are said to be very loving, then God will not mind? Never! Do you think that lying on occasion is alright as long as it does no harm? Never! Is not God perfect? Of course! Is not what He says perfect? Of course! Then why ever does anyone think that they can plough a different furrow to cut across God's law and righteousness and get away with it? Is not God loving? Of course He is! But His holiness will not be discounted. He has made a way whereby His holiness is not forgotten in the exercise of His love and mercy. The Lord Jesus Christ has destroyed sin by His death on the cross and, at one and the same time, He has provided His righteousness for sinners who repent and believe, in order that they may continue no longer in sin and rebellion, but instead pursue godliness and holiness.

God's justice, God's righteousness will never fail. But despite this incredible goodness, *“the unjust do not know shame.”* What a statement! The wicked and unjust who care little for truth and righteousness will continue to wallow in their shameless ways, rebelling, becoming more and more polluted, and engaging in all kinds of oppression.

[3] A dreadful conclusion – mankind is so hard. Zephaniah. [3:6,7].

NKJV	My translation
6 “I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; <i>there is no one, no inhabitant.</i> 7 I said, ‘Surely you will fear Me, you will receive instruction’— so that her dwelling would not be cut off, <i>despite</i> everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.	6 I have cut off nations. Their battlements are desolate. I have dried up their streets so that none will pass by. Their cities are destroyed so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant. 7 I said, “surely you will fear Me, you will take correction, and her dwelling place will not be cut off, even though I have visited her.” Surely they rose early and corrupted all their actions.

It may have been thought that these two verses (Zephaniah 3:6,7) would sit better as a conclusion to the woe against the rebellious city, Jerusalem. However it seems better to consider them as a general conclusion to this second division of Zephaniah's prophecy. I suggest this because the opening statement seems to apply not just to Jerusalem but to all "*nations*." Once again we need to have both a final and a temporal view of this judgement. There is a sense in which these judgements will come in time following Zephaniah's prophecy, but then there is also the idea that such point forward to that great day to end all days.

Verse 6 begins not with what the Lord intends to do, but what He has already in fact done. We do not thence consider that final judgement has actually passed, but that the case has been heard, the verdict has been delivered, judgement has been passed, but we await the executioners work. A man who is tried and sentenced has therefore been judged, even though the carrying out of the sentence may still await. God has effectively consigned all nations to desolation. And so it is presented here as having happened already, even though the final act still awaits. So what has the Lord done? Nations have been "*cut off*." That is, they have been sacrificed or destroyed. The word used is one used to speak of covenant. The Lord has also made the "*battlements*" of the nations "*desolate*" or waste and empty. The nations have no weapon that could succeed against God.²²² The nations are destroyed, their defences are waste and even "*their streets*" are ruined ("*dried up*"). Thus the places which once bustled with activity and what we may loosely call "life," are now no more so that "*none will pass by*," or, none will walk the streets. It has become like a ghost town. Having made a statement about the nations as a whole, and then narrowing down the view to street level, the Lord steps back to review the state of the cities. These too are "*destroyed*," to the extent that there will be "*no man*," and "*no inhabitant*." These words may be applied to Nineveh, for example, which was devastated to the point of oblivion and only re-discovered in the nineteenth century. But ultimately they depict the real situation which faces all cities in all nations. Their defences will be useless, the streets will be empty, and all people will be completely removed.

Now in that such has happened in the past to nations and cities, it might be expected that these would serve as a warning to us. Look back at Nineveh. A thriving city that once repented at the preaching of Jonah, but which would fall again and then was destroyed never to be rebuilt, and all of this foretold by God. Wouldn't this be a sufficient warning? They were wicked in the days of Jonah but repented. And then they fell again and were warned and then destroyed. How will we as a nation fare after years of rebellion and hatred towards God when two centuries ago we were blessed of God with revivals and reformations? Thus in verse 7 we have a statement of God's expectation

222 Proverbs 21:30.

expressed in human terms. On account of what has happened, on account of what I have said and warned, then surely the people will take note? Surely people will heed the warnings? The Lord expresses two things that ought to be sure as consequential upon the warnings issued and the examples made. “*Surely*” they would “*fear*” God and give Him the proper respect and consideration? The Lord is God! He is good, great, glorious and He is gracious! Shall we not heed Him and embrace Him? Surely they would “*take correction*” because He is good and knows what is best? God is good and He does only good, so why, in our state of sin, squalor and hopelessness, would we not flee to Him? If they had feared God and taken correction then they would not have been cut off even though they had suffered punishments. God is a good Father. He chastises His sons. He punishes them to correct. But there comes a time when such correction simply does not work, and then there is no hope at all. What a terrible thought. What was the people's response? What will be the response of the world today when they hear these warnings? There may be some (the small remnant) who repent and flee to God but in the main the people will be all the more eager to pursue corruption. They will rise “*early*” in eager anticipation set and determined on a course of action and in their eagerness they will continue to corrupt all that they do. Truly the sinfulness of man is utterly sinful. Unless the Lord bring some to repentance, unless the Spirit of God cause some to be reborn what hope is there? Even given all the evidence, all the warnings, all the helps and aides mankind is still stubborn and rebellious. This is gross wickedness. We have no excuse whatsoever. And yet in God's amazing grace He steps down and wrestles with a Jacob and illumines the prophets. The Spirit still broods over the waters of this world to bring about new birth. It is to those who receive the Lord Jesus that such new birth will come.²²³

223 John 1:12,13.

Chapter 4.
Part 3: Zephaniah 3:8-20.
Comfort for the believing remnant.

This last passage is a stirring exhortation to those who truly believe. It can be split into three unequal sections as follows:

- [1] Wait for the final day of judgement. [3:8].
- [2] All peoples will call upon the Lord (one church). [3:9-13].
- [3] How the Lord views Zion. [3:14-20].

Before we embark on unpacking this last section we need to remind ourselves of the basic structure of the whole book. We can observe this structure to some extent by looking at one sentence that comes towards the end of section one, and which is repeated here in the last section. The sentence in question first occurs in Zephaniah 1:18:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land²²⁴ shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.²²⁵

Most definitely their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. The whole earth will be consumed in the fire of His jealousy. For an end, a certain and terrible one will He make for all who dwell on the earth.²²⁶

This series of statements is to be compared to what we find at the beginning of this last section in Zephaniah 3:8:

“Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination *is* to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My

224 This word is translated as “earth” in other parts of Zephaniah and it would seem better to render it in this way because the entire earth is in view in this opening section of the book of Zephaniah.

225 NKJV

226 My translation.

indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy."²²⁷

"Therefore, wait for me," says the Lord, "for the day I rise up to the prey, because I shall gather the kingdoms to pour upon them My indignation, all My burning anger, because with the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed."²²⁸

It can be seen in these two sets of statements that we have a depiction of the final day, for all the earth will be burned in the fire of God's jealous anger and wrath. This is His settled, holy, perfect and righteous judgment against all sin and evil. Now it could be argued that because of this repetition then Zephaniah 3:8 ought to be the end of the second section. However it seems more natural to have it in place at the head of the last section because it is part of the message delivered to the remnant.

Once again we need to reiterate the fact that we have reference in this section both to Christ's first coming to bring atonement (in which the wrath of God was satisfied for all true believers), and then also to His second coming to bring final judgement where all who refuse to believe in Christ will suffer God's wrath personally in full.

One other interesting feature of this last section is the concept of gathering and the Lord's "*assembly*." We noted in Zephaniah 2:1 that the Lord called the "*undesirable nation*" to gather themselves together in repentance to seek the Lord. Now however we have the assembly that God has arranged in which He will bring the final judgement upon the entire world.²²⁹

[1] Wait for the final day of judgement. Zephaniah 3:8.

NKJV	My translation
8 "Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord, "until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.	8 "Therefore, wait for me," says the Lord, "for the day I rise up to the prey, because My decision is to gather the nations to My gathering, and the kingdoms, to pour upon them My indignation, all My burning anger, because with the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed."

227 NKJV.

228 My translation.

229 The word "gather" comes at: 2:1(x2); 3:8,18,19,20. The word "assembly" comes at: 3:8,18. The word "midst" (as in the middle of) comes at 2:14; 3:3,5,11,12,15,17.

I have included this verse in this last section because the emphasis seems to be upon the blessings experienced within the church of the living God which is variously described in this last section.²³⁰ We have in this verse a command based upon reason (*“therefore”*). In view of the judgement upon the four corners of the world, those who are remnant, the true church of the living God are told that they must *“wait”* for the Lord. The idea of waiting is a running theme throughout Scripture.²³¹ We are encouraged to wait on the Lord in the sense of enduring trust, and to await His action. Saul fell foul of this when he was waiting for Samuel to come and perform the sacrifice.²³² He went ahead and did it himself instead of waiting and thereby reaped judgement:

13 And Samuel said to Saul, “you have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. **14** But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”²³³

We are to look with eagerness, and to wait patiently for the return of the Lord Jesus.²³⁴ Those who wait on the Lord in obedience and trust will reap the rewards both now and in eternity.²³⁵ The essence of waiting upon the Lord is shown particularly in the following verses:

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul *waits* for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning— *yes, more than* those who watch for the morning.²³⁶

The Lord *is* good to those who wait for Him, to the soul *who* seeks Him. *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.²³⁷

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.²³⁸

230 For example, as “remnant,” “a poor and afflicted people,” “the daughter of Zion.”

231 See, for example: Psalm 27:14; 33:20; 37:7,9,34; 130:5,6; Proverbs 20:22; Isaiah 8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 40:31; 49:23; Lamentations 3:25,26; Micah 7:7; 1Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20; 1Peter 1:13; 2Peter 3:10-13; Jude 1:21.

232 1Samuel 13:8-12.

233 1Samuel 13:13,14.

234 1Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20;

235 **For now:** we gain strength of heart (Psalm 27:14); God is our help and shield (Psalm 33:20); we shall renew strength (Isaiah 40:31); we shall not be ashamed (Isaiah 49:”3). **In eternity:** we will inherit the earth (Psalm 37:9,34); He will finally save us (Proverbs 20:22; Isaiah 25:9; Lamentations 3:25,26); we will receive our citizenship (Philippians 3:20).

236 Psalm 130:5,6.

237 Lamentations 3:25,26.

238 1Peter 1:13.

keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.²³⁹

There is a settled heart for those who wait, for all is at peace, and rest is known. They know with absolute certainty that the Lord will do as He has promised. Meanwhile, as they wait, they place all their hope in “His word,” they “wait quietly” for His return, they prepare their hearts and minds for action and “rest ... fully” upon the grace that will be given, and they keep themselves firmly within “the love of God.”²⁴⁰

Therefore, we are to rest in the Lord and await His return when He will “*rise up to the prey*.”²⁴¹ We are not to fret because of evildoers, but we are to be patient, to trust in the Lord, and to do good dwelling on God's faithfulness.²⁴² The wicked, be they individuals or nations, do not realise that in their rebellion they have made themselves prey! They will soon be mown down as the grass.²⁴³ Nations and individuals who reject God and walk in their own way are running about like silly rabbits and witless fawns on the wilderness of this world in full view of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as the Lord in all His strength looks with patience for that day.

There is coming a day, a day which God has decided, in which He will gather and assemble all nations and kingdoms. There is but one purpose for this day. It is that God's righteous “*indignation*” and His “*burning anger*” may be poured out in full upon those who will be gathered on that day. We tremble to imagine such a time. We have glimpses in Scripture about what it will be like. We have seen something of this day expressed already in the book of Zephaniah. But truly it will be a terrible and fearsome day. It will be the day when “*the earth shall be consumed*” because of the awesome fire of God's “*jealousy*.” We really do not appreciate the incredible goodness and purity of the Lord. As we read these words of Zephaniah 3:8 we must never forget the gospel truth that Christ suffered the wrath of God on behalf of sinners. There is, in point of fact, no reason whatsoever for any to suffer God's wrath and anger on that final terrible day. If any turn and look to Christ, seeing in His one act all that is needed to avert the danger and reap salvation, then that one will be safe and secure. Of course looking to Christ who is the substitute who paid for sins' penalties in full requires a subsequent life of holiness and godliness. There is an exchange taking place for the one who looks to Christ for rescue. The sinner gives up their sin and sin nature so that Christ can pay the penalty, and in exchange receives in full the righteousness of Christ so that a godly life can be lived. Therefore, given this incredible offer of salvation, any who reject it and turn from it can

239 Jude 1:21.

240 Psalm 130:5,6; Lamentations 3:25,26; 1Peter 1:13; Jude 1:21.

241 Zephaniah 3:8.

242 Psalm 37:1,3,7.

243 Psalm 37:2,9.

only expect to pay the bill they owe in full. You sometimes see in gift shops which sell delicate ornaments the sign “all breakages must be paid for!” Do we not realise how precious life is? When we ruin it with sin and wickedness will we not be expected to pay for the breakage and damage we have caused? Imagine that you take your child into that gift shop and through carelessness the child breaks a precious ornament, will you not remonstrate with the child for their unruly behaviour? Will you not tell them that they have broken the precious object and that they are responsible for it? But the child cannot pay! They have no money – certainly not enough to pay for the damage done. The gracious father pays the cost in full, but he makes certain that the child knows what has happened. Now this illustration is weak. The Lord has stepped in and paid for all the damage and ruin we have caused in our lives by going our own way. Although He has made us aware of the cost and the responsibility we have in the matter, His grace and mercy bring to us a complete recovery and fullness of life – eternal life – which is experienced now and reserved for us in heaven.²⁴⁴ But what do you think the Lord will do to those who say: “I want none of Christ and His gift of redemption”? The damage has been done, the life has been ruined (even if we think it hasn't and we are ignorant of the terrible state we are in), and payment must be made. Who is to pay if not Christ? Can the sinner pay? Well the fact of the matter is that the sinner *must* pay. The day is coming when the Lord will require us to face up to the bill we owe. Debts are being called in. For those who have settled the matter and have been redeemed and put on the road to heaven – *“the Highway of Holiness”* – the payment has been made by Christ.²⁴⁵ But for those who have rejected Christ the payment must be made on that terrible day, the day of God's assembly of the nations.

We must make some comment on the very last part of this verse (*“because with the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed”*) because we did not highlight it when commenting on the similar phrase found in Zephaniah 1:18, and further, because it helps us understand something of what will transpire on the last day. We do not like to think of God as being jealous, and we are somewhat puzzled by His burning and fiery nature. Now that is because we only experience jealousy and fire in fallen human ways. We are riven with sin and this colours all our view of things. How important it is that we “renew our minds” by thinking again of these things with God's perspective.²⁴⁶ That God is indeed jealous can be established easily from other Scriptures. The first time we come upon the idea is to be found in the second of the ten commandments written by the finger of God:

244 2Corinthians 6:2; 1Peter 1:4.

245 Isaiah 35:8.

246 Romans 12:1,2; Ephesians 4:23.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything that is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” ²⁴⁷

This commandment follows the first logically. There is no other that can take the place of God. He alone is Creator and maker of all things, and He alone is sovereign Lord. The idea that there are other “gods” is ludicrous. There are none. But mankind has fabricated numerous so-called “gods” (idols) to replace God, the One and Only. Thus it is not surprising that God is jealous. He cannot abide the folly of people offering themselves to things and people who are not truly God. Since God is One and alone God, what can take His place?

The matter is reiterated latter in the book of Exodus in relation to the nation of Israel entering the promised land. The Lord instructs them that they are to “*take heed*” to themselves and consider the covenant God has made in case they be tempted to make covenants with the people of Canaan.²⁴⁸ The people of God were to utterly destroy the pagan idols and altars because these would be a snare and a trap and would ruin their lives. This is because

... you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name *is Jealous, is a jealous God*).²⁴⁹

The third time we come across this idea occurs in Deuteronomy. Moses reminded the people of their obligations and that they ought to be especially careful when entering the land not to forget the covenant of the Lord and turn to pagan and foreign idols, because:

... the Lord your God *is a consuming fire, a jealous God*.²⁵⁰

This statement links the concept of God's jealousy with His nature as a “*consuming fire*.” In the book of Joshua we discover that God's jealousy is also linked to His holiness:

... He *is a holy God. He is a jealous God* ...²⁵¹

247 Exodus 20:4-6.

248 Exodus 34:12.

249 Exodus 34:14.

250 Deuteronomy 4:24.

251 Joshua 24:19.

This feature of God being jealous is found in many other Scriptures apart from these.²⁵² But what do we mean by God being jealous? Perhaps we can get a better understanding from Paul's statement made to the Corinthian church. He longed for them to be wholeheartedly devoted to Christ and so he wrote the following:

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as a chaste virgin to Christ*.²⁵³

It is possible, therefore, to be jealous in a “godly” way, that is, in a pure and righteous way. We get another insight into the biblical idea of jealousy from words that the Shulamite utters to her beloved:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love *is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame*.²⁵⁴

Jealousy is thus an aspect of love. To be jealous in a godly sense is to want what is perfect and good. It is concerned with guarding or keeping that which is good. Since God is good and all that He says is good, it stands to reason that He would want people to worship Him alone. There is nothing better. In fact anything else is a travesty, dangerous, and demeaning to God.

But apart from the fact that God is jealous and will not allow anything but goodness and righteousness to continue, we have this idea that God is a consuming fire. What shall we make of this? Well I think the main point is that His glory, His holiness, His purity, and His goodness are of such perfection that He burns with utter ferocity and will consume anything contrary to His being. How then shall sinful humans approach such a fearsome God? The answer is that it is only possible by being “in Christ” who is holy, without sin and blameless perfection.

252 See, for example: Deuteronomy 5:19; 6:15; Ezekiel 23:25; 36:5; Nahum 1:2

253 2Corinthians 11:2.

254 Song of Songs 8:6.

NKJV	My translation
9 “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshippers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering. 11 In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. 12 I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. 13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed <i>their</i> flocks and lie down, and no one shall make <i>them</i> afraid.”	9 “For at that time I will turn towards the peoples a pure language, in that place all of them will call upon the Lord, to serve with one shoulder. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My suppliants, the daughter of My scattered ones, shall bring My gift. 11 In that day you shall not be ashamed of your deeds by which you transgressed against Me, because at that time I will turn away from your midst those who exult in your pride, and you will not again be haughty in My holy mountain. 12 And I will leave in the midst of you a poor and afflicted people, and they shall shelter in the name of the Lord. 13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor shall they utter lies, and a deceitful tongue shall not be found in their mouths, for they shall feed and they shall lie down and none shall make them afraid.”

Both this section and the next seem to be structured in part around the phrases “*that day*” and “*that time*” pointing to the great day of the Lord.²⁵⁵ We must remember that the day of the Lord has several referents. We usually consider that it refers to the final point in time when all things will be wrapped up when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. However there is a sense in which the day of the Lord began when Christ died upon Calvary. The day of the Lord is perhaps to be characterised by the expression of God's wrath against sin. The wrath of God was indeed poured out upon the Saviour, and will also be meted out to all the rebellious wicked at the end of time. However it is also seen at those times when temporal judgements take place. The apostle Paul wrote about the wrath of the Lord being “*revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*” and then he goes on to outline the effect God's wrath has upon such rebels.²⁵⁶ Always our focus should be on the final day of the Lord, but this day entails the day when Christ died, and the days in which judgement is meted out in part.

We need first to understand what the opening phrase: “*that time*” refers to. Is it the day

255 The NKJV offers “*for then*” where I have suggested “*at that time.*”

256 Romans 1:18.

when the nations are finally gathered to receive the indignation of God, the final great day? Or is it referring to the period expressed by the command to the people of God to “wait”?²⁵⁷ Other modern translations have the phrase “for then” where we have supplied “at that time,” which seems to imply a consequential action.²⁵⁸ In other words when that terrible day comes, then the Lord will do those things outlined in verses 9 and following. There is a sense in which this is certainly true. If the text speaks of what happens after the great and final judgement, then it will be that a pure language will be restored to the redeemed for none can occupy heaven with coarse and unsanctified conversation. However, there are elements in what follows this statement which speak more of the life of the church in the gospel age rather than the purity to be known in heaven. Perhaps the chief support for this idea is the phrase of verse 12 which reads “*I will leave in the midst of you a poor and afflicted people.*” It is impossible to attribute such a statement which describes the redeemed as representing their experience in the new heaven and earth. Thus it is perhaps better to understand these thoughts as applying to the gospel age but also acting prophetically of the age to come.

We might sum up by saying something like this: 'during the gospel age (“at that time”) the people of God will be of a “pure language” and yet will be “poor and afflicted,” but when that final day comes they “shall not be ashamed” at all because of God's saving grace.' I wonder if we realise this? That those privileged to be members of the Kingdom of God are illustrating a glimpse of heavenly life to the world. That is what the church ought to display. Sadly much which is designated by the name “church” does anything but. However true believers who are active members of the Kingdom of God do by their sanctified lives display some features and aspects of the glory of heaven.²⁵⁹

Thus during the gospel age we find a widespread in-gathering from all over the world to form a group of people who are separate from the world.²⁶⁰ Although the word rendered as “peoples” is not the one which is often given as “Gentiles,” nevertheless these are distinct from the children of Israel. There will be people from different lands coming, and one example of this is given from a region “beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,” that is, much further south and far distant than even Egypt. This is a work of God, not of man, for we discover that it is by God's “will” that people will be enabled to speak a new language which is “pure” and unsullied.²⁶¹ When a person becomes a believer their very speech and conversation alters. It is out of the abundance of the heart that the

257 Zephaniah 3:8.

258 For example: NASB, NIV. The ESV has “for at that time” as I have suggested in my translation.

259 Ephesians 3:10; Hebrews 12:22-24.

260 Zephaniah 3:9.

261 Zephaniah 3:9.

mouth speaks, and new born believers are now enabled to speak in the language of heaven.²⁶² But, of course, this is not to say that those who speak this new language do it in some mechanical or automatic way! What we observe is that there will be a people who have the will and desire to “*call upon the Lord.*” These are the ones who have come to realise that self-reliance is a failure. They have come to recognise their great need of God and so they “*call upon the Lord*” and put all their reliance and trust on Him. But for what purpose? Well that is stated too in verse 9, it is “*to serve with one shoulder.*” The idea behind this expression is that the power and strength of all together acts as a single shoulder against the object in the way. Imagine a group of people trying to remove a huge boulder that is blocking some path. They push and heave in unison so that their combined effort is additive. They force the object away with “*one shoulder*” as it were. And so those who turn to Christ to serve Him do so with one mind and heart, working together for God's glory.²⁶³

Those who call upon the Lord are those who come “*from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,*” that is, from deeper south than Egypt. These are described as “*My suppliants*” or God's (true) worshippers, and they are put as “*the daughter of My scattered ones.*” Are these children of Israel that have been spread far and wide? I think not because these are found beyond Egypt and even “*beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*” in a far distant land. It would seem that God is drawing His worshippers from unexpected places far further away than those who will be dispersed and scattered when Nebuchadnezzar finally destroys Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The language in verses 11 to 13 seems to indicate that the people of God (“*the remnant of Israel*”) include this distant peoples (“*from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*” as just one example). The Lord addresses this people made up of the remnant and those gathered from a far distant realm as a collective “*you.*” What follows is a series of statements concerning this collective grouping which we can outline as follows:

- [a] They will not be ashamed of their deeds by which they transgressed God. [Verse 11].
- [b] God will deal with their pride in two ways. [Verse 11].
- [c] The poor and afflicted people will shelter in the name of the Lord. [Verse 12].
- [d] The remnant of Israel will not continue in sin. [Verse 13].
- [e] The remnant shall be able to feed without fear. [Verse 13].

First the people of God, the redeemed church will be those who will no longer “*be ashamed*” of their deeds which they had done against the Lord because of a new relationship and a new

262 Matthew 12:34.

263 Romans 15:16; Philippians 1:27.

disposition. This new relationship and disposition comes about, as we have already noted, because of what God has determined (*"I will"*). Part of this work of God was to deal with those who were not good for them and part of it was to change their attitude. Thus second we learn that God would remove (*"turn away from your midst"*) those who exulted and gloried in their pride. When we are proud and arrogant there are always those around who exult in such folly. Take, for example, the current obsession over sexual identity and expression. These are enhanced and backed by so-called "pride marches" which seek to exult and honour these modern perversions. How then can people repent easily of those who around them exult in their wickedness and pride? Well the Lord makes it possible by removing such folly. He takes out of the way those who hang on and who promote the wickedness and pride. These are to be removed. We pause to think here how great salvation is. How immensely intricate and difficult it is – from a human perspective. We may be proud and arrogant and we begin to see the folly of it and want to turn to God. But then those around us put stumbling blocks in the way and aggravate the position by exulting in our pride and folly! Well in order for one to truly turn and repent and to come humbly, those who exult in pride must be removed. Praise God for His wonderful work! But then also the Lord makes it possible for the people of God to walk in humility. In saying *"you will not again be haughty in My holy mountain"* we understand the opposite positive expression. In other words they will be humble. God draws near to the humble and contrite heart and it is not possible to be haughty or proud in God's presence with any degree of acceptance or success.

We ought also to make some comments on the phrase *"My holy mountain."* This is a phrase which is frequent in Isaiah but also found in other prophets, but what does it signify?²⁶⁴ The Lord's *"holy mountain"* was the place of safety where the redeemed would not be hurt nor destroyed.²⁶⁵ This place was to be a place for prayer and true worship where true believers would gather in joy.²⁶⁶ This was the place which those who truly trusted in God would one day inherit.²⁶⁷ The Lord's holy mountain was forgotten and neglected by the children of Israel in favour of foreign gods, fortune (*"Gad"*) and destiny (*"Meni"*).²⁶⁸ The Lord's holy mountain was His dwelling place where Satan once had the privilege of serving the Lord as the *"anointed cherub who covers."*²⁶⁹ The prophet Daniel and others speak of Jerusalem (or Zion) as the place of God's *"holy mountain"* in which He

264 The phrase occurs 16 times in the KJV at: Isaiah 11:9; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11,25; 66:20; Ezekiel 20:40; 28:14; Daniel 9:16,20; 11:45; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obadiah 1:16; Zephaniah 3:11; Zechariah 8:3.

265 Isaiah 11:9; 65:25.

266 Isaiah 56:7; 66:20; Ezekiel 20:40.

267 Isaiah 57:13.

268 Isaiah 65:11.

269 Ezekiel 28:14.

dwells.²⁷⁰ From these references the main point is the place where God dwells and where He has placed His name, His very character, which is where true worshippers come to rejoice and pray and find safety. In the Old Testament this was Zion or Jerusalem, but in the New Testament time this is where Christ Jesus is.²⁷¹ The similar phrase “*holy hill*” is also relevant here.²⁷² The “*holy hill*” was in Zion and was where the Lord God had set His King to rule.²⁷³ God hears the prayers of His saints from His “*holy hill*.”²⁷⁴ God’s “*holy hill*” was the place where He dwells, and was a place which can only be accessed by the righteous.²⁷⁵ Directions to the “*holy hill*” of God come exclusively from the Lord’s light and truth.²⁷⁶ The “*holy hill*” of God is the place where true worship must take place.²⁷⁷ Apart from these two phrases (“*holy mountain*” and “*holy hill*”) we also get an inclination of what this place signifies by looking at Isaiah 25 where the phrase “*this mountain*” is used, and which clearly speaks of Zion or Jerusalem in contrast to the city of the nations.²⁷⁸ It is to be on “*this mountain*” where death will finally be dealt with, where true and lasting joy may be had, and where the fallen human nature will be trampled down.²⁷⁹ The descriptions in this passage of Isaiah 25 leave us in no doubt whatsoever, that the most important thing about “*this mountain*” (which can be none other than the “*holy mountain*” or “*holy hill*”) is the work of Christ at Calvary, (His death and resurrection).

The phrase “*My holy mountain*” thus contains within it the very presence of God, where His work of salvation at Calvary took place, and where the true believers love to be in worship and prayer. How then could a true believer be haughty or proud in the presence of God or at the foot of the cross? It is an impossibility. Wicked and unrighteous people may be proud and haughty in the face of God, but one brought to repentance and faith can never be so. The holy hill or mountain of God is the centrepiece of the believer’s life. God forbid that we should boast in anything at all apart from the cross of the Saviour, and may it never be that we preach, or put as the centre of our beings, anything save Christ and Him crucified.²⁸⁰ The cross – Christ’s great work on Calvary – is the centrepiece of life for the believer.

The third main statement about the people of God is that they are “*poor and afflicted*” but

270 Daniel 9:16,10; 11:45; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obadiah 1:16; Zechariah 8:3.

271 John 2:21; 4:24; 14:17,21,23.

272 Psalm 2:6; 3:4; 15:1; 43:3; 99:9. See also Psalm 24:3 where we have the expressions “hill of the Lord” and “His holy place.”

273 Psalm 2:6.

274 Psalm 3:4.

275 Psalm 15:1; 24:3.

276 Psalm 43:3.

277 Psalm 99:9.

278 Isaiah 25:3,6,10.

279 Isaiah 25:6-8,10-12.

280 Galatians 6:14; 1Corinthians 2:2.

will *“shelter in the name of the Lord.”* This world's treasures and glories mean nothing to them. Because they look towards heaven and the Saviour, the world detests them and they have tribulation in the world. Their concern is not to build treasures and mansions on earth, but to store up treasures in heaven where their Saviour has prepared His mansion to receive them.²⁸¹ Just as Noah condemned the world by building the ark as instructed and so was focused on salvation, so too those who love Christ and walk with Him show that the world and its concerns and its methods are all in vain.²⁸² Now the poverty of the people of God is no hindrance, nor is it anything to be truly concerned with. Our Lord and Saviour operated having nothing at all to His name in an earthly sense. It was said of Him that foxes had their holes and birds had their nests but the Son of man had nowhere He could lay claim to.²⁸³ The Son of God who owns the entire universe, operated whilst upon the earth in human poverty! We who follow Him ought never to think that money and resources are the answer. How easily we are swayed and moved into thinking that if only we had a sum of money, or some property, or some other earthly goods, what wonders we could do for the Lord! We are fools to think so. We ought to rejoice in being poor because then all the glory goes to God. The truth is that the Lord always takes care of His people. They have no need nor want for anything because the Lord delights to take care of them.²⁸⁴ All we are to do is to obey the Lord and rejoice in His great provision of salvation. We may be called upon to do great things. We may be given the opportunity to make a large amount of money to use in godly ways. But these things are not the essential things. God can work with few or great in number and resources, for He Himself is life and health and peace.²⁸⁵ But in the world we are to be seen as poor, because then the Lord will be seen to be the One who truly saves. Those who have such an attitude of holding to this world's goods and possessions with 'light fingers' prefer to shelter in the very name and character of God. Oh to take refuge in the name of God is wonderful! To have His name upon us is enough. We are sealed by the Spirit.²⁸⁶ We have the stamp of God's ownership upon us so woe betide any who tamper with God's possession. God is the believer's *“hiding place,”* and their *“refuge.”*²⁸⁷ To be with Him is everything. We would rather have Him than anything else in the world.

A fourth feature of the people of God in the new covenant is that they will not want to

281 Matthew 6:19,20; John 14:1,2.

282 Hebrews 11:7.

283 Matthew 8:20.

284 There are numerous Scriptures that teach this but I do not want any to think that by such a Christian may become wealthy as touted and promoted by those who advocate a “health and wealth” gospel (which is no gospel). God provides for us sufficient (and often more than sufficient) for our needs. See, for example: Matthew 6:8,25-34; Psalm 37:25,28.

285 1Samuel 14:6; 2Chronicles 14:11.

286 Ephesians 1:13; 4:30.

287 Psalm 32:7; 62:7; 71:3; 91:2; 119:114.

continue in sin. Our text in Zephaniah 3:13 says that they *“shall not do iniquity.”* Does this mean they are sinless and perfect? Well again we need to bear in mind that these prophecies have a twofold application. They speak of the glory of heaven, but also of that time where revival occurs, where the church comes to life. In heaven it is impossible for sin to be found for therein *only* righteousness dwells.²⁸⁸ Thus the remnant in heaven will truly never do any sin. But in the church of the redeemed following Christ's atonement and prior to His return, the situation is somewhat different. The church ought to be a place of no sin, but it is made up of sinners saved by grace. The apostle John makes it plain that any who say they have no sin are lying.²⁸⁹ He goes on to say that believers do not want to continue in sin.²⁹⁰ They have a new view of sin and hate it. Praise God that we have *“an Advocate with the Father”* who can plead on our behalf.²⁹¹ The text in Zephaniah 3:13 goes on to highlight lying and deceit as examples (*“nor shall they utter lies and a deceitful tongue shall not be found in their mouths”*). The Christian is such by virtue of faith in God and now has a new principle of life within – the new birth. Their attitude of heart is different and they have a new *“pure language.”*²⁹² The Lord touched the mouths of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and this is always the case with those born again.²⁹³ No longer does the new-born person want to curse, or speak wicked things, and, having been confronted with the truth of their state and the truth of God, what use is there in ever hiding anything from God? No they long for God's word and His ways. Yes they stumble and sin, but their heart's desire is truly to know the Lord and speak His word.

The last statement takes up this thought of the new born person's desire. They will be enabled to *“feed”* in safety and without fear. How does such a sentence sit with the persecution and tribulation that believers face day-by-day? Well of course whilst the body may be harmed and treated harshly, none can truly reach the soul.²⁹⁴ We can feed on Christ in the spirit and devour His beauty and life without opposition. How vital it is to hide the word of God in the heart and to memorise Scripture, for then the Spirit can take of what He has placed there to encourage, direct and feed our souls.²⁹⁵ We who have the word of God freely available are guilty and wicked if we neglect it and barely take it up to meditate upon. Think of our dear persecuted brethren who would relish the mere scrap of paper which contains a verse or two! But even the persecuted in their cells

288 1Corinthians 6:9,10; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5.

289 1John 1:8,10.

290 1John 3:6,8,9.

291 1John 2:1.

292 Zephaniah 3:9.

293 Isaiah 6:7; Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 2:8; 3:2.

294 Matthew 10:28.

295 Psalm 119:11.

where they are treated abominably can sing praises to God, and the Spirit of God can move them and animate them to rejoice in their Saviour. We are not to be afraid when the magistrates charge us unlawfully, for the Spirit will be with us and will enable us to say what is necessary at the time.²⁹⁶ However all the while we have the freedom we ought to make every effort to fill our lives, our minds, and our beings with God's word.²⁹⁷

[3] How the Lord views Zion. Zephaniah 3:14-20.

NKJV	My translation
14 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all <i>your</i> heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, <i>is</i> in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. 16 In that <i>day</i> it shall be said to Jerusalem: “do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. 17 The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet <i>you</i> with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” 18 “I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, <i>to whom</i> its reproach <i>is</i> a burden. 19 Behold, at that <i>time</i> I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. 20 At that <i>time</i> I will bring you back, even at the <i>time</i> I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,” says the Lord.	14 Sing daughter of Zion! Make a loud noise Israel! Rejoice and exult with all heart daughter of Jerusalem. 15 The Lord has taken away your judgements, He has turned away your enemy, the King of Israel, the Lord in your midst of you, you shall not be afraid of evil again. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, “Do not fear Zion, do not let your hands hang slack.” 17 The Lord your God in the midst of you, the Mighty One will save. He will rejoice in you with joy. He will be silent in His love. He will rejoice in you with singing. 18 “The sorrowful ones of the festive assembly I will gather from out of you, they are a burden upon her, a reproach. 19 Behold I, I will deal with all who afflict you at that time, and I will save you with the lame, and her that was expelled I will gather and will set them for glory and for a name in the earth in place of their reproach. 20 In that time I will bring you in, and in that time I will gather you, for I will give you a name for glory before all the peoples of the earth. I will turn back your captivity before your eyes” says the Lord.

We have discussed several characteristics of the people of God particularly with regard to their general demeanour, their new “*pure language*,” their status in the world (“*poor and*

296 Luke 12:11,12.

297 Psalm 119:11,15,23,27,48,78,148; Proverbs 4:4; 23:12.

afflicted”), their unity and purpose (“*all of them will call upon the Lord .. with one shoulder*”), their hatred of sin, their new found humility (“*you will not again be haughty*”), and their freedom in feeding on the Lord, but in this last passage we are shown how the Lord looks upon the people of God.²⁹⁸ Once again we have the phrases, “*that day,*” and “*that time,*” which speak both of the gospel age (or the age of renewal and revival – such as the return from exile, for example), and also of the glory to come when the new earth and heavens are called to be.

To begin with, there is a wonderful command issued to the people of God (here called the “*daughter of Zion*” and “*daughter of Jerusalem*”) to rejoice. They are to “*sing,*” to “*make a loud noise,*” to “*rejoice and exult with all heart.*” Here is exuberance, exhilaration and excitement! I wonder, do we really believe the gospel? Have we taken it in properly? If so we would have no trouble fulfilling this command! To the true believer these things come by nature. The Lord has saved, who can but rejoice? The Lord has delivered, who can but sing? The Lord has given us His Son, who can but be completely given to His praise? Perhaps we have been duped and deceived by the devil who pours scorn on the Saviour? Maybe our eyes have wandered from the glorious and gracious Lord? Maybe the trinkets and baubles of this world have attracted us? But surely when we come to our senses and see the truth there is great and immense joy! When the crippled man at the temple gate was healed he could not restrain his joy and ended up: “*walking, leaping, and praising God.*”²⁹⁹

So why is there such joy (as if we didn't know!)? Well in Zephaniah 3:15 we discover that the Lord had removed their “*judgements,*” and had “*turned away*” their “*enemy.*” The first idea points us to the cross where the Lord has removed all decisions and verdicts against the people of God. By His death at Calvary the Lord has

wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.³⁰⁰

But then also, through His work at Calvary, the Lord has equally dealt with the enemy:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.³⁰¹

298 Zephaniah 3:9-13.

299 Acts 3:8.

300 Colossians 2:14.

301 Hebrews 2:14.

Who is it that has done this? It is the “*King of Israel*” and “*the Lord in your midst,*” or, in other words, Immanuel, God with us. Only Christ can claim the title “*Immanuel*” for He alone has stepped down from heaven and dwelt among us.³⁰² The outcome from this tremendous act is that the people of God will “*not be afraid of evil again.*” Fear of evil and wickedness is removed. Perfect love casts out all fear.³⁰³

And then in verse 16 we discover that the city of Zion/Jerusalem (a picture of the people of God in the new covenant) are told not only that they should “*not fear,*” but also that they must not their “*hands hang slack.*” Fear paralyses. But love releases. The Lord releases the captives and sets free the prisoners so that they can run free and do all that they were prohibited to do, whilst in their chains.

The remainder of this book is concerned with what the Lord God, who is described in verse 17 as “*the Mighty one,*” will do. There are a dozen statements in verses 17 to 20 outlining what this Champion, this Warrior, this great Deliverer will do. These are thus descriptions of the God who is with us (His people) and who will bring about salvation, namely the Lord Jesus Christ! We pause briefly to remember that Christ Jesus was truly amongst His people whilst on the earth, and even though He is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory, yet He still walks amongst the lamp stands, and by His Spirit He is with us still.³⁰⁴ Before we proceed to consider what follows from this opening statement in verse 17, we need to consider the translation of verse 18, as it seems to have caused the translators some difficulty. A variety of version are shown below:

NKJV	My Translation	NASB	ESV	NIV	AKJV
I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly,	The sorrowful ones from the festive assembly I will gather from out of you,	I will gather those who are worried about the appointed feasts—	I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,	I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals,	I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly,
who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden.	they are a burden upon her, a reproach.	they came from you, Zion; the disgrace of exile is a burden on them.	so that you will no longer suffer reproach.	which is a burden and reproach for you.	who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

302 Isaiah 7:14.

303 1John 4:18.

304 John 14:18,26; 15:26; 16:13; Revelation 1:13.

It should be noted how often italicised words (indicating words supplied by translators) are used in the above, and also the variety of prepositions (some of which are highlighted). The difficulty arises, perhaps, because many make the assumption that the sorrowful and those that mourn do so because they are penitent. This idea is followed, for example, by Calvin who translates the verse as follows:

The grieved for the festivals have I gathered from thee; they were a burden on thee, a reproach.³⁰⁵

However the literal rendering, which I have attempted in my version, does not supply additional words and uses the most regular form of prepositions (“*from*” “*upon*”). The noun I have rendered as “*festive assembly*” is a singular masculine and this matches the combined preposition and pronoun used (מִמֶּךָ, *mimmēk*) which I have rendered “*from out of you,*” which is second person singular masculine.³⁰⁶ Following this we have a third person plural use of the verb “to be” (hence “*they are*”), and the preposition “*upon*” with 3rd person singular feminine suffix attached which I have given as “*upon her.*” The point of reference for “*upon her*” is Zion last mentioned in verse 16. Thus the right sense of verse 18 is that the Lord will utterly remove from out of the festive assembly all those who mourn and are sorrowful because they are a reproach and a burden. The festive assembly, or, in other words, the gathering for worship, is meant to be something of great joy, not a place of moaning and groaning!

A summary of these various statements made in verses 17 to 20 is shown in the table on the next page. Looking at these as a whole we can see that the time period referred to here is not one that depicts the new heavens and the new earth, (i.e. after Christ's second coming), because there is still affliction and those who are brought in will be for a name and glory to the rest of the earth. What is being described, however, is the gospel age which is in itself a prophetic picture of the heaven to come. Of course the failures and mistakes of what appears to be church on the earth are just part of this world's order. Sinners saved by grace are not yet perfect. \SO what should we make of these statements?

In the first place we are astounded that the Mighty One, the great I AM, rejoices over His people with delight and great joy. This is not the only place we can read of this truth. Consider, for example, the parable of the lost sheep our Saviour told:

305 John Calvin. Commentary on Zephaniah. Banner of Truth Trust. P308 (footnote).

306 I could have reduced this to: “from you.”

4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.³⁰⁷

	The Mighty One will:	Scriptural statements:
[1]	Rejoice in His people with joy, and with singing.	He will rejoice in you with joy. [V17]. He will rejoice in you with singing. [V17].
[2]	Bring peace and security.	He will be silent in His love. [V17].
[3]	Remove those that are sorrowful out of the midst of His joyful people.	The sorrowful ones of the festive assembly I will gather from out of you, they are a burden upon her, a reproach. [V18].
[4]	Deal with any who cause affliction. [Styled as the I AM].	Behold I, I will deal with all who afflict you at that time. [V19].
[5]	Save – just as He saves the crippled.	... and I will save you with the lame. [V19].
[6]	Gather in those who had been expelled and considered outcast.	... and her that was expelled I will gather. [V19]. I will bring you in. [V20]. I will gather you. [V20].
[7]	Give those so saved “glory” and “a name” in place of their reproach.	... and will set them for glory and for a name in the earth in place of their reproach. [v19]. ... for I will give you a name for glory before all the peoples of the earth. [V20].
[8]	Turn back captivity.	I will turn back your captivity before your eyes says the Lord. [V20].

We might also mention the amazing statements concerning the Sulamite in the Song of Songs to show how much rejoicing there is for sinners saved by the blood of Christ.³⁰⁸ Such a thing is marvellous in our eyes but ought not to be a surprise because God is love, and His work of redemption is beautiful and victorious, why would He not rejoice?

The second statement is not easy to unpick on first reading. My translation tracks the Hebrew literally (“*He will be silent in His love*”) but other translations have added words to indicate the meaning.³⁰⁹ The NKJV and the ESV add the pronoun “you” but this is not present in the Hebrew. The AKJV uses the word “rest” in place of “*silent*,” (“*He will rest in His love*”), but this gives a passive sense to the phrase suggesting that the Lord is content in His love. The sense of

307 Luke 15:4-7.

308 Song of Songs 1:15; 4:1-15; 6:4-10; 7:1-9.

309 There are only two words in the Hebrew sentence. יָחַרְיֵשׁ - *He will be silent*, בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ - *in/with/by His love*.

the phrase, is that in acting in His love the Lord will be silent or restful. In other words He comes with great gentleness and compassion. He does not come ostentatiously or with pomp and show.

The statement of verse 18 reinforces what has already been said about the central theme being one of joy and rejoicing. Those that do not see or experience this incredible joy and opt for a moaning and groaning spirit will be cast out. This reminds us of the situation recorded of the Children of Israel who when delivered from Egypt by God's mighty hand continually complained and moaned to Moses and the Lord.³¹⁰ Ten times the Israelites put the Lord to the test and as a consequence they were not able to enter the promised land.³¹¹ Now in the new covenant gospel age, all moaners and groaners will be removed. This comes as a very stark warning to us. It does not mean that the people of God must suffer under bad and wicked leadership or corrupt institutions, but our general demeanour ought to be characterised by the joy of our salvation.

The Mighty One will also deal with all who afflict or persecute. The same general idea is shown in Isaiah:

11 “O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colourful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. **12** I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. **13** All your children *shall be* taught by the Lord, and great *shall be* the peace of your children. **14** In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. **15** Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake. **16** “Behold, I have created the blacksmith who blows the coals in the fire, who brings forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the spoiler to destroy. **17** No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue *which* rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness *is* from Me,” says the Lord.³¹²

As the people of God in this troubled world we suffer persecution and experience tribulation but the Lord is still in our midst and He is still the Mighty One who saves! All our springs of joy are in Him.³¹³ He is the fountain of life and joy, and He brings His joy to us as we look to Him.

The Lord, the Mighty One who saves is still in the business of salvation, both with respect to the lost and new ones coming in, and in connection with those who have been born again.

Our God *is* the God of salvation; and to God the Lord *belong* escapes from death.³¹⁴

310 Exodus 15:24; 16:2,7,8,9,12; 17:3; Numbers 11:1; 14:2,22,27,29,36; 16:11,41; 17:5,10; Deuteronomy 1:12,27.

311 Numbers 14:20-25.

312 Isaiah 54:11-17.

313 Psalm 87:7.

314 Palm 68:20.

How many times does He rescue and deliver? After all the Lord Jesus taught us to pray: “*but deliver us from the evil one,*” and we are to take up the armour God has provided to withstand the enemy's attacks.³¹⁵ Yes the Lord, the Mighty One who is more than able will still be gathering in the outcasts and those who have been rejected. He will reverse our captivity and bondage to this world and its sin, and He will make a name for His people who, as they are gathered from all over the world and from every tribe and tongue, one day will hear these precious words:

*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.*³¹⁶

315 Matthew 6:13; Ephesians 6:10f.

316 Matthew 25:21,23.

Chapter 5.

Making sense of all this.

One of the worst things a preacher can do is to end his sermon with a lengthy summary recapping all his points and applications. Teachers are often guilty of repetition too, but then there may be need for that in today's very distracted classrooms! Well I am afraid I believe this message is so important that I cannot end this work without drawing together some of the themes and applications we have considered throughout our studies.

The word of God.

I wonder if we really appreciate the amazing thing it is that God has taken such pains to reveal His will and ways to us? Can you imagine how a young man would respond when he is sent a letter by the love of his life? Or what if you were awaiting a letter from a prospective employer or cherished university? These are weak analogies, but I venture to suggest you would be eager to hear and receive such letters. Think of it. The Creator of the entire universe has deigned to speak to you and I, and He has done so in words that we can understand, and in words that speak nothing but the truth. God cannot lie and He is holy, so all His statements and revelations are true and they are pure. We forbear to detail the doctrine of Scripture in full at this point, but merely want to encourage the reader to grasp hold of the word of God eagerly and fully as though it were a matter of life and death. The Scriptures are not just authoritative because they are “written,” but are indeed the “word of life” and a “living word.”³¹⁷ The Bible, in short, is that which God has spoken to us and is His 'love letter' to the believing soul.

The day of the Lord.

Perhaps the single most important point to come out of this short prophecy is that the Lord is most certainly coming to judge the entire world. There is no escape. There will be an end to time and this world. But in our culture and environment this truth is not only sidelined but is utterly ridiculed. Without doubt, the main reason why this truth is disregarded is because of the honour given to modern science, and especially to the overarching paradigm which governs modern

³¹⁷ Philippians 2:16; Hebrews 4:12; 1John 1:1.

thought, namely evolution. By stretching time to unimaginable lengths, modern man has effectively pushed God out of all intellectual thought. The history of western thought since the days of the reformation is a sorry tale showing mankind's propensity to drift from God and all things which are good.

It is a grave tragedy that many within what purports to be the church have compromised on the issue of origins, world history and how we should view the created world (loosely termed "science"). The beginnings of this slide from truth started with doubts about the word of God. That is why I began with a note about the word of God at the start of this work. Low views of Scripture have meant a devaluing of its scope and sufficiency. Now given that God is Creator, it stands to reason that what He would reveal to mankind is not only sufficient but also comprehensive. By this I mean that what God has revealed will cover all eventualities. The apostle Peter, as just one example, demonstrates this theme in the opening chapter of his second letter. Why those in former centuries left off trusting in God's word for truth concerning our origins, history and how we should view creation is a question which would require another book. Here we simply note that the theory of evolution, along with those departures in the intellectual world which enabled this idea to gain ground, was met with enthusiasm amongst those who were departing from God, and was not withstood by the church in anything like the strength needed to stem the tide of evil. Those who today stand vigorously for the Bible and its scope and sufficiency, and who thence also promote a Biblical view of creation with a young earth (6,000 years old), are to be encouraged and commended. But given the lack of trust generally for the word of God (sadly amongst many who claim to be believers) it is no surprise to find little acceptance of the coming day of judgement.

We need to redress the balance with urgency. As a start we need to promote with eager enthusiasm the Biblical young earth view, including the idea of a global flood which has caused most of the surface features of the earth we currently inhabit. The loss of belief in the global flood is one reason why few accept the idea of a final judgement. If we had presented the flood of Noah's day as a devastating and catastrophic global event which lasted a year and ten days as Scripture (God's word) reports, and which killed all living things save those on the ark, we would have one steady witness and graphic illustration of the judgement to come. When I look at the rocks on the coast and all over the world I see the remnants of God's judgement on the ancient world, but very few people see this. It is significant that Zephaniah has close affinity with the story of the flood in its depiction of the coming judgement.

The day of the Lord is coming. The end of the world is nigh. It is an utter travesty that that last sentence is often taken as a joke. If you see a man with a sandwich board on which is written

the words: “the end of the world is nigh,” such a figure is laughed at as a figure of fun. We need to be bold and we need to proclaim loud and clear that the end of the world is coming.

I will cut off.

The phrase we have chosen as a heading for this paragraph occurs five times in the book. The Lord will:

- Cut off Adam (man).³¹⁸
- Cut off the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests.³¹⁹
- Cut off all the merchant people.³²⁰
- Cut off the nations.³²¹
- Not cut off her (Zion) dwelling place.³²²

It is significant that the first three occur in the first chapter which describes God's universal judgement on all of creation. This cutting off, or division, is almost surgical. Just as the surgeon removes the cancer, so the Lord God is keen to remove every bit of evil that infects and pervades created things. I wonder if we realise how important it is to be holy? All sin (error or failure), all iniquity (evil), all transgression (breaking of the law – that which is right), will be utterly removed. There can be no exception. This is because God is perfect, pure, beautiful and completely lovely. If one atom of sin, iniquity or transgression is allowed the whole is sullied. Imagine you opened a new bottle of ointment and there nestled in the pure concoction sat a dead fly! You would throw it away immediately!³²³ Of course it is utterly impossible for heaven and all who dwell within to be tainted or marred in any way. Heaven is a place of utter purity.

The Lord God is described several times in Scripture as a “*consuming fire*” and this designation helps us to understand the fact that He cannot dwell with sin, iniquity or transgression, for He would consume it in an instant.³²⁴ We often smooth over many sins and allow others through a false sense of tolerance. God is not like us. Any slight taint of sin, iniquity or transgression must be ruled. Perhaps we need to be reminded of the following words uttered by the Saviour:

318 Zephaniah 1:3.

319 Zephaniah 1:4.

320 Zephaniah 1:11.

321 Zephaniah 3:6.

322 Zephaniah 3:7.

323 Ecclesiastes 10:1.

324 Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Hebrews 12:29.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. **30** And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.³²⁵

8 If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. **9** And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.³²⁶

Of course the Lord does not expect us to physically remove hands and eyes, but that we take extremely seriously those things by which we are caused to sin. The entire Bible teaches us that none can do this properly. It is not actually possible for fallen sinful man to deal with the problem and follow the Lord properly even though we are duty bound to do so. We are taught very clearly that the Lord Jesus alone has done for us what we could not do. This is expressed in many ways throughout the Bible and one of these uses the idea of circumcision:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.³²⁷

Only “in Christ” can we be “cut off” from sin. If we are not cut off from sin and still united to it, then we will be judged when that day comes.

The day of wrath.

When we think about wrath and anger we often have a very human perspective of this emotion. We associate anger with 'fits of rage' or sudden explosive outbursts. The concept of God being angry and wrathful is thus not often accepted. However the Bible makes it very plain that God is angry and wrathful. Apart from the use in Zephaniah consider the following two New Testament examples:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.³²⁸

325 Matthew 5:29,30.

326 Matthew 18:8,9.

327 Colossians 2:11.

328 Romans 1:18.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.³²⁹

Our first example describes the wrath of God as coming from heaven's glory and which is expressed *“against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”* Such a statement is comprehensive. God from heaven is angry with ALL the wrong things mankind does (*“unrighteousness”*), and ALL the wrong ways and behaviours that mankind exhibits (*“ungodliness”*). No exceptions. The second example comes from words uttered by John the Baptist shortly after Christ's interview with Nicodemus on the new birth. This statement is equally stark and also very clear. Mankind outside of Christ, (all who do not believe truly in Christ), have the *“wrath of God”* resting, dwelling or abiding on them. Do we grasp this? All of mankind, no matter what creed, colour, state, position, condition, or any other descriptor you may like to use, are under condemnation and have the anger of God resting upon them, unless they turn to Christ who paid the penalty for all who truly believe. For those who trust in Christ *“there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”* and such as truly love Christ, follow Him and do all that He asks.³³⁰

Now in Zephaniah we have a very graphic picture of that day when the wrath of God, which abides or rests upon all mankind (unless they have turned to Christ who bore it for them), will be poured out. It is a terrible day. A horrible day. Darkness, devastation, desolation, devouring and distress are the features of that day. It is a miserable day. Nothing can alleviate it. Nothing can bring rescue. Nothing can avert that day. Christ in suffering once-for-all-time for sin, bore the wrath of God for all those who would repent and believe. If we reject that offer of rescue then nothing else remains. God saw to it that a means of rescue was offered. What do you think God would say to a man who rejects such an offer? There is no other possible means of escape. Imagine you are standing on a tall tower which will fall in the very next second and a helicopter swoops down with a rope at that very moment. What hope is there if you reject the rope? None! God is far more patient. He came in Christ and offered Himself as a willing sacrifice in our place. He agreed to take the penalty for sin. And now the Lord has made this salvation available and published far and wide. But the offer only lasts while the time can still be called “today.” When time is no more, when Christ returns, there remains only the need to deal with all sin, iniquity and transgression that still remains. Thus all upon whom the wrath of God remains will be called to account and will bear that wrath.

This is so important! Why do we muddy it? Why do we create caveats, alternatives and 'get-out' clauses? When people excuse certain classes of sins (such as sexual perversions) and then claim to be amongst the people of God, we must protest and declare: *“brood of vipers! Who warned you*

329 John 3:36.

330 Matthew 10:38; John 15:10; Romans 8:1.

to flee from the wrath to come? ... Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? ³³¹

The Mighty man cries out bitterly.

We have seen that God's settled, righteous, holy anger against all sin must be vented. Sin (in any form) cannot be allowed to continue. Taken at face value we come to recognise that someone must pay for our sin. If any claim they have not sinned it is a simple matter to demonstrate that they have! Have you ever told a lie, or thought something harmful against another? I cannot imagine anyone could claim to have been without sin in this way. But imagine you think you have been truthful at all times and have never had a wicked thought in your mind, have you loved God wholeheartedly? I am absolutely certain that you have failed to love God as you ought to have done. Remember that God is not just good, He is utterly beautiful and He is supremely perfect and right. He is everything that is required for life and what do we do? We ignore Him and live as though He does not matter in the slightest. Well given that we are all sinners we come to recognise that we must pay for our wrongdoing. It must be dealt with and there are only the two options we have discussed at length in these pages. Either we accept Christ's sacrifice for sin, or we take the wrath of God for ourselves. Now in Zephaniah 1:14 we get this incredible phrase about the day of the Lord: *"in that place the mighty man cries out bitterly."* The most powerful, influential, wealthy, strong person you might imagine will be reduced to crying out in bitterness. But the most amazing thing is that Christ Jesus cried out in such a way when He faced the wrath of His father on the cross:

45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.
46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ³³²

Then very shortly after this Christ cried out again and gave up His spirit. ³³³ The Mighty One, heaven's Champion, has cried out in our place! How we need Him!!

One day is as a thousand years.

One of the most difficult things to grasp hold when viewing Old Testament prophecies is the span of time which many apply over, and how they thus are to be understood. The "day of the Lord" is often limited to simply applying to the point in time when the Lord finally returns. However, as

331 Matthew 3:7; 23:33.

332 Matthew 27:46.

333 Matthew 27:50.

we have tried to make clear, the day of the Lord began when Christ came and suffered in the sinners' place, and will only conclude on that last final and great day. In Zephaniah we are taught primarily that God's wrath must be vented upon sin. This aspect of the atonement – the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross – is not often expressed by believers, but it is an essential and an integral element of what Christ achieved.

The apostle Peter dealt with the whole issue of the length of time that has elapsed between the promise of Christ's return and eventuality of His coming back. He sums up by stating the following:

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **9** The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.³³⁴

God, of course, is not subject to time. A day or a thousand years are one and the same to Him who is eternal. Now in the book of Revelation the apostle John describes the period of time between Christ's first coming and His second as a thousand years, in which those who partook of the first resurrection *“lived and reigned with Christ.”*³³⁵ Thus a day for the Lord is as a thousand years, and so the thousand year reign (between the first and second advents of Christ) can be seen as “the day of the Lord.” This 'day' began when Christ came and died for sin and will end when He returns to judge the living and the dead. On the actual day when He returns it will be such a calamitous affair that no horror film, no disaster film, or no dystopian post-apocalyptic film could ever represent or depict.

Beware of self-reliance!

Atheism is utter folly! Atheism is hard work. A person has to suppress truth to be an atheist. They have to work hard at denying the existence of God. But do you ever realise that many people who profess faith in God actually live as practical atheists? Another word for such people is: hypocrites. But the problem is that denying God in certain areas of life is ingrained by sin and sinful behaviour. We must not rely on self. And yet we so often do. The atheist is, of course, utterly self-reliant. In Zephaniah we see two places where such arrogant self-determination is expressed. First we come up against the complacent and apathetic men who are *“settled upon their lees,”* (*“settled in complacency”*), and who think within themselves that the Lord does not really mind nor care

334 2Peter 3:8,9.

335 Revelation 20:4.

what we get up to (*“the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil”*).³³⁶ The second occasion comes in connection with the *“joyful city”* of Nineveh, which declared: *“I am and no other is,”* (*“I am it, and there is none beside me”*).³³⁷ Now such self-reliance is actually arrogant pride. God will not allow such to continue. He will *“investigate Jerusalem with searchlights”* (*“search Jerusalem with lamps”*). Whatever self-reliance there may be, it will be shown up for what it is. No amount of reform or of tinkering with such fallen sinful hearts will ever succeed or work in this world.³³⁸

The Mighty One will save.

We noted earlier that the most powerful and mighty of men will simply be reduced to crying out in utter bitterness on that great and terrible final day.³³⁹ And we noted also that Christ cried out in dereliction at the cross uttering the words found in Psalm 22:1 as He was bearing the wrath of God in the sinners' place. But then we read later, in the section which brings encouragement to the believer, that the *“Mighty One will save,”* and He will come with joy and rejoicing!³⁴⁰ Deliverance can only be found in Christ Jesus (the Mighty One) and in Him exclusively. He paid the price for sin in full crying out as He suffered the punishment of God and He brings to us the fruits of His work as He rose from the dead never to die again. This doctrine of the exclusivity of Christ as Saviour is not popular today, but it is impossible to find any who could match what Christ has done (or even come within a million miles of His achievement). None but Christ has dealt the death blow to sin, death and Satan, and at-one-and-the-same-time brought life and forgiveness to the repentant sinner. Who else could pay for sin in full, and bring life and restoration with God? It is impossible to exhaust the amazing wonder of what Christ Jesus has done!

God will bring fame and praise to His people.

In this period of time, the time we call the 'gospel age' stretching from Christ's first to His second coming, the Christian is not to expect to be honoured but must face tribulation, opposition, and obscurity.³⁴¹ None of this ought to worry the believer. The worldly person thinks that to be of use, to have an effect, or to make a mark, you have to be prominent, to be seen, to have money or power but that is all false. What really counts is how we conduct ourselves in this world according to God's ways recognising that the Father is watching over us. We long to hear Him speak those

336 Zephaniah 1:12.

337 Zephaniah 2:15.

338 Zephaniah 1:18.

339 Zephaniah 1:14.

340 Zephaniah 3:17.

341 Luke 12:32; John 16:33; 2Timothy 3:12.

wonderful words as we enter heaven's glory:

well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.³⁴²

People in the world do not realise that what believers do and how they live are the most important and vital thing and of the greatest value. It is not the politicians, the scientists, the entertainers, the artists, the business moguls, or other super-people who really matter.

Now our task as believers is to adorn the gospel and to declare it to one and all. On top of that we are also to declare the great, goodness, gracious and gloriousness of God as publicly as we can.³⁴³ This is over and above the gospel but it is also intimately interlinked with the gospel because it is the “*gospel of God*.”³⁴⁴ Whilst the gospel alone brings life and peace, we must still call people to obey God. How do we see our nation? It is an *undesirable* one and not righteous, so what should we do? Well like Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel and other godly people, we ought to pray for our nation and confess our sins seeking the Lord's mercy.³⁴⁵ Our task then is threefold. We must live lives worthy of the calling, we must declare God's goodness and greatness publicly, and we must pray for our nation that the Lord will bring revival.³⁴⁶

Seek the Lord, righteousness and humility.

Now the book of Zephaniah gives us a lot to consider with respect to personal sanctification and holiness. In our discussion of the things that the Lord would cut off, we discovered a variety of attitudes and dispositions which we need to be delivered from and some we may be tempted to fall into. The Lord is keen to remove all other lords and masters we may be tempted to honour. There can be no rival to our dedication, worship and love. Then we note that compromise (as shown by the mixture within the priesthood) is a deadly sin. How many are compromised with regard to lifestyle? What about those who try to hold to a teaching like evolution or some aspect of modern science that is incompatible with true faith? Many of the popular advocates of evolution and modern science demonstrate their error in worshipping the things they are interested in. If we follow such people (Cox, Attenborough etc.), what does that say about our faith? Or what about those who have one foot in the world and try and claim that they are truly following Christ? We need to examine ourselves and consecrate our lives wholly to the Lord. Then further I highlighted the great

342 Matthew 25:21,23.

343 Psalm 9:1,11; 40:9,10; 145.

344 Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2Corinthians 11:7; 1Thessalonians 2:2,8,9; 1Peter 4:17.

345 Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3-19.

346 Ephesians 4:1; 1Timothy 2:1.

evil of abortion and the sacrifice of our children to the god of secular indoctrination. We rightly baulk at the horrors of burning children in sacrifices to false gods, but how then can we be blaze about abortion or the current godless education we enforce on the young? This is the time to change things. This is the time to declare openly our hatred of abortion and our determination to promote godly education.

One other tendency we have is to slip and forget. We must do everything in the power that God gives us to remember all that the Lord has done and to keep ourselves in the love of God.³⁴⁷ More than this we need to seek the Lord. We need to be often in His company! We need to draw from Him and delight ourselves in what He loves best. Oh if we did that just a little bit what a change we would see. Dear Lord please help us draw near to You in the holiness You provide that we may delight in Your presence and show forth Your praises!³⁴⁸

He will be silent in His love.

Do we realise how much God loves those who truly turn to Him? Do we recognise the immense privilege such people have? The longer I live the more I see that the Lord loves His people. Can anyone love as God does? Such statements as can be found in John 3:16 or Romans 5:8 are but the tip of the iceberg! I can think of no better way of ending what I have to say than by quoting one of the apostle Paul's prayers:

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. **20** Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, **21** to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.³⁴⁹

To know the love of Christ with all the saints! That is worth everything! And the Lord gives more!

347 Jude 1:21.

348 1Peter 2:9.

349 Ephesians 3:14-21.

Appendix: NKJV and my translation compared.

Chapter 1. Zephaniah 1:1. The word of the Lord came to ...

NKJV	My translation
#1 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.	#1 1 The word of the Lord which came to Zepaniah, son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. In the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah.

Chapter 2. Part 1: Zephaniah 1:1-18. The end of the world is certain and it is coming!

[1] A universal destruction for the entire world. [1:2-6].

NKJV	My translation
2 “I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,” says the Lord; 3 “I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land,” says the Lord. 4 “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the <i>pagan</i> priests— 5 Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; those who worship and swear <i>oaths</i> by the Lord, but who <i>also</i> swear by Milcom; 6 Those who have turned back from <i>following</i> the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.”	2 Gathering to destroy I will certainly cause everything to perish from the surface of the ground says the Lord. 3 I will cause to perish both man [Adam] and beast, I will cause to perish birds of the heavens and fish of the seas, and both that which causes offence and the wicked, and I will cut off man [Adam] from the surface of the ground says the Lord. 4 I will stretch out My hand upon Judah and upon all those dwelling in Jerusalem and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests. 5 and those that worship the host of heaven on the roof tops, and those that worship swearing to the Lord and swearing by Malekām. 6 and those that have slipped away from following the Lord and those which have not earnestly sought the Lord and have not gone regularly to Him.

[2] The Lord's sacrifice on the day of the Lord centred on Jerusalem. [1:7-13].

NKJV	My translation
7 Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice ; He has invited His guests. 8 “And it shall be, in the day of the Lord ’s sacrifice , that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. 9 In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit. 10 “and there shall be on that day ,” says the Lord, “the sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crashing from the hills. 11 Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off. 12 “And it shall come to pass at that time <i>that</i> I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘the Lord will not do	7 Be quiet! Before the face of the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is drawing near. For the Lord has established His sacrifice , He has consecrated those whom He has called out. 8 And it shall be in the day of the Lord ’s sacrifice that I will punish (upon) the princes, and (upon) the king’s sons and all those clothed with foreign clothing. 9 And I will bring punishment upon all that leap upon the threshold in that day , those that fill their master’s house with violence and deceit. 10 And it shall be in that very day , says the Lord, a voice exclaims from the fish gate, and a wailing from the second quarter, and a great breach from the hills. 11 How! You who sit in the Mortar! For all the merchant people (Canaan) were cut off/undone (struck dumb). They were cut off all who were laden with silver. 12 And it shall be at that time, I will investigate Jerusalem with searchlights. And I will punish (upon) the men who

good, nor will He do evil.’ 13 Therefore their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit <i>them</i> ; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.”	are congealed/settled upon their lees, those that are saying in their hearts, “He will not do good nor will He do evil.” 13 And it shall be that their strength/wealth with be for booty, and their homes (given) to desolation. They shall build houses and not dwell in them, and they shall plant and they shall not drink the wine (produced).
--	---

[3] The great day of the Lord described in detail. [1:14 -18].

NKJV	My translation
14 The great day of the Lord <i>is</i> near; <i>it is</i> near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. 17 “I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.” 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy , for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.	14 Nearby is the great day of the Lord ! Nearby and exceedingly swift is the sound of the day of the Lord . In that place the mighty man cries out bitterly. 15 A day of wrath is that day . A day of distress and oppression. A day of tempest and desolation. A day of darkness and thick darkness. A day of clouds and thick clouds. 16 A day of the trumpet and the sounding of the trumpet, upon the fortified cities and upon the great battlements. 17 And I will distress men, and they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against the Lord and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. 18 Most definitely their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. The whole earth will be consumed in the fire of His jealousy. For an end, a certain and terrible one will He make for all who dwell on the earth.

Chapter 3. Part 2: Zephaniah 2:1-3:7. Seek the Lord for nowhere is safe!

[1] A call to seek – maybe the Lord will answer. [2:1-3].

NKJV	My translation
#2 1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, 2 Before the decree is issued, <i>or</i> 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! 3 Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger .	#2 1 Gather yourselves together, yes gather, nation not shamed. 2 Before the decree is brought forth like chaff <i>before</i> the day is passed. Before it will come upon you the anger of the wrath of the Lord. Before it will come upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. 3 Seek the Lord all you meek of the earth, those who perform His justice. Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the wrath of the Lord.

[2] A word against all nations. Zephaniah. [2:4-3:5].

NKJV	My translation
4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted. 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the sea-coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord <i>is</i> against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: “I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant.” 6 The sea-coast shall be pastures, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. 7 The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of	4 For Gaza will be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation. They shall drive out Ashdod at noon and Ekron shall be uprooted. 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites (Philistines). The word of the Lord is upon you Canaan, land of the Philistines. I will even destroy you so that there will be no inhabitants. 6 And the sea coast shall be for pastures and shelters for shepherds and sheep folds for their flocks. 7 And the coast

Judah; they shall feed <i>their</i> 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. 8 “I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders. 9 Therefore, as I live,” says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah — overrun with weeds and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation. The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them.” 10 This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts. 11 The Lord <i>will be</i> awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; <i>people</i> shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations. 12 “You Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by My sword.” 13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness. 14 The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation. both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge on the capitals <i>of</i> her <i>pillars</i>; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation <i>shall be</i> at the threshold; for He will lay bare the cedar work. 15 This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, “<i>I am it, and there is none besides me.</i>” How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss and shake his fist. #3 1 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! 2 She has not obeyed <i>His</i> voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the Lord, she has not drawn near to her God. 3 Her princes in her midst <i>are</i> roaring lions; her judges <i>are</i> evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning. 4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. 5 The Lord <i>is</i> righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame.	shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah where they shall feed, for they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon in the evening, for the Lord their God will visit them and turn back their captivity. 8 I have heard the taunt of Moab and the reproaches of the sons of Ammon by which they have taunted My people, and they have made themselves great upon their border. 9 Therefore, as I the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel live, you shall be like Sodom and you shall be like the sons of Gomorrah, — a possession of nettles and salt pits, and a desolation and spoil forever. The remnant of My people will take them as spoil and those remaining of My people shall possess them. 10 This is to them instead of their pride, for they have taunted and magnified (themselves) upon/against the people of the Lord of hosts. 11 Fearful will the Lord be to them, for the gods of the earth will waste away, for they shall bow to Him a man from his place (even) every island of the peoples. 12 You also Ethiopia, they shall be pierced by My sword. 13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north, and He will destroy Assyria, and He will appoint Nineveh to desolation, dry as the wilderness. 14 And the flocks shall lie down in the midst — every living thing of all nations, both the pelican and the hedgehog and they shall lodge in the capitals. A voice shall sing in the window. Desolation in the threshold, for He will make bare the cedar-work. 15 This is the joyful city, the one dwelling in confidence who says in her heart “<i>I am and no other is.</i>” How has it come to pass again that she has become a desolation, a resting place to all creatures? All who go towards her and pass by shall hiss and shake his hand. #3 1 Woe to the rebellious and she who has been polluted, to the city that is greatly oppressive! 2 She did not listen to the voice, she did not grasp correction by the Lord, she did not trust her God and she did not draw near. 3 Her princes within the midst of her are roaring lions. Her judges are wolves of the desert. They shall not gnaw in the morning. 4 Her prophets are light/frothy/wanton and men of treachery. Her priests have profaned that which is holy, they have done violence to the law. 5 The Lord is righteous in her midst. He will not do unrighteousness. Morning by morning He brings His justice to light. It does not fail but the unjust do not know shame.
--	---

[3] A dreadful conclusion – mankind is so hard. Zephaniah. [3:6,7].

NKJV	My translation
6 “I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; <i>there is</i> no one, no inhabitant. 7 I said, ‘Surely you will fear Me, you will receive instruction’— so that her dwelling would not be cut off, <i>despite</i> everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.	6 I have cut off nations. Their battlements are desolate. I have dried up their streets so that none will pass by. Their cities are destroyed so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant. 7 I said, “surely you will fear Me, you will take correction, and her dwelling place will not be cut off, even though I have visited her.” Surely they rose early and corrupted all their actions.

Chapter 4. Part 3: Zephaniah 3:8-20. Comfort for the believing remnant.

[1] Wait for the final day of judgement. Zephaniah 3:8.

NKJV	My translation
8 “Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination <i>is</i> to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation , all My fierce anger ; all <u>the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy</u> .”	8 Therefore, wait for me, says the Lord, for the day I rise up to the prey, because My decision <i>is</i> to gather the nations to My gathering, <i>and</i> the kingdoms, to pour upon them My indignation, all My burning anger, because with <u>the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed</u> .

[2] All peoples will call upon the Lord (one church). Zephaniah 3:9-13.

NKJV	My translation
9 “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshippers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering. 11 In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. 12 I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. 13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed <i>their</i> flocks and lie down, and no one shall make <i>them</i> afraid.”	9 For at that time I will turn towards the peoples a pure language, in that place all of them will call upon the Lord, to serve with one shoulder. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My suppliants, the daughter of My scattered ones, shall bring My gift. 11 In that day you shall not be ashamed of your deeds by which you transgressed against Me, because at that time I will turn away your from your midst those who exult in your pride, and you will not again be haughty in My holy mountain. 12 And I will leave in the midst of you a poor and afflicted people, and they shall shelter in the name of the Lord. 13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor shall they utter lies, and a deceitful tongue shall not be found in their mouths, for they shall feed and they shall lie down and none shall make them afraid.

[3] How the Lord views Zion. Zephaniah 3:14-20.

NKJV	My translation
14 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all <i>your</i> heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, <i>is</i> in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. 17 The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet <i>you</i> with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” 18 “I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, <i>to whom</i> its reproach <i>is</i> a burden. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. 20 At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,” says the Lord.	14 Sing daughter of Zion! Make a loud noise Israel! Rejoice and exult with all heart daughter of Jerusalem. 15 The Lord has taken away your judgements, He has turned away your enemy, the King of Israel, the Lord in your midst of you, you shall not be afraid of evil again. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, “Do not fear Zion, do not let your hands hang slack.” 17 The Lord your God in the midst of you, the Mighty one will save. He will rejoice in you with joy. He will be silent in His love. He will rejoice in you with singing. 18 “The sorrowful ones of the festive assembly I will gather from out of you, they are a burden upon her, a reproach. 19 Behold I, I will deal with all who afflict you at that time, and I will save you with the lame, and her that was expelled I will gather and will set them for glory and for a name in the earth in place of their reproach. 20 In that time I will bring you in, and in that time I will gather you, for I will give you a name for glory before all the peoples of the earth. I will turn back your captivity before your eyes” says the Lord.