
Zephaniah

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

By his Spirit and over a thousand-year period (ca. 1446–500 BC), the Lord guided many prophets, usually writing in Hebrew, to make himself and his will known to his people. Although these seers, sovereigns, sages, and singers used a variety of genres to communicate, the Old Testament proclaims a unified message and purpose that testify to the Supreme Author’s guiding hand.

Who Wrote Zephaniah?

Zephaniah (whose name means “Yahweh has hidden”) grew up during the dark days of King Manasseh (2Kgs 20:21–21:18), the son of reformer King Hezekiah (2Kgs 18–20; Isa 36–38), who was Zephaniah’s great-great grandfather (Zeph 1:1). As a “son of Cush¹” (1:1) who was distinctively interested in both the destruction (2:12) and restoration (3:9–10) of Cush (ancient black Africa centered in modern Sudan), Zephaniah may have been a black Judean. Being both bi-racial and part of the royal family, his life highlighted messianic-Davidic hope and God’s commitment to redeem the world. Zephaniah’s social status likely clarifies how he knew so well the international situation (2:5–15) and moral lives of Jerusalem’s leaders (1:4, 8–9; 3:3–4).

When, Where, and to Whom Was Zephaniah Written?

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Judean King Josiah (641/40–609 BC) (1:1), and the prophet’s preaching would have advanced the king’s reforms (2Kgs 22:3–23:25; 2Chr 34:8–35:19). The

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prophet probably ministered in 622 or 621 BC after Josiah found the Book of the Law but before the reform movement was fully established. Zephaniah's preaching warned all covenant violators in Judah to repent and patiently pursue the Lord (Zeph 2:1, 3; 3:8). Additionally, the book addresses other nations (2:5, 12) and speaks of global punishment (1:2–3, 14–18; 2:5–15) and restoration (see esp. 3:8–10), which suggests that the prophet was speaking warning and hope to both Judah *and* her neighbors.

How is Zephaniah Structured?

Of the Twelve minor prophets, Zephaniah supplies *the Savior's invitation to satisfaction*. Its statements of coming punishment and salvation motivate listeners to accept the prophet's exhortation. The superscription (1:1) identifies Zephaniah's message as Yahweh's word. Next, 1:2–18 provide the invitation's setting by calling the audience to revere God in light of his encroaching day of wrath. The substance of the Savior's invitation to satisfaction then comes in 2:1–3:20b. The prophet first charges his audience to seek the Lord together (2:1, 3) so they will avoid punishment (2:1–3:7). He then commands them to wait for the Lord (3:8) in order to enjoy satisfying salvation (3:8–20b). A subscription concludes the book in 3:20c, recalling 1:1 and reinforcing that the entirety of Zephaniah is God's word.

What Is the Message of Zephaniah?

Zephaniah highlights God's wrath against sin yet identifies the possibility of deliverance unto delight for a remnant. On his day (1:7, 14), Yahweh will execute just vengeance against sinners (1:15, 17–18; 2:2–3; 3:8) and establish peace and joy in his presence for a remnant (3:11–20). Babylon's imminent destruction of Judah for her wickedness (1:4–13; 2:2; 3:7) foreshadows when God will eradicate all evildoers (esp. 1:2–3, 14–18; 3:8; cf. Deut 30:7; Isa 24:5–6). Nevertheless, God will also restore, gather, and eternally satisfy a global remnant with salvation and security in his presence (Zeph 3:9–20). Only those seeking (2:1, 3) and waiting for the Lord (3:8) may enjoy this divine protection and provision (2:4). That is, the Savior will only satisfy in his presence those who flee idolatry and look to the Lord in prayer and devotion (1:4–6), who seek righteousness and

humility (2:3), who embrace his instruction and respond dependently (3:2), and who fear him (3:7). God will gather to himself a multi-ethnic remnant who calls on the Lord, and they will find refuge and delight in his presence at his holy mountain, even as he celebrates over these who will lack reason to fear anymore (3:9–20).

The Day of the Lord as Wrath and Renewal

Zephaniah portrays Yahweh's day of wrath both as sacrifice (1:7; cf. Jer 46:10; Rev 19:17–19) and war conquest (Zeph 1:14–16; 2:5–15; 3:15, 17). When atonement is not secured through faith in God's substitute (Lev 17:11; Isa 52:13–53:12; Heb 9:22), the fires and armies of his jealousy will rage against the offenders (Zeph 1:17–18; 3:8). The prophet envisions the Lord carrying out his day of punishment and renewal in stages. His arrival, initial purifying, and ingathering of the remnant ensures that he will save his elect (3:9–15), but he will only consummate his new creation and fully eradicate evil at a later time (3:16–20). The day of the Lord will, therefore, include an overlap of the ages, wherein all aspects of new creation will in one sense be *already*, but in another sense *not yet* finalized.

Zephaniah and the Work of Christ Jesus

New Testament authors understood God to fulfill Zephaniah's vision of wrath and renewal through Christ. Jesus's triumphal entry marks the eschatological return of the king to overcome evil and to save a worldwide remnant (John 12:13–16, 19; cf. Zeph 3:14–15 with Ps 118:25–26; Zech 9:9). Jesus's death and resurrection mark the intrusion of the future day of the Lord into the middle of history, since Christ's tribulation unto triumph satisfies God's wrath against the elect's sins and begins the new creation for believers (Isa 53:10–11; Zech 3:8–9; 12:10; 13:1, 7; 2Cor 5:17, 21; Gal 3:13–14). The Gospel writers portray Jesus's sacrificial crucifixion with images associated with the day of the Lord (e.g., Luke 23:44–45), and Peter's citation of Joel 2:30–31 suggests he identified the darkness at Golgotha with what the prophets believed would precede the day of the Lord (Acts 2:19–20). Furthermore, Luke portrays the saving events of Pentecost (2:4–11, 21) and of the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–39) as initially fulfilling Zephaniah's vision of reversal of the Tower of Babel judgment (Gen 11:1–9) by his creating a multi-ethnic remnant of worshipers on the

day of the Lord (Zeph 3:8–10; cf. Isa 56:3–8). At the cross, Jesus, operating as the *object* of God’s wrath, died “for the nation [of Israel], and . . . to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51–52; cf. Zeph 3:10). Thus, Christ is fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant by creating one new humanity made of people from all the nations (Gen 12:3; 17:4–6; 22:17–18; 26:3–4; 35:11; 49:8–10). Fulfilling Zephaniah 3:9–13, the multi-ethnic church has already gathered “to Mount Zion” (Heb 12:22), and we are offering priestly sacrifices of praise and good deeds (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15–16) in the priestly service of God (Rom 15:16; 1Pet 2:5). Nevertheless, we still look ahead to Jesus consummating the new heavens and earth (2Pet 3:13). When he comes to accomplish this, he will be the *instrument* through whom God will pour out his vengeance on all evil and deliver the elect (Heb 9:27–28; Rev 19:11–21; cf. 2Thes 1:7–8, 10; 2Pet 3:7–10). In this sense, the day of the Lord is still future (see 2Thes 2:2–3). In that day, God the Savior will fully complete his invitation to satisfaction.

PURPOSE

Zephaniah wants his listeners in Judah and beyond to seek the Lord together and to wait for the Lord in order to avoid punishment and to enjoy satisfying salvation.

KEY VERSES

Zeph 2:3; 3:8–9 – “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD. . . . Therefore, wait for me, declares the LORD, for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed. For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.”

OUTLINE

- I. The Preamble to the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (1:1)
- II. The Setting of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction: A Call to Revere God in Light of the Coming Day of the Lord (1:2–18)
 - A. The Context for the Call to Revere God: Coming Punishment (1:2–6)
 - B. The Makeup of the Call to Revere God (1:7–18)
- III. The Substance of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (2:1–3:20b)
 - A. Stage One: Seek the Lord Together to Avoid Punishment (2:1–3:7)
 - B. Stage Two: Wait for the Lord to Enjoy Satisfying Salvation (3:8–20b)
- IV. The Closing of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (3:20c)

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COMMENTARY

I. The Heading of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (1:1)

1:1 The introduction describes the book as “the word of the LORD.” Thus, this book is both trustworthy and incomparably authoritative (cf. Hos 1:1; Hag 1:1). The word’s messenger is Zephaniah, a prophet known only from this book. For more on his identity and the historical background, see the introduction.

II. The Setting of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction: A Call to Revere God in Light of the Coming Day of the Lord (1:2–18)

The initial chapter provides the setting for the book’s main exhortations by calling readers to revere Yahweh in light of the nearness and nature of his impending wrath on Judah and the world.

A. The Context for the Call to Revere God: Coming Punishment (1:2–6)

To introduce the call to revere the Lord, Zephaniah begins with Yahweh promising to punish sinful humanity in general (1:2–3) and the wicked of Jerusalem in particular (1:4–6).

1:2–3 Echoing his flood judgment (Gen 6:7), the Lord promises to “gather” (ESV/NIV = “sweep away”) everything on the earth’s surface for judicial assessment (Zeph 1:2; cf. 3:8; Matt 3:12; 13:40–42; 25:32, 46) and to “cut off mankind from the face of the earth” (Zech 1:3; cf. Gen 9:11; Ezek 14:17). Yahweh will assess “man . . . beast . . . birds . . . fish” (Zech 1:3), listed in reverse order from how God created them (Gen 1:20–28) to portray the coming punishment as a

de-creation back toward chaos. The “rubble” that God will destroy with the “wicked” are likely idols (cf. Ezek 7:19–20).

1:4–6 Even Yahweh’s special covenant people would not be immune to his worldwide retribution. Aligning with his “ingathering” and “cutting off” at the global level (Zeph 1:2–3), Yahweh would “stretch out his hand” (cf. Isa 5:25; Ezek 14:13) against Judah and “cut off” individuals from Jerusalem, Judah’s capital and religious center (Zeph 1:4). God would target the “remnant” of idolaters worshiping “Baal,” Canaanite’s false storm and fertility deity who provided the most enduring threat to Israel exclusively worshiping Yahweh.

Although English translations vary, the Hebrew text of 1:4–6 suggests “the remnant of Baal” included four overlapping sub-groups: (1) The “idoltrous priests” were illegitimate, non-Levitical clergy who led in worshiping idols (1Kgs 12:31–32; 13:33–34). They served alongside legitimate “priests” who failed to teach God’s law, guard knowledge, and preserve what was holy (Lev 10:10–11; cf. Zeph 3:4). The other syncretists included those (2) worshiping stars (3:5a; cf. 2Kgs 17:16–18; 21:3, 5, 12; Jer 19:13), (3) paying lip service to Yahweh (i.e., swearing *to*) but giving highest allegiance to (i.e., swearing *by*) another god (Zeph 3:5b), and (4) living self-ruled, self-dependent lives (3:6). To “turn back from following the LORD” (1:6) always refers to covenant disloyalty (Pss 44:18; 78:57; Isa 59:13), which the people demonstrated by failing to rely on God (cf. Deut 4:29; 2Chr 20:3–4; Ps 105:3–4; Jer 29:13) or by not wanting to know his will or word (cf. 1Kgs 22:5; Amos 8:12) (“seek” and “inquire”). Josiah’s reform sought to eradicate all instruments and individuals associated with these activities (2Kgs 23:4–5, 10, 24).

Response to 1:2–6 Take seriously the warning of God’s coming judgment (Matt 13:40–42; 25:45–46; Rom 11:22) and flee all forms of idolatrous syncretism by following the Lord on the only path that leads to life (Matt 7:13; John 3:36; 14:6).

B. The Makeup of the Call to Revere God (1:7–18)

Like a herald preparing courtiers for a king’s arrival (Judg 3:19), Zephaniah urges his audience to revere the Lord (Zeph 1:7a) because

of the temporal nearness and sacrificial nature of Yahweh's impending punishment against Jerusalem (1:7b–13) and the world (1:14–18).

1:7a With an interjection instead of an imperative, the prophet captures his audience's attention calling them to "be silent before the Lord God" (cf. Hab 2:20; Zech 2:17). The use of "Lord/Sovereign" emphasizes Yahweh's supremacy and the people's need to revere his position.

1:7b–13 Zephaniah now supplies the first of two reasons ("For") to revere God, this one related to Jerusalem. He begins by stressing the nearness and sacrificial nature of "the day of the LORD." This title refers to both the ultimate future time when God eradicates evil and renews the world and to Yahweh's periodic intrusions of punishment that reestablish right order and anticipate the ultimate future time. Portraying his "day" as "sacrifice" (Zeph 1:7c; cf. Jer 46:10; Rev 19:17–19) recalls that the Lord can appease his just wrath only through the death of a sinner or substitute (cf. Lev 17:11; Isa 52:13–12; Heb 9:22). Although the "consecrated . . . guests" for this feast could be the victims in Judah (Zeph 1:7d; cf. Jer 12:3), they are more likely the enemy invaders that Yahweh had devoted as agents of the slaughter, whether from Babylon (Isa 13:3; Jer 34:21–22; Hab 1:6) or the godly ones who will stand alongside the king in the end (Ps 149:5–9; 1Cor 6:2; Rev 2:26–27).

Zephaniah 1:8–13 identifies the implications of the Lord punishing Jerusalem's leaders (Zeph 1:8–11) and broader population (1:12–13). These political elite included the public "officials" (whether governmental or military), royal court ("the king's sons"), and superiors influenced by pagan values ("foreign attire," 1:8). The religious overseers were those engaged in superstitious activity related to the temple doorway ("everyone who leaps over the threshold," cf. 1Sam 5:3–5) and filled Yahweh's temple ("their master's house") with oppression and deceit ("violence and fraud," Zeph 1:9; cf. 3:1). Such covenant disloyalty would ultimately incur the city's ruin (3:3–4; cf. Isa 1:23; Jer 32:32). The "cry," "wail," and "loud crash" of war would overcome Jerusalem's northern market district ("Fish Gate," "Second Quarter," "all who weigh out silver"), thus removing a key source of self-exaltation and abuse (Zeph 3:10–11; cf. Isa 2:6).

As for the broader population, Yahweh promises to target their misplaced satisfactions and securities (“goods . . . houses . . . vineyards,” Zeph 1:13; cf. 1:11, 18; Deut 28:30–31), reversing original covenant blessings (Deut 6:10–11). Unexpectedly, he will come at night (Zeph 1:12; cf. Joel 2:9; 1Thes 5:2) and search thoroughly (“with lamps”) so that none will escape (Zeph 1:12; cf. Isa 24:17; Amos 5:18–20). He will specifically target the “complacent” (those like wine left too long in a jar), who neither fear God’s wrath nor desire his blessings (“the LORD will not do good nor . . . ill,” Zeph 1:12).

1:14–18 Alluding back to 1:7b, Zephaniah now signals his second reason one must revere God. It relates to the characteristics of the Lord’s coming day (1:14–16) and its effects on the whole world (1:17–18). That the encroaching terror is “great” likely marks a shift at least in scope from 1:7b (from local to global punishment). It may also signal a temporal shift, with 1:7b–13 addressing Jerusalem’s 586 BC destruction and 1:14–18 addressing the final judgment associated with Christ’s two comings (Mal 4:5 [3:23]; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:17). Regardless, the day’s timing is imminent (Zeph 1:14a), its sound torturous (1:14b), and its essence terrifying (1:15–16). The “mighty” one (1:14c) is likely Yahweh (cf. NIV and 3:17), but it could be a valiant soldier crying in defeat. “Darkness and gloom” (1:15) express God’s fierce presence and a movement away from life (cf. Joel 2:2, 30–31). Scripture often links the war images of “trumpet . . . and battle cry” with Yahweh’s conquest (Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14).

The universal effects of the Lord’s punishment are twofold: (1) humanity’s distress (Zeph 1:17) seen in both inflicted disability (cf. Deut 28:28–29) and sacrificial dismemberment (cf. Jer 16:4; Mal 2:3) and (2) mankind’s destruction (Zeph 1:18), which includes the impossibility of deliverance and the complete end of every sinful inhabitant. Humanity’s sin “against the LORD” sparked God’s wrath (Zeph 1:17). This has aroused his blazing jealousy (cf. Deut 4:23–24; Ps 79:5), which will ultimately consume all the ungodly (Zeph 1:18; cf. 3:8; Isa 66:15–16; 2Thes 1:7–8), paralleling the earlier judgment by water (2Pet 3:5–7).

Response to 1:7–18 Allow the seriousness of the Lord’s day to move you to revere God (2Pet 3:9–13) and celebrate God’s gift of a substitute sacrifice in Jesus Christ (Isa 53:5, 11; 1Pet 2:24), “in whom we have redemption” (Col 1:14) and who will save us “from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9)!

III. The Substance of the Savior’s Invitation to Satisfaction (2:1–3:20b)

The book’s primary exhortation now comes in two stages. Five imperatives initiate the first (“*Gather* together, yes *gather* . . . *Seek* the LORD . . . *seek* righteousness; *seek* humility,” Zeph 2:1, 3) and one signals the second (“Therefore, *wait* for me,” 3:8). The Savior’s invitation to satisfaction demands that hearers seek the Lord together to avoid punishment (2:1–3:7) and wait for the Lord to enjoy a satisfying salvation (3:8–20).

A. Stage One: Seek the Lord Together to Avoid Punishment (2:1–3:7)

Stage one of the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction includes a charge to bundle together in submission to the Lord (2:1–2), a charge to seek the Lord in righteousness and humility (2:3–4), and two parallel reasons to seek the Lord together (2:5–15; 3:1–7).

2:1–2 Zephaniah now addresses his primary audience, Judah, as a “shameless nation” (lit., “the nation not longing” for Yahweh; cf. 1:12). He urges listeners to “gather” together using a Hebrew root usually associated with collecting straw or sticks in contexts of punishment (2:1; cf. Exod 15:7; Nah 1:10). The context here is more positive. As people collect desirable straw or grain after separating the chaff, the faithful remnant must “bundle” themselves in unity (cf. Joel 1:14–15) and separate from everything destined for God’s fiery just wrath. The prophet repeats the preposition “before” to emphasize that the time to repent is fleeting, and he repeats the phrase “anger of the LORD” to stress that the need to repent is serious (Zeph 2:2).

2:3–4 Having addressed the nation broadly, the prophet now narrows focus to the remnant of “the land” who have already humbled

themselves before Yahweh. The Hebrew suggests the prophet regards the remnant not as those who have followed God’s “commands” but as those who are humbly taking seriously his coming “judgment” (cf. 3:5, 8). To these lowly and circumspect followers, the prophet addresses the charge that they should “seek the LORD, . . . seek righteousness, seek humility!” (2:3a–c; cf. 1:6). A life of “humility” is totally dependent on God (cf. Zeph 3:12; Ps 37:11; Isa 11:4), and pursuing “righteousness” is to align with right order in the cosmos (Pss 89:14; 119:75) and community (Gen 18:19; Deut 16:20; Ps 15:2) such that one values God and his image in others. Only these individuals will be “hidden” from Yahweh’s coming fury (Zeph 2:3d; cf. 2:7, 9; 3:11–20; Ps 27:5). Zephaniah 2:4 predicts that Yahweh will soon destroy four primary Philistine cities, and the nearness of this impending punishment supplies an initial reason why (“For”) the faithful remnant must seek the Lord.

Response to 2:1–4 Commune regularly with other believers to aid your perseverance (Heb 3:12–14; 10:25–25), and continue to seek the Lord, righteousness, and humility (Matt 5:3, 5–6; 6:33; Phil 3:8–11).

2:5–3:7 Two additional reasons explain why those in Judah and beyond should seek the Lord together. Both sections begin with the particle “Woe” (Zeph 2:5; 3:1) and bemoan the state and fate of the rebels from the surrounding foreign nations (2:5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7).

2:5–15 Adding to the initial sentence against Philistia (2:4), Yahweh now builds a four-pointed compass of punishment around Judah. God will judge Philistia to the west (2:5–7), Moab and Ammon to the east (2:8–11), and Cush and Assyria to the south and north (2:12–15). Thus, Judah herself will be unable to flee the coming terror; their only hope is to look to the Lord and join the preserved remnant (2:3, 7, 9).

2:5–7 With both dismay and disgust (“Woe!”; cf. Jer 30:7; Hab 2:12, 19), Yahweh addresses the Philistines (= “Cherithites,” Ezek 25:16) and announces his intent to exterminate these western enemies (Zeph 2:5; cf. 1:17). This will result in “the remnant of the house of Judah” (cf. 2:9; 3:13) reclaiming turf that God promised long ago (2:6–7; cf.

Josh 15:12; Judg 1:18) but that Israel had never fully enjoyed (Josh 11:22; 13:2–3; Judg 3:1–13). Yahweh will fulfill his promise in Deuteronomy 30:3 and “restore their fortunes” (cf. Zeph 3:20; Jer 30:18), including original covenant blessings (Deut 6:10–11).

2:8–11 Unlike with Philistia, the Lord specifies why he will punish the Moabites and Ammonites, Judah’s highland “cousins” to the east (see Gen 19:36–38): “They have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory” (Zeph 1:8). Therefore, with a strong oath, Israel’s all-powerful God will confront their “boasts” (2:8) and “pride” (2:10), making these neighbors a desert wasteland like “Sodom” and “Gomorrah” (2:9), the very cities overcome by curse in the days of Lot, these peoples’ forefather (Gen 19:24–26). And Yahweh’s “remnant” will “plunder” and “possess” Moab and Ammon (Zeph 2:9). This means that God’s people will claim their territory (cf. Gen 1:28; 26:3–4; Rom 4:13) and that some of these once-enemy neighbors will join the eschatological transformed people of God (Ps 87; Isa 19:24–25; 53:11–54:3; 56:6–8; Jer 12:16; cf. Jer 30:9 with Hos 3:5). Moab and Ammon will most certainly encounter God’s fearsome presence (Zeph 2:11; cf. Exod 15:11; Deut 7:21; Joel 2:11, 31 [3:4]; Mal 4:5 [3:23]), because (“for”) he will diminish all evil powers that stand against him (“famish all the gods of the earth”; cf. Deut 5:7; 10:17; Ps 95:3) and to him all peoples will give allegiance, whether as defeated rebels or the worshiping remnant (Zeph 2:11; cf. 3:9–10; Isa 45:23; Phil 2:10–11).

2:12–15 Attention now switches to the imperial powers Cush and Assyria. Cush was the center of black Africa (located in modern Sudan). Israel occasionally sought their help rather than Yahweh’s (Isa 20:5–6). Zephaniah 2:12 identifies the Lord’s “sword” judgment against the Cushites, but although English translations treat this judgment as future, the Hebrew may refer to a past event—namely, when Assyria destroyed the twenty-fifth (Cushite) dynasty of Egypt in 663 BC, a generation before Zephaniah (Isa 20:1–6). If so, the reference to Cush/Egypt’s demise supplies proof that Assyria’s empire in Zephaniah 2:13–15 would also fall (cf. Nah 3:8–13).

Assyria was the notorious northern superpower who controlled the Near East from 870–629 BC. They conquered the northern kingdom’s capital of Samaria in 723 BC, and exiled Israel (2Kgs 17; cf. Isa 10:5). The Lord promises to “stretch out his hand” (Zeph 2:13; cf. 1:4) and destroy Assyria, making this “secure” and self-exalting city (2:15) ruins inhabited by animals (2:14; cf. Nah 3:7). Assyria claimed a preeminence reserved for God alone (“I am, and there is no one else,” Zeph 2:15; cf. Isa 45:5–6, 18), but Yahweh would remove their “exultation” by means of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC.

3:1–7 With the new statement of “Woe” (Zeph 3:1; cf. 2:5), Yahweh adds a second reason why the remnant in Judah and beyond must together seek the Lord (2:1, 3)—Jerusalem’s destruction. The city had become “rebellious and defiled,” even “oppressing” (3:1; cf. 1:9; 3:3–4; Ezek 22:6–7, 29). Her leaders’ cruel practices (Zeph 3:3–5) and her unwillingness to grow (3:6–7) revealed her resistance and unresponsiveness to the Lord (3:2). Rather than serving as protective shepherds, the political heads (“official” and “judges”) had become like wild beasts, threatening and feasting on the weak and poor (3:3; cf. Ezek 22:25, 27; Mic 3:1–3). The religious leaders (“prophets” and “priest”) accepted bribes, divined lies, and twisted God’s word (Zeph 3:4; cf. Jer 23:16–22) instead of serving as God’s mouthpieces and ambassadors to the people. These “unjust” overseers who knew “no shame” contrasted with Yahweh, who inhabited the temple and continually worked to preserve and display right order by showing himself supreme, upholding justice, and valuing his image in others (he is “righteous; he does no injustice,” Zeph 3:5). Because Judah continued “to make all their deeds corrupt” and failed to both “fear” God and learn from the way he treated their neighbors’ sins, God would “cut off” their refuge (“dwelling”) and bring upon them the covenant curses (“all that I have appointed against you,” 3:6–7; cf. Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68).

Response to 2:5–3:7 While there is still hope, turn from pride and oppression to humility and love (1Thes 5:8–10; 1Jn 2:15, 17; 4:17–19), and fear God and learn from his merciful discipline (Rom 2:4; 11:22; Phil 2:12–13; Heb 12:10, 14; Rev 3:19).

B. Stage Two: Wait for the Lord to Enjoy Satisfying Salvation (3:8–20)

Savior Yahweh supplies stage two of his invitation to satisfaction by charging the remnant from Judah and beyond to dependently wait for him (Zeph 3:8–10) and by motivating this charge through promises of satisfying salvation (3:11–20). The section opens with the inferential “Therefore” (3:8), which identifies that the state and fate of the rebels from the broader world and Jerusalem (2:5–3:7) clarify why waiting for God is imperative.

3:8–10 The logical response (“Therefore”) to the promised global crisis (2:5–3:7) is that the same remnant charged to “seek” the Lord together (2:1, 3) must also “wait” for him—specifically for the “day” (cf. 1:7, 14) when he will “rise” over his enemies. Although the ESV reads his intent is “to seize the prey” (3:8), the slightest change to the Hebrew identifies the term “witness,” which occurs in similar contexts (so NIV: “for the day I will stand up *to testify*”; cf. Jer 29:23; 52:5; Mic 1:2; Mal 3:5).

Yahweh supplies two reasons, each beginning with “for,” for why the remnant of faithful must wait for God: because (1) he still intends to punish the wicked of the earth (Zeph 3:8b) and (2) he will save a remnant from the nations, reversing the Tower of Babel’s effects (3:9–10). First, God will “gather” all people groups (“nations”) and political powers (“kingdoms”) for judicial assessment (Zeph 3:8b; cf. 1:17–18; Isa 24:22; Joel 3:2; Zech 14:2–3; Matt 13:40–42; 25:46). At that time his molten jealousy for his name’s honor will “pour out” upon “all the earth,” destroying everyone hostile to him. Second, fulfilling his Abrahamic covenant promises (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), Yahweh will, “at that time,” cleanse the speech of the earth’s elect “peoples,” moving them to “call upon the name of the LORD” and “serve him” together (Zeph 3:9; cf. Rev 7:9–10). With Zephaniah’s black African relatives as exhibit A (“Cush,” see Zeph 1:1 and introduction), Yahweh foretells that he will create a multi-ethnic contingent of worshipers from the ends of the earth. This will reverse the Tower of Babel judgment by calling the descendants of those once scattered (“the daughter of my dispersed ones”) back to God (Zeph 3:10; cf. Gen 11:8–9; John 11:51–52). Luke apparently alludes to this passage

and portrays Christ inaugurating this period of global salvation and God-centered speech through his death and resurrection, at Pentecost, and in saving the Ethiopian (i.e., Cushite) eunuch (Acts 2:1–11, 21, 42; 8:26–40).

Response to 3:8–10 Wait for the Lord (Isa 64:4; Heb 10:23–25; Jas 1:12; 2Pet 2:9), rejoice that the church fulfills OT hopes for a reconciled community from every tribe and tongue (Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–10), and act knowing that God saves worshipers without prejudice (Matt 28:18–20; Rom 10:13–15, 17; 2Cor 5:17–19).

3:11–20 The Lord motivates his charge to wait by promising to save in a way that satisfies. The unit has three parts: (1) God promises that the new Jerusalem will not live in shame (Zeph 3:11–13); (2) the prophet parenthetically charges the remnant to rejoice as if their salvation has already occurred (3:14–15); and (3) Yahweh promises that he will save completely (3:16–20). The outer promise-sections both begin with “on that day” (3:11, 16), thus linking the temporal context for fulfillment to the day of the Lord (3:8).

3:11–13 To stimulate patient trust (3:8a), Yahweh announces that, despite Jerusalem’s previous rebellion and corruption (cf. 3:7), the transformed city will not remain before him in a shameful state (3:11a; cf. Isa 29:22–23; 45:17; Rom 10:11). This is because he will remove Jerusalem’s proud (Zeph 3:11bc) and preserve her humble (3:12–13). God will forever erase pride by expelling the haughty and self-reliant (cf. Isa 3:16–17; Jer 3:15–16; Ezek 16:50) from his presence (cf. Zeph 3:5) and “holy mountain” (3:11bc). Additionally, he will leave an afflicted and needy people (“humble and lowly”; cf. Isa 14:32; Matt 5:3), who will find “refuge in the name of the LORD” (Zeph 3:12; cf. Ps 118:9; Prov 30:5; Nah 1:7). Because a multi-ethnic community of worshipers gathered to God’s presence in Zephaniah 3:9–10, this global, transformed remnant makes up “those who are left in Israel” (Zeph 3:13a; cf. 2:7, 9; Ps 87; Rom 11:17–24; Gal 6:16; Eph 2:11–16). With God having purified them, they shall walk in justice and truth (“no injustice . . . no lies, nor . . . a deceitful tongue”), turning from sin because (“for”) they experience rest with none to “make them afraid” (Zeph 3:13; cf. Jer 30:10; Ezek 34:28; Mic 4:4).

3:14–15 Zephaniah’s excitement over the hope of 3:11–13 now erupts in an intrusive call to celebrate as if the promised deliverance had already occurred. Four imperatives urge the remnant to praise: “Sing aloud . . . shout! Rejoice and exult!” (Zeph 3:14). Calling his audience the “daughter of Zion,” “Israel,” and the “daughter of Jerusalem” reveals that the remnant descends from Yahweh’s sacred city and is the new people of God. Two unmarked reasons ground the call to rejoice: (1) The Lord has removed the curse of enemy oppression (3:15a, 15b; cf. 3:11), and (2) he is near (3:15c, 15d). Rather than treating the coming wrath and salvation as *future* (e.g., 1:7; 2:2; 3:8–10, 11, 19), the prophet acts as though the time of judgment has *already passed*: “the LORD *has taken away* the judgments against you” (3:15a). This shift is unexpected and identifies that, for Zephaniah, the certainty of future satisfaction was to create present joy amidst pain. The prophet tags Yahweh “the King of Israel” in order to highlight him as the true sovereign (cf. 1:5; 2:11; 3:8). Because he will be in Jerusalem’s midst, she ought to “never again fear evil” (3:15). John apparently alludes to these verses when recording Jesus’s triumphal entry, for only in Zephaniah 3:14–15 and John 12:13–15 do we find the collection of phrases “daughter of Zion,” “King of Israel,” and “fear not.” Jesus is the one who initiates Yahweh’s end-times reign by casting out “the ruler of this world” (John 12:32) and by drawing “all” from “the world” to himself (John 12:19, 32).

3:16–20b Repeating the phrase “on that day” (Zeph 3:16; cf. 3:11), Yahweh now adds his second promise to motivate faithful waiting (3:8). This final unit of Zephaniah’s sermon includes both a future speech that prohibits fear on the day of the Lord (3:16–18) and then the implications of the speech itself (3:19–20).

“On that day” when the Lord reestablishes order in his world, an unnamed messenger will charge the transformed Jerusalem/Zion to neither feel afraid (“fear not”) nor act fearfully (“let not your hands grow weak”; cf. Isa 13:7). The first reason is because the saving Warrior will be readying to deliver (“a mighty one who will save”) and to celebrate over his redeemed (Zeph 3:17; cf. Isa 65:19; Jer 32:41). “He will rejoice . . . he will quiet . . . he will exult,” matching the

remnant's three-fold chorus of joy line by line (cf. Zeph 3:14). In this inaugurated but not consummated state of the Lord's day, the second reason the remnant need not fear is because Yahweh will have already gathered his remnant, thus initiating the promised second exodus (cf. Isa 11:10–11, 16; Jer 23:5–8; Zech 10:10–11; Luke 9:30–31) and identifying his intention to save (Zeph 3:18). The Hebrew text in 3:18 is difficult. I propose the following: "I have gathered those tormented from an appointed time [i.e., when they heeded Yahweh's coming judgment by humbling themselves]. They were away from you [i.e., the new Jerusalem]; a burden was on her [i.e., the sinful Jerusalem], a reproach."

"Behold, at that time," in 3:19 identifies the end of the future speech and designates what follows as God's future prediction. Yahweh pledges to save Jerusalem, remove her "oppressors," and receive her even though she is "lame" and "outcast" (cf. Mic 4:6–7). He will then establish the remnant for "praise" and "renown in all the earth" (Zeph 3:19), which identifies not only that others will honor God's redeemed (cf. Isa 56:5) but also that the redeemed themselves will display Yahweh's fame in the earth (Jer 33:9; Ezek 36:23). Christ's ministry of healing (Matt 8:16–17; 11:5; cf. Isa 42:3; 53:4; 61:1–3) and recovery (John 10:16; 11:50–52) inaugurated the fulfillment of such hopes. Now his followers honor him so that others see their good works and "give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16; cf. 1Pet 2:12). Zephaniah 3:20 reaffirms this great ingathering in personal terms, identifying that those seeking and waiting for God are the ones whom he will exalt "among all the peoples of the earth." He will "restore [their] fortunes" (cf. 2:7), thus fulfilling his ancient promise (Deut 30:3), and he will do so in such a way that the very remnant of Zephaniah's day will experience it for themselves ("before your eyes"; cf. Job 19:25–26; Ps 73:24–26; Isa 26:19).

Response to 3:11–20 Confident that God has overcome the curse and is for you in Christ (Rom 8:31–32; Gal 3:13–14), stand fearless before others (Matt 10:28), celebrate Jesus as the hoped-for Savior-King of Israel (John 12:13, 15), and delight in the Lord who saves you from his wrath and all evil (Rom 5:2–11; 8:31–32; 2Thes 3:3; 1Pet 5:10).

IV. The Closing of the Savior's Invitation to Satisfaction (3:20c)

Like the beginning, the book ends reasserting that the whole oracle is God's word and is, therefore, trustworthy (cf. Amos 9:15). Patiently pursuing God together will result in prolonged pleasures in his presence, all for his glory and great joy. This is the essence of *the Savior's invitation to satisfaction*.