

REJOICING THEN AND NOW: PLEASURES ON THE DAY OF THE LORD (ZEPH 3:11–20)

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WHAT WE HOPE OR DREAD FOR TOMORROW changes who we are today. This is the role that promises play throughout Scripture.¹ Thus, Peter asserts that God in Christ “has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that *through them* you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:4).² Zephaniah castigates those in Jerusalem who ignored God’s promises of blessing and curse and declared, “The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill” (1:12). Like Yahweh’s other prophets, Zephaniah magnifies God’s promises to motivate his listeners to heed his exhortations. First, the prophet urges the faithful remnant to seek the Lord together (2:1–4) and then motivates them by overviewing the lamentable state and fate of the rebels from both the foreign nations (vv. 5–15) and Jerusalem (3:1–7). God’s fiery wrath would soon blaze against the wicked (1:17–18), and no unrepentant sinner would survive, even in Judah. Next, in 3:8–10 Yahweh charges those seeking him to wait for him, and in verses 11–20 he offers the highest motivation for patiently pursuing him—satisfying salvation.

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¹ For more on this theme, see John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God*, 2nd ed. (Multnomah, 2012); and Jason S. DeRouchie, *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ* (Crossway, 2024), 133–89.

² Unless otherwise noted, English translations of Scripture are from the ESV.

Before overviewing 3:11–20, it is important to recall Zephaniah’s hopeful statements in verses 8–10 that already supplied two reasons why the remnant of the faithful in Judah and other lands should “wait” for the Lord.³ The prophet’s initial reason, found in verse 8, is that Yahweh would, in due course, establish justice and eradicate evil throughout the world. The remnant can wait in hope, for the faithful God has not forgotten those loyal to him, and he will fight on their behalf and for the sake of his name. Next, according to verses 9–10, the remnant should wait for God because he will transform peoples from the ingathered nations and kingdoms of the earth, empowering them to call on his name in unity (v. 9). These descendants of those scattered at Babel will now be priests in God’s presence (v. 10)—realities now realized in the church.⁴ Thus, verses 8–10 associate this international worshiping community with Yahweh’s presence at the day of the Lord. These truths shape the backdrop for the extended motivational section that follows.

THE FLOW OF THOUGHT IN ZEPHANIAH 3:11–20

Verses 11–20 include two parallel promise units, each referring to the transformed Jerusalem and beginning with the phrase “on that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, vv. 11, 16).⁵ First, in verses 11–13 Yahweh declares that “on that day” when he rises as judge, he will not shame the new Jerusalem. Second, he adds in verses 16–20: “On that [same] day” he will completely save the city and those associated with her. These two promises frame verses 14–15, which are discursive and provide the motivational high point of the book. Let’s consider each unit.

YAHWEH WILL NOT SHAME JERUSALEM (3:11–13)

To stimulate patient trust (v. 8), Yahweh announces that, despite Jerusalem’s previous rebellion and corruption (v. 7), the transformed city will not remain before him in a shameful state

³ For more, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Seeking God and Waiting: Hope on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 2:1–4; 3:8–10),” *BSac* 181.722 (2024): 131–49.

⁴ E.g., Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 5:10.

⁵ Waylon Bailey, “Zephaniah,” in *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, by Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, NAC 20 (Broadman & Holman, 1999), 487; and Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary* (Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 374. Though Ernst R. Wendland and David J. Clark state that “in that day” in 3:11 recalls Yahweh’s day from verses 8–9, they fail to note the same is true in verse 16. “Zephaniah: Anatomy and Physiology of a Dramatic Prophetic Text,” *JOTT* 16 (2003): 31, 33.

(v. 11a).⁶ This is because he will remove Jerusalem's proud ones (v. 11bc) and preserve her humble (vv. 12–13). Yahweh announces,

On that day you shall not be put to shame
because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.
But I will leave in your midst
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD,
those who are left in Israel;
they shall do no injustice
and speak no lies,
nor shall there be found in their mouth
a deceitful tongue.
For they shall graze and lie down,
and none shall make them afraid. (vv. 11–13)

In Hebrew, the pronoun “you” in verse 11 is feminine singular and addresses the new city of Jerusalem, God's bride. This is where the multiethnic group of worshipers gathered in verse 10, for it is where Yahweh dwells (v. 5). God promises to erase pride forever by expelling the haughty and the self-reliant from his presence and “holy mountain” (v. 11bc).⁷ Additionally, he will leave an afflicted and needy people (“humble and lowly”),⁸ who will find “refuge in the name of the LORD” (v. 12).⁹ Because verses 9–10 portray an in-

⁶ See Isaiah 29:22–23; 45:17; Romans 10:11.

⁷ See Isaiah 3:16–17; 4:2–4; 13:3; Jeremiah 3:15–18; Ezekiel 16:50.

⁸ See Isaiah 14:32; Matthew 5:3. In Zephaniah 2:3 the prophet used the adjective עָנָו (“bent over, humble”), referring to a posture, but here he uses the adjective מַכְרָה (“afflicted”), referring to a condition and highlighting both the remnant's broken but delivered state and their endurance through trial (cf. Jer 31:34; 50:20). See William J. Dumbrell, “עָנָו, מַכְרָה (‘ānāw; ‘ānī),” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Zondervan, 1997), 3:451–52. With this, Zephaniah points to the “needy, poor” (מַכְרָה), who context suggests are the meek and dependent who stand in contrast to the arrogant (cf. Zeph 3:19). See also A. Vanlier Hunter, “Seek the Lord! A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortations in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah” (ThD diss., St. Mary's Seminary and University, 1982), 268; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1990), 331; Johannes Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, HCOT (Peeters, 1999), 203; and Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 334. Others unhelpfully limit the “poor” to the economically destitute. E.g., Liudger Sabottka, *Zephania: Versuch einer Neuübersetzung mit philologischem Kommentar*, BibOr 25 (Biblical Institute Press, 1972), 65–66; and Norbert Lohfink, “Zephaniah and the Church of the Poor,” *TD* 32.2 (1985): 113–18.

⁹ See Psalm 118:9; Proverbs 30:5; Nahum 1:7.

ternational remnant worshiping in Yahweh's presence, "the remnant of Israel" (שְׁאֲרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל) in verse 13, now associated with Yahweh's holy mountain, the new Jerusalem, may be the same group.

Within the context, who is "the remnant of Israel" in Zephaniah 3:13? Earlier in 2:9, Yahweh declared that "the remnant of my people" (שְׁאֲרִית עַמִּי) and "the survivors of my nation" would "plunder" and "possess" (נָחַל) Moab and Ammon. What the remnant "possesses" or "inherits" becomes theirs and is fully identified with them. Thus, if the remnant of Judah claims not only foreign turf but also enemy peoples as their own, those peoples gain new identities and a new God. This is what is envisioned in texts like Psalm 87:3–6, which declares with language quite like Zephaniah 3:8–13:

Glorious things of you are spoken,
O city of God. *Selah*.
Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—
"This one was born there," they say.
And of Zion it shall be said,
"This one and that one were born in her";
for the Most High himself will establish her.
The LORD records as he registers the peoples,
"This one was born there." *Selah*.

Much like Paul celebrating spiritual adoption (Gal 4:4–5) and declaring "the Jerusalem above . . . is our mother" (v. 26), Korah's sons in Psalm 87 foretell how God would give foreigners new birth certificates associated with the future Zion. This psalm and the prophecies of Isaiah likely influenced Zephaniah's preaching.

Isaiah envisions the nations gathering to a transformed Jerusalem in the latter days (2:2–4). Using the same verb "to possess" as found in Zephaniah 2:9, Isaiah anticipates how Israel's restored house will "inherit" (*hithpa'el* נָחַל) some from the foreign nations as servants (Isa 14:2; cf. 61:5; 66:20–21), and he also foresees "the outcast of Moab" sojourning in Zion's midst when the Davidic king reigns uprightly (16:3–5; cf. 9:7; 11:4–5). This Davidic king he later names "Israel," whom God calls "to bring the preserved of Israel [the people] back" but also to serve "as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:3, 6).¹⁰ Using a

¹⁰ For further reflection on the "servant" of Isaiah's Servant Songs being eschatological king and messianic conqueror, see G. P. Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Baker Books, 1995), 105–40; Walter C.

conceptually related verb, Isaiah also charges the new Jerusalem, as Yahweh's bride, to "enlarge the place of your tent" because "your offspring will possess [יִרְשׁוּ] the nations" (54:2–3; cf. Gal 4:26–27). This implies Jerusalem's family size will expand, and this will happen because the righteous, suffering servant's atonement will "sprinkle many nations" and "declare many righteous" (Isa 52:15; 53:11). Thus, Yahweh declares, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance" (19:25).¹¹

In fulfillment of Yahweh's promises to Abraham regarding his singular messianic offspring's extending God's kingdom and blessing the nations (Gen 22:17), Hosea notes that the "children of Israel" will multiply (1:10 [2:1 MT]; cf. 2:23 [2:25 MT]), a text Paul applies to the international church (Rom 9:26). Hosea also declares the restored community will "seek the LORD their God, and David their king" (3:5), the latter of whom will stand as a singular representative "Israel" from whom Yahweh's anger will turn, who will blossom like a garden, whose memory will be recalled, and under whose shadow God's people will dwell (14:4–8). Furthermore, like Isaiah, Amos envisions those who are a part of the restored Davidic kingdom "possessing" (יִרְשׁוּ) nations called by God's name (9:11–12), and James uses this text to support Peter's conviction that the time to include gentiles in God's one people had arrived (Acts 15:16–18). Jeremiah, too, foresees God "restoring the fortunes" of both Moab and Ammon in the latter days (48:47; 49:6).¹² He declares that some foreigners who were once evil neighbors will be "built up into the midst of my people" (12:16) and worship "the LORD their God and David their king" (30:9)—a phrase exactly parallel to Hosea's earlier testimony regarding the restored children of Israel after exile (3:5).¹³ Ezekiel anticipates that God will make Samaria and Sodom "daughters" of Judah in the days of the everlasting cove-

Kaiser Jr., "The Identity and Mission of the 'Servant of the Lord,'" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Kregel Academic, 2012), 87–108; and Jason S. DeRouchie, "Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach," in *Five Views of Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. Andrew M. King and Brian J. Tabb (Zondervan, 2022), 204–10.

¹¹ For more on Isaiah's understanding of the makeup of the messianic people of God, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58.3 (2015): 465–74.

¹² Drawing on Deuteronomy 30:3, Zephaniah 2:7 uses the same phrase, "restore the fortunes" (שָׁבִיטָם) for Judah's remnant, and 3:20 uses a comparable phrase for God's work for the whole community associated with the transformed Jerusalem.

¹³ For more on Jeremiah's understanding of the makeup of the messianic people of God, see DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham," 462–65.

nant (16:61). Thus, once-rebel Israelites and enemy foreigners will become part of the new single covenantal family of God. Finally, Yahweh declares through Zechariah, “Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people” (2:11). Regarding the representative shepherd’s substitutionary work, he also adds: “He will call upon my name, and I will answer him. I have said, ‘He is my people’; and he will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (13:9, author’s translation).

I offer these texts as outside support for my claim that Zephaniah portrays the transformed global worshipers from 3:9–10 to be “the remnant of Israel” in verse 13 through their ultimate identification with “Israel” the person, Messiah Jesus.¹⁴ The daughters of those God once dispersed are now members of God’s single family, his new nation (1 Pet 2:9). Using Paul’s words in Galatians, with God having removed the proud from the transformed city, his ingathered remnant peoples from the world are now “Abraham’s offspring” (3:29), “the Israel of God” (6:16), with the heavenly Jerusalem as their “mother” (4:26). With their being cleansed, the prophet asserts in Zephaniah 3:13 that they will walk in justice and truth (“no injustice . . . no lies, nor . . . a deceitful tongue”);¹⁵ they will turn from sin because they will experience rest with none to “make them afraid.”¹⁶

A DISCURSIVE CHARGE TO REJOICE (3:14–15)

Zephaniah’s excitement over the hope of verses 11–13 now erupts in an intrusive call to celebrate as if the promised deliverance had already occurred.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil. (vv. 14–15)

Numerous factors suggest this is the motivational rhetorical high point of the book.¹⁷ Four commands urge the remnant to praise:

¹⁴ See Romans 11:17–24; Ephesians 2:11–16.

¹⁵ See Revelation 14:4–5.

¹⁶ See Jeremiah 30:10; Ezekiel 34:28; Micah 4:4.

¹⁷ As Christopher S. Tachick observes, Zephaniah 3:14–15 contains all six of Robert Longacre’s proposed markers for surface structure peak: (1) rhetorical underlin-

“Sing aloud . . . shout! Rejoice and exult!” (v. 14). Those who are called “the daughter of my dispersed ones” (v. 10) are now referred to as the “daughter of Zion,” “Israel,” and the “daughter of Jerusalem.” There is both continuity and discontinuity between the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem. The new “Israel” descends from the earlier Zion/Jerusalem but is now transformed and includes ethnically diverse worshippers from the Judean and non-Judean peoples of the world.¹⁸

Why should this changed remnant rejoice? Two grammatically unmarked reasons ground the call to sing: (1) God has removed the curse of enemy oppression (v. 15ab; cf. v. 11),¹⁹ and (2) Yahweh the King is near (v. 15cd). What is striking in verse 15 is this: Rather than treating the coming wrath and salvation as *future*, Zephaniah acts as though the time of judgment has *already passed*: “The LORD has taken away the judgments against you” (v. 15a).²⁰ Everywhere else in the book, God’s judgment is future (1:7, 14; 2:2; 3:8, 11, 19). The shift here to past tense is, therefore, unexpected and indicates that, for Zephaniah, the future salvation is so certain that it should create present joy amid pain. Zephaniah’s audience is still awaiting the day of the Lord. The remnant is still living amid injustice and corruption. Yet they can delight in their day because their desire for complete freedom from oppression and darkness will be realized.²¹ They must rejoice in hope, waiting for the Lord to act.

ing; (2) concentration of participants; (3) heightened vividness; (4) change of pace; (5) change of vantage point and/or orientation; (6) incidence of particles and onomatopoeia. “King of Israel” and “Do Not Fear, Daughter of Zion”: *The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, *Reformed Academic Dissertations* 11 (P&R, 2018), 101–7; see Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 2nd ed. (Springer, 1996), 38–48.

¹⁸ The shift here from “the remnant of Israel” (שְׁאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) in Zephaniah 3:13 to only “Israel” in verse 14 suggests that the multiethnic “remnant of Israel” has now become God’s new “Israel,” a freshly established singular people (see Gal 6:15–16; Eph 2:13–22). See G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b,” *Bib* 80.2 (1999): 204–23; cf. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Baker Academic, 2011), 722–24.

¹⁹ Specifically, Yahweh has taken away Jerusalem’s “judgments” (הַיָּסֻדִּים), namely, her “enemy” (אֹיֵב). Having addressed the charges, carried out his sentence, and appeased his wrath, God now promises to overcome the curse with a blessing.

²⁰ The God who displays his “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט) morning by morning (Zeph 3:5) and whose “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט) is to punish the world’s evildoers (v. 8; cf. 2:3) will remove the new Jerusalem’s “judgments” (הַיָּסֻדִּים). This likely refers to his halting the covenant curses of enemy oppression, which shaped the “decree” (2:2) that he “purposed to visit” against the city (3:7; cf. Lev 26:16–17; Deut 28:43–44).

²¹ To cease the curses means that he has “turned away” Jerusalem’s “enemy.” The switch from plural “judgments” to singular “enemy” is unexpected, leading many translations to render both forms as plural (e.g., LXX, Vulg., Syr., Tg. Neb., NRSV,

Notice who is with them. “The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil” (v. 15). By calling Yahweh “the King of Israel,” Zephaniah emphasizes that he is the true Sovereign (see 1:5; 2:11; 3:8).²² Because he will be in Jerusalem’s midst, she ought to “never again fear evil” (v. 15).

John likely alludes to Zephaniah 3:14–15 when he narrates Jesus’s triumphal entry in John 12:13–15. Interpreters commonly recognize that the apostle cites Psalm 118:25–26 (117:25–26 LXX) and Zechariah 9:9 in his account of Jesus’s journey into Jerusalem:

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even *the King of Israel!*” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!*” (John 12:13–15)

What some miss is that the psalm does not include the phrase “the King of Israel” and that Zechariah’s opening charge is actually “re-joice” rather than “fear not,” probably recalling Zephaniah 3:14.

These differences imply that John is also alluding to Zephaniah 3:14–15, which is the only place in the Old Testament where we find the grouping “the King of Israel,” “fear not,” and “daughter of Zion.”²³ Within Zephaniah, these verses interrupt his motivational promises that Yahweh will cleanse and renew his creation “on that day” of his judgment (vv. 11, 16). John, therefore, sees Jesus initiating God’s end-time reign and salvation for which Zephaniah longed. In Christ, Zephaniah’s eschatological day of the Lord has dawned. Jesus is the Warrior-King who judges the enemy: “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31; cf. v. 13). With this, Jesus is working a great in-

ESV, NASB). However, the singular has solid textual support (and is followed by NKJV, NET, NIV, CSB). Because Yahweh promises to remove the arrogant abusers from Jerusalem’s midst (3:11) with the same *hiphil* verb סָרַר, the singular “enemy” (אֹיֵב) in verse 15 likely refers to a class of all those who caused and carried out the divine judgments—both those *within* the city (1:9; 3:1–4, 11, 18–19) and those *outside* it (2:4–15; 3:18–19). Cf. Ivan Jay Ball Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (BIBAL, 1988), 181; Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*, BZAW 198 (de Gruyter, 1991), 241; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25A (Yale University Press, 1994), 143; and Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 207.

²² Zephaniah calls Jerusalem’s great deliverer “the King of Israel” (מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל) 3:15c), the full title of which Scripture applies to Yahweh only here and in Isaiah 44:6 (41:21; Jer 10:7). Scripture frequently depicts Yahweh as “King” (מֶלֶךְ) (e.g., Num 23:21; 1 Sam 12:12; Ps 149:2; Isa 33:22; Jer 10:10; Ezek 20:33; Mic 2:13; Mal 1:14; Zech 14:9).

²³ See especially Tachick, *Use of Zephaniah 3*.

gathering of the nations. “So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.’ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks” (vv. 19–20). Then Jesus declares in verse 32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” John’s allusion to Zephaniah 3:14–15 further supports that Jesus’s first coming initiates Zephaniah’s vision of the day of the Lord as both punishment and renewal and that through the church God is fulfilling his promises related to the transformed Israel of God.

YAHWEH WILL SAVE COMPLETELY (3:16–20)

We now come to the last unit, verses 16–20. Repeating the phrase “on that day” (v. 16; cf. v. 11), Yahweh adds his second promise to motivate faithful waiting (v. 8). Here we have a future speech that prohibits fear on the day of the Lord (vv. 16–18) and then the implications of the speech itself (vv. 19–20). While I take issue with the following translation at points, the ESV reads:

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
 “Fear not, O Zion;
 let not your hands grow weak.
 The LORD your God is in your midst,
 a mighty one who will save;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness;
 he will quiet you by his love;
 he will exult over you with loud singing.
 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
 so that you will no longer suffer reproach.
 Behold, at that time I will deal
 with all your oppressors.
 And I will save the lame
 and gather the outcast,
 and I will change their shame into praise
 and renown in all the earth.
 At that time I will bring you in,
 at the time when I gather you together;
 for I will make you renowned and praised
 among all the peoples of the earth,
 when I restore your fortunes
 before your eyes,” says the LORD. (vv. 16–20)

“On that day” when the Lord reestablishes order in his world, an unnamed messenger will charge the new Jerusalem/Zion neither to feel afraid (“fear not”) nor to act fearfully (“let not your hands grow weak”).²⁴ The city (filled with the international ingath-

²⁴ See Isaiah 13:7. That the speech addresses “Jerusalem” and not the remnant

ering of worshipers from vv. 9–10) need not fear because the saving Warrior will be with them and will be readying to deliver (“a mighty one who will save”) and to celebrate over his redeemed (v. 17).²⁵ Specifically, the future messenger longs for God to “rejoice . . . renew²⁶ . . . exult,” matching the remnant’s threefold chorus of joy in verse 14 line by line.²⁷ The prophet anticipates the day of the Lord to include not only the remnant’s joy but also Yahweh’s joy in those he has redeemed. God takes pleasure in his people, and

“daughter” of the old city (Zeph 3:14) implies the “daughter of Zion/Jerusalem” (v. 14) has now become the whole city. The close context from verses 9–10 further suggests this new city’s makeup is the multiethnic redeemed remnant.

²⁵ See Isaiah 65:19; Jeremiah 32:41.

²⁶ The Masoretic Text has the verb *יִקְרִיֵּן*, which is the *hiphil* of *קָרַן* and which many English translations render “to [make] quiet” (see NKJV, NASB, ESV). However, the *hiphil* stative verb *קָרַן* always means “to keep, be, or become silent” rather than “to make silent” (e.g., Ps 50:21; Isa 42:14; Hab 1:3), so the NASB translates the clauses, “He will be quiet in his love,” and the NIV reads, “In his love he will no longer rebuke you” (Zeph 3:17). The immediate context of celebration, however, makes God’s silence out of place. Significantly, the Septuagint translated the clause, “And he will renew you in his love” (καὶ καινῶσι σε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου). The Greek translator apparently read the *piel* *קָרַן* (“he will renew”) (or *קָרַן*, “he will renew you,” with object suffix) from the verb *קָרַן* (“to make new, restore”) with *dalet* (ד), rather than the *hiphil* *יִקְרִיֵּן* (“may he quiet”) with *resh* (ר), as in the Masoretic Text. The NRSV, NET, and NASB margins all have “renew,” which is the best lexical reading. Perhaps the Hebrew text does not specify the object of the renewal since Yahweh’s eschatological work will exceed a single place or people and include the entire universe—a new heavens and a new earth (Isa 43:19–21; 65:17; 66:22). Among those following this emendation include John Owen in John Calvin, “Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,” in *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen, vol. 15 of *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Baker Books, 2009), 304n1; John Merlin Powis Smith, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Zephaniah,” in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, by John Merlin Powis Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius A. Bewer, ICC 24 (T&T Clark, 1911), 257, 262; Paul R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, JSOTSup 69 (Almond Press, 1989), 133; and Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 341.

²⁷ Following the predictive indicative *yiqtol* *יִשְׁעֶי* (“he will save”) in Zephaniah 3:17b, most modern translations treat the three first-position *yiqtol*s as emphatic, predictive indicatives, as in the ESV: “He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (v. 17c–e; NKJV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, CSB). Others, like the NET, treat them as emphatic, present continuous indicatives, which is one way fientive *yiqtol*s (i.e., those dealing with activities) function in certain contexts: “He takes great delight in you; he renews you by his love; he shouts for joy over you” (YLT). While both renderings fit the context, only the former aligns with the promissory orientation of verse 17b. However, *yiqtol* verbs in the first position usually express nonindicative volitional modality, which in this setting would mean the certainty of coming salvation moves the speaker to bless the city with hope in direct alignment with previous promises. Thus, the syntax probably yields this interpretation: “May he rejoice [*יִשְׁעֶי*] over you with merriment; may he renew [*יִקְרִיֵּן*] with his love; may he celebrate [*יִגְדִּיל*] over you with song!”

the hope of the text is that one day his mirth-filled melody will ring across the universe on behalf of those he saves.

The Hebrew in verse 18 is difficult, resulting in manifold interpretations throughout history. Most significantly, the text reads, “I have gathered” (יִקְרַח, *qal qatal* קָרַח) and not “I will gather” (against most modern translations except NET). I translate the whole: “Those tormented from an appointed time I have gathered. They were away from you; a burden was on her, a reproach” (v. 18).²⁸ Verses 16–18 envision a time when God will have gathered his remnant and will be with them yet when they will still need to be comforted and charged not to fear. Because verse 19 returns to speaking of God assembling his peoples as a *future* reality, verse 18 likely concludes the messenger’s speech begun in verse 16 (against the ESV’s placement of the quotation marks at the end of v. 20). Yahweh’s day will work its way out in stages, bearing both “already but not yet” elements. The “day” will include a period in which God will have already gathered his remnant but not saved them completely. Verse 19, then, returns to Zephaniah’s day and furthers Yahweh’s future prediction.

The phrase, “behold, at that time” (v. 19), refers to the day of the Lord that is still future from Zephaniah’s perspective. Yahweh pledges to save transformed Jerusalem (using feminine singular address), remove her “oppressors,” and receive her even though she

²⁸ My approach to Zephaniah 3:18 allows the Hebrew text to stand in its present Masoretic form and treats the shift from *yiqtol* in verse 17 (4x) to *qatal* in verse 18 (2x) as significant. Elsewhere in the book, intrusive *qatal* verbs treat future events as having already occurred (2:11, 15; 3:15). Here, however, the speech act is something declared in the future, and the switch to *qatal* suggests divine activity that is indeed past to awaken hope for the further future. At least two elements from the immediate context support this more positive reading of verse 18. First, while the book uses the verbs קָרַח (“to gather”) and קָבַץ (“to assemble”) for Yahweh’s eschatological ingathering of his global *enemies* (1:2–3; 3:8), in this unit God twice “assembles” (קָבַץ) his *redeemed* on that future day (3:19–20). The single eschatological ingathering that Zephaniah envisions will include both prisoners of war and those whom God has freed (cf. 2:11). The positive use of קָבַץ in the same unit of Zephaniah 3:16–20 suggests that קָרַח (“to gather”) in verse 18a depicts the new exodus of some ethnic Israelites and some once foreigners as fulfilled and ensuring their lasting place of rest. Second, Yahweh already spoke of such an influx by noting that international worshipers, the daughter of those he scattered at the tower of Babel, would bring tribute to Yahweh at his sacred abode on his day of worldwide ingathering (vv. 9–10). Since Yahweh is presently addressing the new Zion, it is logical for him to comment on her already assembled inhabitants. For another positive treatment of this verse, see Ben Zvi, *Historical-Critical Study*, 252–54. For more negative interpretations of this verse, see Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets: Part 2*, FOTL 22 (Eerdmans, 2000), 237–38; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Fortress, 2003), 204; Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 2021), 635 note e, 638–41.

is “lame” and “outcast” (v. 19).²⁹ He will then establish the remnant for “praise” and “renown in all the earth” (v. 19), which indicates not only that others will honor God’s redeemed (Isa 56:5) but also that the redeemed themselves will display Yahweh’s fame in the earth (Jer 33:9; Ezek 36:23).³⁰ Zephaniah 3:20 reaffirms this great ingathering in personal terms, noting 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 remnant of Zephaniah’s day will experience it for themselves (“before your eyes”).³¹

THE COMMUNITY’S CHORUS AND THE SAVIOR’S SONG

Zephaniah opens with one of Scripture’s most ominous and graphic depictions of the day of the Lord as punishment (1:2–18), but the book ends with one of Scripture’s most breathtaking and hope-filled pictures of the day of the Lord as renewal (3:11–20). Motivating the charge to “wait” for Yahweh’s saving work (v. 8) are promises that the new Jerusalem will know no shame (vv. 11–13) and will be saved completely (vv. 16–20). And at the center of this glorious salvation is pleasure—the remnant’s joy in God and God’s delight in those he has saved. Because of the certainty of our coming deliverance, the redeemed should already sing praise, ringing forth a new song that the Lord will join when what Christ finished becomes complete.

Zephaniah does not describe what songs the delivered remnant should sing (v. 14), but Isaiah clarifies the nature of the singing and rejoicing that are to fill the mouths of the ingathered worshippers. For example, with allusions to the prophetess Miriam’s song at the first exodus (Exod 15:1–21), Isaiah highlights that “in

²⁹ See Micah 4:6–7.

³⁰ While the preposition לְ (“to, for”) can mark the direct object of the verb (e.g., Lev 19:18; Deut 9:27; Jer 31:34), in Zephaniah 3:19d the preposition לְ plus noun construction more likely expresses purpose, such that Yahweh “will place them *for* praise and *for* a name” (וְשִׁמְתִּים לְתִהְיֶה וְלִשְׁמָהּ). Indeed, praise and a name will in some way relate to the remnant, but the acclaim is not necessarily limited to them. Several parallel texts support this reading. For example, Jeremiah elaborates on Moses’s earlier promise (Deut 26:19) and offers the two closest parallel texts to Zephaniah 3:19d, both of which suggest that the honor the people of God enjoy results in onlookers exalting *him* above all (Jer 13:11; 33:9). See also Isaiah 55:13; Ezekiel 36:23; Zechariah 9:16–17.

³¹ See Job 19:25–26; Psalm 73:24–26; Isaiah 26:19.

that day” of the Messiah’s second exodus (11:1–16), the multiethnic redeemed community will proclaim with one voice,

I will give thanks to you, O LORD,
for though you were angry with me,
your anger turned away,
that you might comfort me.
Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation. (12:1–2; cf. Exod 15:2)³²

And again,

Give thanks to the LORD,
call upon his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples,
proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be made known in all the earth.
Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. (Isa 12:4–6)

Similarly, Isaiah later notes that “in that day” when God destroys death, wipes away all tears, and saves his saints, they will cry:

Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might
save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (25:9; cf. Rev 21:4)

Then the prophet says,

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
“We have a strong city;
he sets up salvation
as walls and bulwarks.
Open the gates,
that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. . . .
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.” (Isa 26:1–2, 4)

And again,

A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!
I, the LORD, am its keeper (27:2–3).

³² See Jason S. DeRouchie, “How Does Isaiah 12:2 Use Exodus 15:2?,” in *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Kregel Academic, 2020), 301–10.

Zephaniah recognizes that joyous salvation always finds its consummation in praise. The New Testament authors, too, highlight how such praise will characterize the redeemed both in this age and in the age to come (e.g., Eph 1:4, 6). In the heavens, the new song is ringing out in praise to the Lion-Lamb King:

Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth. (Rev 5:9–10)

John also heard the victorious saints singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb:

Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed. (Rev 15:3–4)

God's creatures will glorify him with these and many other praises forever (see 4:8, 11; 7:9–10; 11:17–18; 19:1–3, 5–8). Yet we are not the only ones who will sing.

This book hopes in the day when the Mighty One who will save may also “rejoice over you with gladness, . . . quiet you by his love, . . . [and] exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph 3:17). How could God justly celebrate over sinners and revel in former rebels? It is because the humbled and humble remnant becomes part of the new Jerusalem, of whom we are told: “The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies” (v. 15). He works toward the weak, who recognize their need, seek refuge in his name, and call upon him in the day of trouble (vv. 9, 12). Thus, he declares, “I will save the lame and gather the outcast” (v. 19).

What do you imagine you will hear when God's melody rings forth? Moses recalls how Israel at Mount Sinai declared, “If we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, we shall die” (Deut 5:25; cf. 18:16). Similarly, David as a psalmist reflected:

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
 the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. . . .
 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
 the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. (Ps 29:3–5, 7–8; cf.
 18:13–15)

Reflecting on God's voice in the world today, John Piper helps us consider Yahweh's song:

I hear the booming of Niagara Falls mingled with the trickle of a mossy mountain stream. I hear the blast of Mt. St. Helens mingled with a kitten's purr. I hear the power of an East Coast hurricane and the barely audible puff of a night snow in the woods. And I hear the unimaginable roar of the sun, 865,000 miles thick, 1,300,000 times bigger than the earth, and nothing but fire, 1,000,000 degrees centigrade on the cooler surface of the corona. But I hear this unimaginable roar mingled with the tender, warm crackling of logs in the living room on a cozy winter's night.³³

With this, I consider God's future song in the crash of Lake Superior's waves and in the drops of rain in the Wisconsin woods. It resonates through the stampede of horses' hooves on the range and in the subtle chomping of grasshoppers on a midsummer's day. It sounds in the shriek of a soaring hawk and in the rooster's crow from a coop, in the laughter of boys jumping in a water hole and in the ding of a grandfather clock. Yahweh's voice rings through the cheers of football fans and in a father's lullaby as he rocks his daughter to sleep.

But the day is coming when the Maker's melody will be solely directed toward his bride. A cry will go forth like "the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of mighty peals of thunder," declaring, "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19:6–7). Then the royal groom will rise and celebrate over his queen with song. His ringing notes will make the night flee and his bride's joy forever full. He will love; he will renew; he will celebrate. And we will stand in awe.

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
 nor repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
 As a father shows compassion to his children,

³³ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, 2nd ed. (Multnomah, 2000), 180.

so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust. (Ps 103:10–14)

Thus, Yahweh testifies:

I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress. (Isa 65:19)

And again,

I will rejoice over them for doing them good, and I will plant them
in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and with all my soul.
(Jer 32:41)

May all who are in Christ stand expectantly in awe! Come, Lord
Jesus!³⁴

CONCLUSION

God will sing over those he saves (Zeph 3:17; cf. Ps 147:11), and his joyous melody is matched, line for line, by his bride rejoicing in his goodness (Zeph 3:14–15).³⁵ Our joy today is not based on present appearances but on what God has *already* done and promises to do.³⁶ Already the Lord “has put all things under his feet” (Eph 1:22; cf. Heb 2:8). Having “disarmed the rulers and authorities,” God has already “put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” at the cross (Col 2:15; cf. Zeph 3:11, 19). Already “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5), such that God is truly in our midst (Zeph 3:15, 17). God has already begun to gather his remnant (John 10:16; 11:51–52; cf. Zeph 3:18–20), has already inaugurated the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), and has already secured the complete and future victory for which Zephaniah rejoiced (Zeph 3:14–15). Heeding his own prayer (Matt 6:13; John 17:15), the faithful Lord Jesus “will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thess 3:3). “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18).

³⁴ For further devotional reflections on God’s delight in his bride, see Piper, *Pleasures of God*, 179–202; and Sam Storms, *The Singing God: Feel the Passion God Has for You . . . Just the Way You Are* (Passio, 2013).

³⁵ See Isaiah 65:18; Jeremiah 31:10–14.

³⁶ See Habakkuk 3:18–19; Romans 5:2–5, 9–11; 8:31–32; 1 Peter 5:10.

“For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured” (Heb 12:2; cf. Isa 53:10–11). As was true for him, the future joy for which we aim becomes our present joy that sustains.³⁷ “The King of Israel” and the “mighty one,” who will completely save and sing over his redeemed, desires to satisfy us with his goodness (Zeph 3:14–15, 17). Our gladness redounds to his glory (vv. 19–20), so may we today patiently pursue the Lord together, rejoicing in hope and embracing the Savior’s invitation to satisfaction.

³⁷ See Hebrews 10:34; 11:6, 26; 12:3.