



INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH

AUTHOR

Because the prophet Zephaniah was the “son of Cushi” (1:1) and uniquely interested in the sin and future restoration of the Cushites (i.e., black Africans from ancient Ethiopia, today modern Sudan, 2:12; 3:9–10), he may have been a black Jew. Books like Genesis, Deuteronomy, Amos, and Isaiah apparently influenced him, and he may have been aware of the ministries of his contemporaries Nahum, Habakkuk, and young Jeremiah.

Zephaniah means “Yahweh hides.” Perhaps his parents prayed that God would protect him at his birth during the shadowy reign of Manasseh (2 Kgs 20:21 — 21:18), who was son of King Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18–20; Isa 36–38), Zephaniah’s great-great-grandfather (Zeph 1:1). As part of the royal family, Zephaniah was part of the Messianic-Davidic hope that still burned in the darkness. His social status may explain how he was aware of the international climate (2:5–15) and the ethics of Jerusalem’s political and religious leadership (1:4,8–9; 3:3–4).

DATE

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (641/40–609 BC) (1:1). In about 628 BC, Josiah started removing all pagan Canaanite shrines and emblems (2 Chr 34:3–7), and around 622 BC he recovered the Book of the Law and instituted a mass religious reform throughout the land (2 Kgs 22:3 — 23:25; 2 Chr 34:8 — 35:19). Because Zephaniah’s message shows signs of Deuteronomy’s influence while stressing a high need for spiritual growth, he likely ministered early in 622 BC after Josiah found the Book of the Law but before the reform movement was fully underway.

MESSAGE

Zephaniah provides a summons to satisfaction — a call to persevering trust in God in order to experience personal and divine pleasure in the future. In light of the impending day of Yahweh’s wrath, the prophet urges his listeners to join the remnant in patiently pursuing Yahweh (i.e., “seek” [2:3] and “wait” [3:8]); this alone will preserve them through judgment and secure consummate joy in God (3:14) and the experience of God’s delight in saved sinners (3:17). Three main messages are evident.

Basic Training for Satisfaction

Because Yahweh’s day of fury is coming, Judah must repent and wait upon God. The prophet calls the people back to the basics as the only means for experiencing salvation through judgment (2:1,3; 3:8). Two judgments are certain: (1) near judgment against Judah through Babylon (1:4–13; 2:2; 3:7), and (2) future judgment against the entire world due to pervasive sin against the God of all the earth (1:1–3,14–18; 3:8; cf. Deut 30:7; Isa 24:5–6).

These warnings provide the context for the book’s main purpose: to exhort Judah to trust God to faithfully preserve and ultimately satisfy them — even through judgment. What we hope for or fear tomorrow changes who we are

LOCATIONS IN ZEPHANIAH



today. Zephaniah motivates his audience with hope and dread as basic training for finding satisfaction in the Lord (2:1,3; 3:8,14–15).

Yahweh's War Equated With Sacrifice

The fires of Yahweh's retributive war will destroy the entire old creation order, including unbelieving humanity (1:3,18; 3:8), yet Yahweh will protect those who have humbled themselves and called on his name (2:3; 3:9,11). How can a righteous God who does no injustice (3:5) pardon, preserve, and bring pleasure to former sinful rebels (3:9–20)?

Zephaniah says little explicitly about the saving work of the Messiah, probably to portray that the Judahites were deep in darkness and almost fully separated from hope. But he hints that the means for understanding salvation through judgment and the inauguration of new creation is penal substitutionary atonement. He associates the fires of God's judgment with sacrifice (1:7; cf. 1:18; 3:8), which appeases God's righteous wrath. He also urges his audience to "draw near" to Yahweh (3:2), the exact language for approaching God by faith through a substitute sacrifice (Lev 9:1–10:3), which points to Christ (Heb 9:11–14,27–28; 10:11–14). Jesus took upon himself the sacrificial fires of God's judgment on behalf of all who believe (1:7,18; 3:8; cf. Isa 53:5,7,11); thus God is both just and the justifier (Rom 3:24–26). See "Sacrifice," p. 2656, and "Wrath," p. 2681.

Global Salvation

While Zephaniah focuses on a righteous remnant from Judah, he also highlights that God will save other peoples of the world (3:9–10; cf. 2:11). He thus anticipates the church age and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in blessing Jews and Gentiles alike in Christ (Gal 3:8,14,29; Eph 2:14–16). Together they will worship the King, the "Mighty Warrior who saves" (3:17; cf. 3:14–15). All these features have been inaugurated already in Christ and his church, and they now await complete consummation at Christ's second coming. See "People of God," p. 2672.

OUTLINE**I. Superscription (1:1)****II. Judgment on the Whole Earth in the Day of the Lord: A Call to Dreadful Silence Before God (1:2–18)**

- A. The Reason for the Call to Silence (1:2–6)
- B. The Nature of the Call to Silence (1:7–18)

III. Judah and Jerusalem Judged Along With the Nations: Calls to Repent and to Wait for God (2:1—3:8)

- A. Judah Summoned to Repent Before the Lord to Avoid Judgment (2:1–3)
- B. Reasons for the Summons to Repent and Wait (2:4—3:7)
 - 1. The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels From the Foreign Nations (2:4–15)
 - 2. The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels From Jerusalem (3:1–7)
- C. Judah Summoned to Wait for the Lord, Ultimately to Enjoy Satisfaction (3:8)

IV. Restoration of Israel's Remnant: Lasting Joy as Motivation for Waiting on God (3:9–20)

- A. The Motivation: Global Salvation (3:9–10)
- B. The Impact of Global Salvation for the Remnant of Judah: Lasting Joy (3:11–20)



ZEPHANIAH

1:1 ^a2Ki 22:1;
2Ch 34:1-35:25
1:2 ^bGe 6:7
1:3 ^cJer 4:25 ^dHos 4:3
1:4 ^eJer 6:12 ^fMic 5:13
^gHos 10:5
1:5 ^hJer 5:7
1:6 ⁱIsa 1:4; Jer 2:13
^jIsa 9:13 ^kHos 7:7

1 The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah^a son of Amon king of Judah:

Judgment on the Whole Earth in the Day of the LORD

²“I will sweep away everything
from the face of the earth,”^b

declares the LORD.

³“I will sweep away both man and beast;
I will sweep away the birds in the sky^c
and the fish in the sea—
and the idols that cause the wicked to stumble.”^a

“When I destroy all mankind
on the face of the earth,”^d

declares the LORD,

⁴“I will stretch out my hand^e against Judah
and against all who live in Jerusalem.
I will destroy every remnant of Baal worship in this place,^f
the very names of the idolatrous priests^g—

⁵those who bow down on the roofs
to worship the starry host,
those who bow down and swear by the LORD
and who also swear by Molek,^h

⁶those who turn back from followingⁱ the LORD
and neither seek^j the LORD nor inquire^k of him.”

^a 3 The meaning of the Hebrew for this line is uncertain. ^b 5 Hebrew *Malkam*

1:1 *Superscription.* See Introduction: Author; Date.

1:2–18 *Judgment on the Whole Earth in the Day of the Lord: A Call to Dreadful Silence Before God.* This sets a context for the book’s main exhortations in chs. 2–3. Zephaniah’s listeners must pause in silence since Yahweh’s impending judgment is near.

1:2–6 *The Reason for the Call to Silence.* Yahweh will judge the world in general (vv. 2–3) and Judah in particular (vv. 4–6) because of their idolatrous rebellion.

1:2 *sweep away everything.* Echoes the flood judgment (Gen 6:7). Yahweh will destroy the proud rebel majority by fire (3:8b; cf. 1:18) but preserve and bless the penitent few (3:9–10,20).

1:3 *man ... beast ... birds ... fish.* Specifies “everything” (v. 2) in the reverse order that God created them (Gen 1:20–28), suggesting that the impending judgment will be a de-creation, parallel to the flood but now with fire (see note on v. 2).

1:4 *remnant of Baal worship.* Remaining pagan apostasy. **idolatrous priests.** Priests were supposed to preserve holiness and teach God’s law (Lev 10:10–11). The Hebrew raises the possibility of two corrupt groups of priests: foreign and Israelite.

1:5 *worship the starry host.* A sin that corrupted the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17:16) and characterized the reigns of Manasseh and Amon (2 Kgs 21:3,5–6,21; cf. 2 Kgs 23:4–5,24). **swear by the LORD and ... by Molek.** Make promises to Yahweh by Molek (cf. Deut 6:13; 10:20; Josh 23:7; 2 Kgs 23:10). God strongly condemned syncretism (2 Kgs 17:7–18; 21:2–9; 23:4–25).

1:6 *those who turn back.* Covenant disloyalty (Pss 44:18; 78:56–57; Isa 59:13). Following God is the only means to life (Matt 7:13–14; John 14:6).

⁷Be silent^l before the Sovereign LORD,
for the day of the LORD^m is near.
The LORD has prepared a sacrifice;ⁿ
he has consecrated those he has invited.

⁸“On the day of the LORD’s sacrifice
I will punish^o the officials
and the king’s sons^p
and all those clad
in foreign clothes.

⁹On that day I will punish
all who avoid stepping on the threshold,^q
who fill the temple of their gods
with violence and deceit.^q

¹⁰“On that day,”
declares the LORD,
“a cry will go up from the Fish Gate,^r
wailing from the New Quarter,
and a loud crash from the hills.

¹¹Wail,^s you who live in the market district^b;
all your merchants will be wiped out,
all who trade with^c silver will be destroyed.^t

¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and punish those who are complacent,^u
who are like wine left on its dregs,^v
who think, “The LORD will do nothing,^w
either good or bad.”

¹³Their wealth will be plundered,^x
their houses demolished.
Though they build houses,
they will not live in them;
though they plant vineyards,
they will not drink the wine.”^y

¹⁴The great day of the LORD^z is near^a—
near and coming quickly.

^a 9 See 1 Samuel 5:5. ^b 11 *Or the Mortar* ^c 11 *Or in*

1:7–18 *The Nature of the Call to Silence.* Like a herald readying an audience for an angry king’s arrival, Zephaniah charges his audience to become quiet (v. 7a) because Yahweh will imminently judge Judah (vv. 7b–13) and the whole world (vv. 14–18).

1:7 silent. A reverent hush demanded of courtiers in an earthly king’s presence (cf. Judg 3:19) or of humans before Yahweh (Hab 2:20; Zech 2:13 [“be still”]). **day of the LORD.** See note on Amos 2:16. **prepared a sacrifice.** To appease Yahweh’s just wrath against sin. For the day of the Lord as a sacrifice, see Jer 46:10; Ezek 39:17,20–21. Christ’s death combines Yahweh’s day of judgment imagery with substitutionary sacrifice (see “Sacrifice,” p. 2656). **those he has invited.** Either (1) the enemy invaders (i.e., Babylon) whom Yahweh consecrated as agents in Judah’s destruction (Isa 13:3) or (2) the sacrificial victims devoted to slaughter (Jer 12:3), first from Judah (vv. 8–13) and then from the rest of the earth (vv. 14–18).

1:8 officials ... king’s sons. Judah’s public leaders and royal court. Their rebellion caused the nation’s destruction (cf. 3:3–4). **foreign clothes.** Signify pagan influence.

1:9 avoid stepping on the threshold. Probably associated with pagan superstitious activity (see 1 Sam 5:3–5 and note on 5:5).

1:10 Fish Gate ... New Quarter. A main gate (2 Chr 33:14; Neh 3:3) and important district (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22) on the north side of Jerusalem, implying enemies would invade from the north.

1:11 market district. Where “violence and deceit” flourished (v. 9; cf. 3:1) as the rich exploited the poor (cf. vv. 13,18).

1:12 search ... with lamps. Yahweh will find his enemies in the dark when least expected. **complacent.** Cf. Amos 6:1; Mic 3:11; Mal 2:17. Rather than diminishing fear of punishment or desire for blessing, God’s delayed judgment should cause people to be humble and in awe of his longsuffering mercy (see Exod 34:6–7).

1:13 wealth ... houses ... vineyards. God’s judgment targets false securities (cf. vv. 11,18), likely gained by oppressing the weak (v. 9; cf. 3:1–4). **not live in ... not drink.** Covenant curses (Deut 28:30–31,39), reversing the original blessings (Deut 6:10–11).

1:14 great day. Not merely the “day” as in vv. 7–10. This moves from Yahweh’s impending punishment of Jerusalem to his final judgment of the

1:7 ^lHab 2:20; Zec 2:13

^mver 14; Isa 13:6

ⁿIsa 34:6; Jer 46:10

1:8 ^oIsa 24:21 ^pJer 39:6

1:9 ^qAm 3:10

1:10 ^r2Ch 33:14

1:11 ^sJas 5:1 ^tHos 9:6

1:12 ^uAm 6:1 ^vJer 48:11

^wEze 8:12

1:13 ^xJer 15:13

^yDt 28:30,39; Am 5:11;

Mic 6:15

1:14 ^zver 7; Joel 1:15

^aEze 7:7

1:15 ^b Isa 22:5; Joel 2:2
 1:16 ^c Jer 4:19 ^d Isa 2:15
 1:17 ^e Isa 59:10 ^f Ps 79:3
^g Jer 9:22
 1:18 ^h Eze 7:19 ⁱ ver 2-3;
 Zep 3:8 ^j Ge 6:7
 2:1 ^k 2Ch 20:4; Joel 1:14
^l Jer 3:3; 6:15
 2:2 ^m Isa 17:13; Hos 13:3
ⁿ La 4:11
 2:3 ^o Am 5:6

The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter;
 the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.
 15 That day will be a day of wrath —
 a day of distress and anguish,
 a day of trouble and ruin,
 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and blackness^b —
 16 a day of trumpet and battle cry^c
 against the fortified cities
 and against the corner towers.^d
 17 “I will bring such distress on all people
 that they will grope about like those who are blind,^e
 because they have sinned against the LORD.
 Their blood will be poured out^f like dust
 and their entrails like dung.^g
 18 Neither their silver nor their gold
 will be able to save them
 on the day of the LORD’s wrath.”^h
 In the fire of his jealousy
 the whole earth will be consumed,ⁱ
 for he will make a sudden end
 of all who live on the earth.^j

Judah and Jerusalem Judged Along With the Nations

Judah Summoned to Repent

2

Gather together,^k gather yourselves together,
 you shameful^l nation,
 2 before the decree takes effect
 and that day passes like windblown chaff,^m
 before the LORD’s fierce angerⁿ
 comes upon you,
 before the day of the LORD’s wrath
 comes upon you.
 3 Seek^o the LORD, all you humble of the land,
 you who do what he commands.

world (cf. Joel 2:11,31; Mal 4:5; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:17; 16:14). Its inauguration is Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:19–20), and its consummation will come at his second coming (cf. Rom 2:5; 2 Pet 3:7,10,12). **near.** With respect to eternity and God’s timeline. **Mighty Warrior.** Likely Yahweh (cf. 3:17) but possibly a valiant soldier crying in defeat.

1:15 darkness and gloom ... clouds and blackness. Common cataclysmic images (likely figurative) associated with the day of the Lord that express God’s fierce presence and the reversal of creation for those he judges (i.e., a move back to the state of Gen 1:2). Cf. Joel 2:2,30–31; 3:15; Acts 2:20.

1:16 trumpet and battle cry. Alarms that ready people for war, often associated with Yahweh’s judgment (Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14; cf. 1 Thess 4:16).

1:17 blind. A covenant curse (Deut 28:28–29) that may point to spiritual disability and suggest that sin not only *deserves* judgment but *is* judgment (cf. Rom 1:24,26,28).

1:18 silver ... gold. Either money (vv. 8,11,13) or idols shaped from it (vv. 3,5). **save.** Cf. 1 Pet 1:18–19. **fire of his jealousy.** Cf. 3:8. Yahweh’s passion for highest allegiance (Deut 5:7–10) is often associated with his inflamed zeal for worship (Deut 4:24; 6:15; Ps 79:5), which would soon

burst forth in unquenchable fires of wrath against the ungodly of the earth (Deut 32:21–22; Heb 10:27; 2 Pet 3:10–13; Rev 20:14–15), paralleling the flood judgment by water (see notes on 1:2–3; 2 Pet 3:5–7).

2:1 — 3:8 Judah and Jerusalem Judged Along With the Nations: Calls to Repent and to Wait for God. The book’s main section calls the remnant of Judah to repent (2:1–3) and wait for God (3:8). These two charges frame 2:4–3:7, which highlights the lamentable state and fate of the rebels from the foreign nations (2:4–15) and from Jerusalem (3:1–7) in order to clarify why Judah should turn to Yahweh.

2:1–3 Judah Summoned to Repent Before the Lord to Avoid Judgment. Repentance entails *gathering* together (vv. 1–2) and *seeking* Yahweh (v. 3).

2:1 Gather. Like desirable straw or grain is collected after being separated from the chaff (cf. v. 2), the remnant of the faithful must join in unity (cf. Heb 3:13; 10:24–25). **shameful.** Since the word for silver (cf. 1:18) is based on the same three Hebrew letters as “shameful,” the prophet acknowledges that part of their “shame” is that they were relying on silver instead of on God.

2:2 There is still opportunity to repent, but it is fleeting.

2:3 Seek the Lord. Pursue God (cf. 1:6; 3:2; Pss 27:8; 105:3). **humble.** Earnestly and dependently trusting Yahweh (3:12). **righteousness.** Cor-

Seek righteousness, seek humility;^p
perhaps you will be sheltered^q
on the day of the LORD's anger.

Philistia

⁴Gaza^r will be abandoned
and Ashkelon left in ruins.
At midday Ashdod will be emptied
and Ekron uprooted.
⁵Woe to you who live by the sea,
you Kerethite^s people;
the word of the LORD is against you,^t
Canaan, land of the Philistines.
He says, "I will destroy you,
and none will be left."^u
⁶The land by the sea will become pastures
having wells for shepherds
and pens for flocks.^v
⁷That land will belong
to the remnant of the people of Judah;
there they will find pasture.
In the evening they will lie down
in the houses of Ashkelon.
The LORD their God will care for them;
he will restore their fortunes.^{aw}

Moab and Ammon

⁸"I have heard the insults^x of Moab
and the taunts of the Ammonites,
who insulted^y my people
and made threats against their land.
⁹Therefore, as surely as I live,"
declares the LORD Almighty,
the God of Israel,

^a 7 Or will bring back their captives

rect order in the cosmos (Ps 89:14) and community (Deut 16:20), thus commonly associated with acts of justice, especially for the marginalized (cf. 1:9; 3:1–5). See Matt 6:33.

2:4–3:7 *Reasons for the Summons to Repent and Wait.* Beginning with a statement of judgment in 2:4, this two-part unit provides the logical basis for the charges to "seek" Yahweh (2:3) and "wait" for him (3:8) that frame it. Judah should repent and patiently trust Yahweh for two reasons: he will judge his enemies from the foreign nations where Judah might seek protection (2:4–15) and the rebels from Jerusalem itself (3:1–7). After the initial punishment declared in 2:4, each reason begins with "woe" (2:5; 3:1).

2:4–15 *The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels From the Foreign Nations.* God will punish those surrounding Judah: the Philistines to the west (vv. 4–7), the Moabites and Ammonites to the east (vv. 8–11), and the Cushites and Assyrians to the south and north (vv. 12–15). God's judgment encircles Judah, so they cannot escape; therefore, their only hope is to repent.

2:4 Judah must repent *because* Yahweh's judgment will fall very close to home, including on the foreign rebels from nearby Philistia. (In Hebrew, v. 4 begins with "Because.") **Gaza ... Ashkelon ... Ashdod ... Ekron.** Four of the five main Philistine cities, listed from south to north.

2:5 *Woe.* Parallels the "woe" of 3:1; used to express disgust over covenant rebellion (e.g., Hab 2:12,19) or dismay over impending doom (e.g., Jer 30:7). **Kerethite people.** The Philistines (Ezek 25:16).

2:6 *pastures.* Depicts fertility and peace, which God's people will enjoy (v. 7), ultimately through the one great shepherd in the line of Judah (Ezek 34:23; Mic 5:4; John 10:14–16; Rev 7:16–17).

2:7 *remnant.* Humble, faithful, God-trusting Judahites (v. 9; 3:12–13, 17–20; cf. 2 Kgs 19:31). Yahweh will preserve them through the destruction and satisfy them. **lie down in the houses of Ashkelon.** Restores original covenant blessings (Deut 6:10–11; see note on 1:13) but outside the original promised land. This suggests that God's earthly sovereignty, manifest first in the Garden of Eden and then in Zion and the promised land (Exod 15:17; Ps 78:54), is now beginning to expand to include the whole earth, which was the goal from the beginning (Gen 1:28; cf. Jer 3:16–17; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; Rev 21:2,10–27). See "Temple," p. 2652, and "The City of God," p. 2666. **restore their fortunes.** Bless them irreversibly in the future age of new creation and new covenant (see 3:20; cf. Deut 30:3; Jer 30:18; Joel 3:1).

2:8 Cf. Jer 48:27–30. **Moab ... Ammonites.** Judah's "cousins" (see Gen 19:36–38). They were proud (see note on v. 10).

2:9 *like Sodom ... like Gomorrah.* See Gen 19 and notes. This

2:3 ^pPs 45:4;
Am 5:14–15 ^qPs 57:1

2:4 ^rAm 1:6, 7–8;
Zec 9:5–7

2:5 ^sEze 25:16 ^tAm 3:1
^uIsa 14:30

2:6 ^vIsa 5:17

2:7 ^wPs 126:4; Jer 32:44

2:8 ^xJer 48:27 ^yEze 25:3

2:9 ²Isa 15:1-16:14;
Jer 48:1-47 ³Dt 29:23
^bJer 49:1-6; Eze 25:1-7
^cIsa 11:14 ^dAm 2:1-3
2:10 ^eIsa 16:6 ^fJer 48:27
2:11 ^gJoel 2:11
^hZep 1:4 ⁱZep 3:9
2:12 ^jIsa 18:1; 20:4
^kJer 46:10
2:13 ^lNa 1:1 ^mMic 5:6
2:14 ⁿIsa 14:23
2:15 ^oIsa 32:9 ^pIsa 47:8
^qEze 28:2 ^rNa 3:19

“surely Moab² will become like Sodom,^a
the Ammonites^b like Gomorrah —
a place of weeds and salt pits,
a wasteland forever.
The remnant of my people will plunder^c them;
the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.^d”

¹⁰This is what they will get in return for their pride,^e
for insulting^f and mocking
the people of the LORD Almighty.
¹¹The LORD will be awesome^g to them
when he destroys all the gods^h of the earth.
Distant nations will bow down to him,ⁱ
all of them in their own lands.

Cush

¹²“You Cushites,^{aj} too,
will be slain by my sword.^{kn}”

Assyria

¹³He will stretch out his hand against the north
and destroy Assyria,
leaving Nineveh^l utterly desolate
and dry as the desert.^m

¹⁴Flocks and herds will lie down there,
creatures of every kind.
The desert owlⁿ and the screech owl
will roost on her columns.
Their hooting will echo through the windows,
rubble will fill the doorways,
the beams of cedar will be exposed.

¹⁵This is the city of revelry^o
that lived in safety.^p
She said to herself,
“I am the one! And there is none besides me.”^q
What a ruin she has become,
a lair for wild beasts!
All who pass by her scoff^r
and shake their fists.

^a 12 That is, people from the upper Nile region

comparison stresses the ominous severity of Yahweh’s judgment against the Moabites and Ammonites by ironically linking it with the very cities he destroyed in the days of Lot (Gen 19:24–25), the progenitor of these people groups (see note on 2:8). Again Zephaniah portrays the day of the Lord as reversing the created order (see note on 1:3). Biblical authors make similar comparisons elsewhere when addressing God’s judgment against the ungodly (2 Pet 2:6; Rev 11:8) — be they from Israel (Deut 29:23; 32:32; Lam 4:6; Amos 4:11; Matt 10:15; 11:24; cf. Isa 1:9–10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:46–56) or the nations (Isa 13:19; Jer 49:18; 50:40). **inherit their land.** See note on v. 7.

2:10 pride. Self-reliance or self-exaltation, a regular problem for Israel’s neighbors to the east (see v. 8; Isa 16:6). See Prov 16:18; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5.

2:11 all the gods. Cf. Pss 95:3; 96:4–5; 97:7,9. **Distant nations**

will bow down. Foreigners will pay homage to Yahweh, whether as defeated rebels (Isa 45:14) or the worshiping remnant (3:9–10). Cf. Phil 2:10–11.

2:12 Cushites. Black Africans from ancient Ethiopia in the region of modern Sudan, the southernmost empire of the known world at that time (see NIV text note). They controlled Egypt ca. 715–663 BC.

2:13 Assyria ... Nineveh. See Introduction to Nahum.

2:14–15 Such will be the devastation of the city that fails to surrender to Yahweh. Animals will replace humans as the inhabitants of what was the center of human power.

2:15 Speaks as if God has *already* destroyed Assyria. **safety.** False security (see Ps 118:8–9; Jer 17:5; cf. 1:18). **none besides me.** Cf. Isa 45:5–6, 18, 21–22; 46:9.

Jerusalem

3

Woe to the city of oppressors,^s
rebellious and defiled!^t

²She obeys^u no one,
she accepts no correction.^v

She does not trust in the LORD,
she does not draw near^w to her God.

³Her officials within her
are roaring lions;
her rulers are evening wolves,^x
who leave nothing for the morning.

⁴Her prophets are unprincipled;
they are treacherous people.^y
Her priests profane the sanctuary
and do violence to the law.^z

⁵The LORD within her is righteous;
he does no wrong.^a
Morning by morning he dispenses his justice,
and every new day he does not fail,
yet the unrighteous know no shame.

Jerusalem Remains Unrepentant

⁶“I have destroyed nations;
their strongholds are demolished.
I have left their streets deserted,
with no one passing through.
Their cities are laid waste;^b
they are deserted and empty.

⁷Of Jerusalem I thought,
‘Surely you will fear me
and accept correction!’
Then her place of refuge^a would not be destroyed,
nor all my punishments come upon^b her.
But they were still eager
to act corruptly^c in all they did.

⁸Therefore wait^d for me,”
declares the LORD,
“for the day I will stand up to testify.^e

^a 7 Or *her sanctuary* ^b 7 Or *all those I appointed over* ^c 8 Septuagint and Syriac; Hebrew *will rise up to plunder*

3:1–7 *The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels From Jerusalem.* God will judge not only those surrounding Israel (2:4–15) but Jerusalem itself.

3:1 **Woe.** See 2:5. **city of oppressors.** Cf. vv. 3–5; 1:9; Ezek 22:6–7, 29. Cf. also Jas 1:27. **rebellious and defiled!** Though God called Israel to be holy (see “Holiness,” p. 2676).

3:2 **obeys no one.** Cf. Jer 7:28; 22:21. **accepts no correction.** Stubborn and unlearning (v. 7). **does not trust.** Cf. Pss 62:8; 115:9–11; cf. also Jer 17:5–8. **draw near.** Probably shorthand (when paired with trusting God and linked to the imagery of sacrifice in 1:7–8) for approaching Yahweh through his provision of sacrificial atonement. As the supreme savior, sovereign, and satisfier of the world, God promises to meet all who draw near to him (Jas 4:8). In the new covenant, we draw near to God only through Jesus’ blood and righteousness (Eph 2:13; Heb 7:19).

3:3 Rather than guarding the people like shepherds protect sheep, the

rulers abused them like wild beasts devour prey (Ezek 22:25, 27; Mic 3:1–3).

3:4 Rather than representing Yahweh accurately, as his mouthpiece or his ambassador, the (false) prophets spread lies (cf. Ezek 13) and the priests failed to preserve holiness and teach God’s law (Lev 10:10–11).

3:5 **righteous.** Preserves and displays right order (see note on 2:3). See Deut 32:4.

3:6 **destroyed nations.** Cf. 2:4–15. This destruction should motivate Judah to fear Yahweh (v. 7).

3:7 **fear.** Respect or worship (see note on Prov 1:7; cf. Eccl 12:13; Matt 10:28). **my punishments.** The covenant curses, which remove all provision and protection (Lev 26:14–33; Deut 28:15–68). **act corruptly.** Parallels what brought about the flood (Gen 6:11–12). See notes on 1:2, 18.

3:8 *Judah Summoned to Wait for the Lord, Ultimately to Enjoy*

3:1 ^s Jer 6:6 ^t Eze 23:30
3:2 ^u Jer 22:21 ^v Jer 7:28
^w Ps 73:28; Jer 5:3
3:3 ^x Eze 22:27
3:4 ^y Jer 9:4 ^z Eze 22:26
3:5 ^a Dt 32:4
3:6 ^b Lev 26:31
3:7 ^c Hos 9:9
3:8 ^d Ps 27:14

3:8 ^aJoel 3:2 ^fZep 1:18
 3:9 ^gZep 2:11 ^hIsa 19:18
 3:10 ⁱPs 68:31 ^jIsa 60:7
 3:11 ^kJoel 2:26-27
 3:12 ^lIsa 14:32 ^mNa 1:7

I have decided to assemble the nations,^e
 to gather the kingdoms
 and to pour out my wrath on them —
 all my fierce anger.
 The whole world will be consumed^f
 by the fire of my jealous anger.

Restoration of Israel's Remnant

⁹“Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,
 that all of them may call^g on the name of the LORD
 and serve^h him shoulder to shoulder.
¹⁰From beyond the rivers of Cush^{ai}
 my worshipers, my scattered people,
 will bring me offerings.^j
¹¹On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame^k
 for all the wrongs you have done to me,
 because I will remove from you
 your arrogant boasters.
 Never again will you be haughty
 on my holy hill.
¹²But I will leave within you
 the meek^l and humble.
 The remnant of Israel
 will trust^m in the name of the LORD.

^a 10 That is, the upper Nile region

Satisfaction. The “therefore” signals that Zephaniah is now drawing an inference from the bilateral ground of 2:4—3:7 and returning to the primary line of command begun at 2:1–3 (see note at 2:4—3:7). The charge to wait for Yahweh in 3:8 stands as a counterpart to the plea to repent in 2:1–3, and those who obey the call will experience lasting joy on the other side of judgment (vv. 9–20).

3:8 Therefore. Likely introduces a necessary, appropriate logical inference from the ground in 2:4—3:7 (see note there). **wait.** Possibly dread of future punishment but probably patient, persistent hoping for salvation through judgment (e.g., Ps 33:20). Judah must continue to “wait” for Yahweh *because* his judgment on the rebel nations is coming but delayed. (In Hebrew, “because” precedes “I have decided.”) **testify.** As both righteous accuser and judge. **fire of my jealous anger.** See note on 1:18.

3:9–20 Restoration of Israel's Remnant: Lasting Joy as Motivation for Waiting on God. The ultimate motivation for waiting for God (v. 8) is eternal joy. The vision of a redeemed community of worshipers made up of ethnic Israelites and others from the nations points to the re-creation of a unified humanity fulfilling its purpose, now eternally realized in the church (Matt 28:18–20; Rom 11; Eph 2:11–22; Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–10).

3:9–10 The Motivation: Global Salvation. Judah must continue to “wait” for Yahweh (v. 8) because, when he judges as covenant witness, he will transform peoples from all over the world into true worshipers. (In Hebrew, “because” or “for” precedes “then” in v. 9.)

3:9 Then. Corresponds to “on that day” in vv. 11, 16. **purify the lips.** Cleanse speech (cf. Isa 6:5–7). This likely alludes to a reversal of the tower of Babel episode, where Yahweh confused the world's languages because of the people's pride (Gen 11:7–9). **the peoples.** Those from Judah and the nations whom Yahweh preserved through judgment. **call on.** Depend on Yahweh as the savior, sovereign, and satisfier (Ps 116:4, 13, 17; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13; cf. Zeph 3:12).

3:10 rivers. Likely the White Nile and Blue Nile, the two main tributaries of the Nile River in northeast Africa, the region of modern Sudan (cf. Isa 18:1–2). **Cush my worshipers.** Even the most distant lands will have a remnant of worshipers (see NIV text note), as if following the rivers of life back up to the Garden of Eden for fellowship with the great King (Gen 2:13). The Ethiopian eunuch (from the area of modern Sudan) in Acts 8:26–39 gives evidence of the initial fulfillment of this prophecy. **my scattered.** Yahweh reverses Israel's exile (Deut 30:3; Ezek 11:17) and the tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:8–9; see note on v. 9). Cf. John 11:51–52. **offerings.** Tangible gifts of praise. Those who were once enemies of God now gather to pay homage to their King (Isa 18:7; 60:4–7; 66:20; Zech 14:16), with some even serving as priests (Isa 66:21; cf. Isa 56:6; 60:7). The NT treats all Christians as priests who, in light of the completed and sufficient sacrificial and priestly work of Christ (Heb 2:17; 9:7, 11–14), now offer God spiritual sacrifices of praise expressed in doing good, sharing, and using their spiritual gifts (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15–16; 1 Pet 2:5; cf. 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10).

3:11–20 The Impact of Global Salvation for the Remnant of Judah: Lasting Joy. This is what the global transformation in vv. 8–10 implies: God will remove the proud and preserve the God-dependent (vv. 11–13), who will joyfully sing in the wake of his irreversible victory (vv. 14–15), and he will deliver and delight in them (vv. 16–20). So the call to patiently pursue Yahweh that shapes the book's body (2:1–3; 3:8) is nothing less than a summons to satisfaction (see Introduction: Message).

3:11 On that day. When Yahweh carries out his judicial decision (v. 8; also v. 16). **put to shame.** Humiliated, dishonored (v. 19). **because.** Introduces two reasons that Yahweh's judgment will not disgrace Jerusalem: he will remove the proud (v. 11b) and preserve the humble (v. 12).

3:12 remnant. See note on 2:7. **trust.** See note on v. 9.

¹³Theyⁿ will do no wrong;^o
 they will tell no lies.^p
 A deceitful tongue
 will not be found in their mouths.
 They will eat and lie down^q
 and no one will make them afraid.^r”

¹⁴Sing, Daughter Zion;^s
 shout aloud,^t Israel!
 Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
 Daughter Jerusalem!
¹⁵The LORD has taken away your punishment,
 he has turned back your enemy.
 The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;^u
 never again will you fear^v any harm.

¹⁶On that day
 they will say to Jerusalem,
 “Do not fear, Zion;
 do not let your hands hang limp.^w”

¹⁷The LORD your God is with you,
 the Mighty Warrior who saves.^x
 He will take great delight^y in you;
 in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
 but will rejoice over you with singing.^z”

¹⁸“I will remove from you
 all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals,
 which is a burden and reproach for you.

¹⁹At that time I will deal
 with all who oppressed you.
 I will rescue the lame;
 I will gather the exiles.²
 I will give them praise³ and honor
 in every land where they have suffered shame.

3:13 ^oIsa 10:21; Mic 4:7

^pPs 119:3 ^qRev 14:5

^rEze 34:15; Zep 2:7

^sEze 34:25–28

3:14 ^tZec 2:10 ^uIsa 12:6

3:15 ^vEze 37:26–28

^wIsa 54:14

3:16 ^xJob 4:3;

Isa 35:3–4; Heb 12:12

3:17 ^yIsa 63:1 ^zIsa 62:4

3:19 ¹Eze 34:16; Mic 4:6

²Isa 60:18

3:13 no lies. Because of Yahweh’s speech-purifying work (v. 9; see Rev 14:5). **eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.** Like sheep under the care of a good shepherd (Ps 23).

3:14–15 An ode to joy expressing wholehearted delight in all God has won (cf. Isa 65:18).

3:14 Daughter Zion ... Daughter Jerusalem. No longer “the city of oppressors” (v. 1); now the object of Yahweh’s saving love.

3:15 Jerusalem should celebrate (v. 14) because judgment day is over (stated as if it is already accomplished). **has taken away your punishment.** God ultimately removes his wrath and curse through Christ (Rom 5:9; 8:1; Gal 3:13–14). **King of Israel.** See Introduction to Psalms: Theology of the Psalms. Highlights Yahweh’s reign over a restored, unified people. The rulers of Israel and Judah were always to represent, rather than replace, Yahweh’s kingship (cf. Num 23:21; Deut 33:5; 1 Sam 8:7; Ezek 20:33). While the OT never refers to the Messianic royal deliverer with the title “King of Israel,” it clearly declares that Yahweh’s reign will be realized through his royal son (e.g., Gen 49:8; Num 24:17–19; 1 Sam 2:10; Ps 2:8,12; Isa 9:5–7; 11:1–4; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–24). Furthermore, the NT applies the title to Jesus the Messiah (Matt 27:42; Mark 15:32; John 1:49; 12:13; cf. Matt 2:2; 28:18; Luke 1:32–33; Heb 1:8), and when speaking of Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem in John 12:13, John appears to apply to Jesus the mention of Yahweh’s reign in Zeph 3:15–16. **with you.** The eschatologi-

cal promise of God’s enduring Spirit-presence in the midst of his people that enables holiness and brings security (Ezek 36:27; 37:26–28; Zech 2:10). Jesus has inaugurated the fulfillment of these promises, for he is “God with us” (Matt 1:23; John 1:14) and indwells the church through his Spirit (Matt 28:20; John 14:16–20; Rom 8:9–10; cf. Rev 21:3).

3:16 hands hang limp. Symbolizes discouragement.

3:17 Mighty Warrior. Cf. 1:14. Yahweh is the supreme soldier (Ps 24:8). **take great delight.** Rejoice like a bridegroom delights in his bride (Isa 62:4–5). **with singing.** Cf. 3:14. Yahweh delights in his beloved (cf. Isa 65:18–19).

3:18 The suffering rebels that Yahweh removed from his remnant were a reproach to Jerusalem (cf. v. 11). **appointed festivals.** Possibly refers to a festival (e.g., Isa 33:20) but could also be a time of judgment like the day of the Lord (Hab 2:3). An alternative rendering of this verse is: “Those mourning/suffering from the appointed time [i.e., the day of judgment] I removed from you; they were a burden on her [i.e., Jerusalem], a reproach” (cf. v. 11).

3:19 rescue the lame. The weak and humble that the rebel majority abused (1:9; 3:1–2; cf. Ezek 34:21) are the very ones upon whom Yahweh’s justice would shine (3:5; cf. 2:3; 3:12; Deut 10:17–18). God would deliver the broken (Mic 4:6–7; cf. Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8; Ezek 34:16), for to them belong the kingdom and its comfort (Matt 5:3–4). Christ’s own ministry of mercy proved that he was inaugurating this eschatological

3:20 ^b Jer 29:14;
Eze 37:12 ^c Isa 56:5;
66:22 ^d Joel 3:1

²⁰ At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring^b you home.
I will give you honor^c and praise
among all the peoples of the earth
when I restore your fortunes^{a,d}
before your very eyes,”

says the LORD.

^a 20 Or *I bring back your captives*

age of rescue (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22; cf. Isa 42:3; 61:1–3; Matt 15:30–31; 21:14; Luke 14:21), and through his church comparable acts of healing and restoration are to continue until the consummation (Acts 3:1–10; 8:5–8; 14:8–10; 20:35; 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 12:13; Jas 1:27). **praise and honor.** The Hebrew can also be translated “*for* praise and *for*

honor,” which suggests that admiration and acclaim would be given not to the remnant of Judah but to God (Jer 33:9; cf. Ezek 36:23).

3:20 restore your fortunes. See note on 2:7. **says the LORD.** The book ends where it began (1:1); these words are from God and are therefore utterly trustworthy.