

**YHWH'S JUDGMENT IS NEW EVERY MORNING:  
ZEPHANIAH 3:5 AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

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*The LORD within her is righteous;  
he does no injustice;  
every morning he shows forth his justice.  
each dawn he does not fail;  
but the unjust knows no shame.  
(Zeph 3:5, NASB)*

In Zeph 3:5 the prophet asserts that YHWH's "justice" is new every morning. Translations render this statement differently, and commentators do not agree as to what Zephaniah means. With a close eye to the syntax, proper meaning of the forms, and literary and biblical context, this study proposes that Zephaniah stresses that in the prophet's time, God daily rendered his end-times verdict to punish sin and save the oppressed in at least five typological ways, all of which served a pedagogical purpose. The study then considers one key text in John's Gospel that shows how Jesus's life and ministry in his first and second comings supply the ultimate end to which Zephaniah pointed.

*I. ZEPHANIAH 3:5 WITHIN ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT*

Within Zeph 3:5, God's nature and work contrast with both Jerusalem and her rulers' corrupt tendencies (Zeph 3:1-4), thereby providing hope for a change in Judah's state and fate.<sup>1</sup> The prophet

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*, BZAW 198 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 208. Motyer marks a number of general contrasts between the depiction of YHWH in Zeph 3:5 on the one hand and the city in 3:2 and the political and religious leaders in 3:3-4 on the other. Whereas the city has not listened (3:2a), would not accept correction (3:2b), would not trust (3:2c), and did not draw near (3:2d), YHWH was speaking and never absent (3:5d), constantly made his decisions known (3:5c), was completely trustworthy (3:5b), and was always available (3:5a). And whereas the officials failed in their duty (3:3a), the judges thought only how to satisfy themselves (3:3b), the prophets were treacherous (3:4a), and the priests defiled the holy (3:4b), YHWH was never away from his post (3:5d), was constantly

opens with a verbless clause that describes both the Lord's identity and his proximity to the depravity in Jerusalem: "YHWH is righteous in her midst" (יְהוָה צְדִיק בְּקִרְבָּיהָ, Zeph 3:5a).<sup>2</sup> Zephaniah 3:3a identified that the corrupt "officials" were "in her midst" (בְּקִרְבָּיהָ), and now the prophet implies that their sins were contaminating YHWH's very habitation. To declare God "righteous" (צְדִיק) is to acquit him of any of the wrongs that Jerusalem's nobility were exercising.<sup>3</sup> It also means that the one enthroned at Jerusalem's temple is unswerving in his passion to preserve and display right order. That is, the living God is committed to see others display his supremacy, uphold justice, and respect his image in others (cf. 2:3).<sup>4</sup>

The prophet now asserts that YHWH "never does wrong" (לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עוֹלָה, Zeph 3:5b; cf. Ps 92:15[16]). Therefore, God's actions and his character directly oppose the beastly practices of Jerusalem's elite (cf. Ps 37:1). That YHWH's righteousness is a present reality in Jerusalem (Zeph 3:5a), that he works "morning by morning" (3:5c), and that his judgment "has never been lacking" (3:5d) all suggest that the dynamic *yiqtol* in 3:5b is declaring present, continuous action: "[YHWH] never does wrong." Nevertheless, because most *yiqtol*s in the book are future, the statement may be a promise of the immediate and distant future with continuous implications: "[YHWH] will never do wrong." Regardless, the testimony affirms to both victims and violators that Moses's earlier words are true: "All his ways are judgment [מִשְׁפָּט]—a God of faithfulness and without wrong [עָוֹן]; righteous [צְדִיק] and upright is he" (Deut 32:4; cf. Job 34:10; Ps 18:30). But how does YHWH's constant uprightness align with Zephaniah's present reality in Judah?

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making his judgments known (3:5c), was free from deviancy (3:5b), and was setting the standard (3:5a) (J. Alec Motyer, "Zephaniah," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 941).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Exod 9:27; Deut 32:4; 2 Chr 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8; Pss 119:137; 129:4; Jer 12:1.

<sup>3</sup>For this use of "righteousness" language, see, e.g., Exod 23:7-8; Deut 16:19; 25:1; 1 Kgs 8:32; 2 Chr 6:23; Isa 5:23; 29:21; 50:7-9. Cf. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 207-8; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 172. See also George W. Ramsey, "Speech Forms in Hebrew Law and Prophetic Oracles," *JBL* 96 (1977): 45-58.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Pss 36:6[7]; 50:6; 98:9; 99:4; 143:1; Isa 51:5-8; 56:1; Jer 9:24; 11:20; Hos 2:19; 10:12; Mic 6:5; Zech 8:7-8. Motyer writes: "The Lord's righteousness is his consistency of character (Ps. 11:7), reliability in relation to his stated purposes (Neh. 9:8), and correctness in all his actions (Ps. 145:17)" ("Zephaniah," 944).

Hebrew MT	NASB
<p>יְהוָה צְדִיק בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עוֹלָה  בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ יִתֵּן לְאוֹר לֹא  נִעְדָּר וְלֹא-יִוָּדַע עוֹל בְּשֶׁת׃</p>	<p>The LORD is righteous within her;  He will do no injustice. Every  morning He brings His justice to  light; He does not fail. But the  unjust knows no shame.</p>

We know from elsewhere that YHWH's steadfast love is new every morning (Lam 3:22–23) and that he loves legal order (Ps 37:28). Zephaniah 3:5 adds that YHWH makes his judgment apparent every dawn: "Morning by morning he will give his judgment for the light [לְאוֹר] בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ יִתֵּן לְאוֹר" (Zeph 3:5c).<sup>5</sup> Before addressing the meaning and implications of this phrase, I will first overview the structure of the whole verse.

The adverbial phrase בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר (lit., "in the morning, in the morning") in Zeph 3:5c is distributive. Thus, its meaning "every morning"<sup>6</sup> signals that every time dawn's light overcomes the night, YHWH retestifies to his commitment to punish sin.<sup>7</sup> As YHWH elsewhere declares, "At the mornings [לְבֹקְרִים] I will destroy all evil ones of earth, to cut off from YHWH's city all those doing wickedness" (Ps 101:8). An explanatory clause using an unexpected *qatal* verb then emphasizes that his judgment "has never been lacking" (לֹא נִעְדָּר, Zeph 3:5d), which should move the hurting to hope and the oppressor to dread. We then learn that, in strong distinction from the God who "will never do wrong" (3:5b), one whose lifestyle is characterized by wrongdoing (= עוֹל "a wrong one, sinner") "never knows shame" (3:5e). We'll now consider each line of this important verse.

## II. THE RELATIONSHIP OF YHWH'S JUDGMENT TO THE LIGHT

Many contemporary English versions and commentators read the phrase לְאוֹר ("for/to/at the light") temporally, treating it in parallel with בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר ("morning by morning") and as fronting

<sup>5</sup>M. O'Connor treats יִתֵּן as a Qal passive (= יִתֵּן, see GKC, §53.u), separates the two בְּבֹקֶר forms, and treats עוֹלָה as the subject of the preceding clause, thus rendering the whole: "The evil one does not act in the morning. In the morning he is given his judgment" (*Hebrew Verse Structure*, 2nd ed. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 256). While his translation is smooth, his reading treats the feminine noun עוֹלָה ("wrong, injustice, badness") as if it were the masculine noun עוֹל ("wrong one, sinner," cf. 3:5e), divides the very common idiom בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר (see below), applies a rare pointing to יִתֵּן, and stands against both the Masoretic pointing and cantillation, all while the Masoretic text makes sense as it stands.

<sup>6</sup>See GKC, §123-c. The phrase is used elsewhere for Israel's daily gathering of manna in wilderness (Exod 16:21), for the daily rituals and worship at the tabernacle or temple (30:7; 36:3; Lev 6:21; 1 Chr 23:30; 2 Chr 13:11; Ezek 46:13), for a royal noble's daily lustful torment (2 Sam 13:4), for repeated divine punishment (Isa 28:19), and for YHWH's sustained instruction of his royal Servant (50:4).

<sup>7</sup>The expression "give judgment" (נָתַן מִשְׁפָּט) occurs elsewhere only in Job 36:6 and Ezek 23:24.

the following phrase (“Morning by morning he gives his judgment; *at the light* it has never been lacking”) (cf. NRSV, NETB, ESV, NIV, CSB).<sup>8</sup> This proposed structure would make Zeph 3:5cd nicely parallel, and the definiteness of the noun (“*the light*”) makes the temporal reading quite natural. Furthermore, we elsewhere find other prepositions with אור (“light”) expressing temporal meanings (e.g., עַד־הָאֹר “unto the dawn/light,” Judg 19:26; מִן־הָאֹר “from the dawn/light,” Neh 8:3). Nevertheless, the MT, LXX, and Vulgate treat the prepositional phrase לְאֹר (“for/to/at the light”) of Zeph 3:5c as an adverbial modifier of the verb “to give” (נתן), and this approach seems preferable in view of the external evidence.

Hebrew MT	NASB
<p>יְהוָה צְדִיק בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עֲוֹלָה  בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ יִתֵּן לְאֹר לֹא  נִעְדָּר וְלֹא־יִוָּדַע עֲוֹל בְּשֶׁת:</p>	<p>The LORD is righteous within her;  He will do no injustice. Every  morning He brings His justice to  light; He does not fail. But the  unjust knows no shame.</p>
Greek Septuagint (Göttingen)	NETS
<p>ὁ δὲ κύριος δίκαιος ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς καὶ  οὐ μὴ ποιήσῃ ἄδικον· πρῶτο πρῶτο δώσει  κρίμα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ εἰς νίκος ἀδικίαν.</p>	<p>But the Lord within it is just and  will do no injustice. Morning by  morning, he will render his  judgment and no injustice unto  victory.</p>
Latin Vulgate	Douay-Rheims
<p><i>Dominus iustus in medio eius non  faciet iniquitatem mane iudicium suum  dabit in luce et non abscondetur  nesciuit autem iniquus confusionem</i></p>	<p>The just Lord is in the midst  thereof, he will not do iniquity: in  the morning, in the morning he  will bring his judgment to light,  and it shall not be hid: but the  wicked man hath not known  shame.</p>

<sup>8</sup>The temporal use of the preposition לְ is clearly seen in phrases like לְמוֹעֵד הַזֶּה (“at this appointed time,” Gen 17:21; 2 Kgs 4:16), לְיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי (“by the third day,” Exod 19:11), לְבֹקֶר (“by the morning,” Exod 34:2), and לְעֶרֶב (“by the evening,” Ps 90:6). Cf. 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. Brewer, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), 241; Gillis Gerleman, *Zephanja: Textkritisch und Literarisch Untersucht* (Lund: Gleerup, 1942), 51; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 107; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC 32 (Dallas: Word, 1984), 137; Ivan Jay Ball Jr., *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL, 1988), 161–62; Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 210–11; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 205; O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 256; Motyer, “Zephaniah,” 944; Johannes Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 178; Hubert Irsigler, *Zefanja*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 317, 321.

Berlin treats the preposition in לְאֹרֶךְ as a “לְ” of agent” with אֹרֶךְ (“light”) being a reference to the sun (= “he displays his judgment in the light”).<sup>9</sup> Below I will reflect on how God’s oversight of nature points to his final verdict against sin. In contrast to Berlin, however, I have rendered the preposition with the more common “לְ” of reclassification or product,” meaning that the prepositional phrase either portrays God’s judgment from a specific angle or expresses the state or condition that results from God’s act of his justice (cf. KJV, NASB).<sup>10</sup> “The light” is, thus, neither a temporal marker (i.e., “at dawn”) nor a reference to “the sun” but a metaphor for “that which guides to the right way.” Below we will detail the various ways that YHWH’s daily judgment manifests itself. For now, we note that YHWH’s daily judgment anticipates God’s definitive punishment of sin and by this warns the spiritually perceptive to seek God’s protection and gift of life. Support for this reading comes in at least three other literary prophets.

First, Isaiah bemoaned, “What is due [מִשְׁפָּט] is far from us, and righteousness [צְדָקָה] does not overtake us. We hope for the light [לְאֹרֶךְ], but alas, darkness [חֹשֶׁךְ]—for gleams of brilliance; in shadows we walk” (Isa 59:9).<sup>11</sup> Here the prophet speaks as one experiencing the tragic results of Israel’s defiance against God, and he grieves their condition. Within Isaiah, the term “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט) commonly operates alongside “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) to

<sup>9</sup>Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 125, 130.

<sup>10</sup>For more on these categorizations, see Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §278; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), §39.11(4a). Cf. Martin Luther, “Lectures on Zephaniah,” in *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea–Malachi*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Richard J. Dinda, vol. 18 of *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 352; John Calvin, “Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,” in *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen, 500th anniversary, vol. 15 of Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 273; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Zephaniah,” in *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 151; Liudger Sabottka, *Zephanja*, BO 25 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972), 107–8; Paul R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, JSOTSup 69 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 124; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 315; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 130; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 167.

<sup>11</sup>G. Liedke notes that when מִשְׁפָּט (“judgment, verdict, just decree”) occurs alongside צְדָקָה (“righteousness” as standard; see, e.g., Job 8:3; 29:14; 35:2; Pss 72:2; 89:14[15]; 97:2; Prov 1:3; 2:9; Eccl 5:8[7]; Isa 16:5; 26:9; 32:1; 51:4–5; Hos 2:19[21]; Zeph 2:3) or צְדָקָה (“righteous” as behavior; see, e.g., Pss 33:5; 36:6[7]; 99:4; 106:3; Job 37:23; Prov 8:20; 16:8; Isa 5:7; 9:7[6]; 28:17; 32:16; 35:5; 54:17; 56:1; 58:2; 59:9; Jer 4:2; Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12), it usually takes on the meaning of “that which one is due,” whether as a “claim” (1 Kgs 6:38; 2 Kgs 17:26–27; Jer 5:4–5; 30:18), as an “obligation” (Judg 13:12), as what is “correct, appropriate” (Exod 26:30; 1 Kgs 18:28; Isa 28:25–26), as an “order” (Gen 40:13; 1 Kgs 5:8; 2 Kgs 11:14; Jer 8:7), as a “reward or punishment” (Ezek 16:38; 23:45), or as a legal “verdict” (Num 35:12; Deut 16:18; 17:9; Josh 20:26; 1 Kgs 3:28; 2 Kgs 25:6; 2 Chr 19:6; Ps 105:5; Prov 16:10; Jer 1:16; 21:12) (“שֹׁפֵט *špt* to Judge,” TLOT 3:1396).

express either the upright behavior God expects of humans (i.e., “justice,” esp. chs. 1–39) or God’s decision to re-establish right order in his world by punishing sin and saving a remnant (esp. chs. 40–55, except 51:1, 7). In Isa 56–66, and especially in ch. 59, Oswalt has observed that the distinction becomes less clear. Both concepts work side-by-side, allowing Israel’s failure to respond to YHWH (i.e., not giving God and others their due) to stand alongside their failure to experience God’s saving righteousness—here portrayed as “the light” that remains distant.<sup>12</sup> In spite of the sinful state of his people, God would act, using his own “arm” to bring salvation (59:16). “The light” in 59:9, therefore, likely stands as a metaphor for YHWH’s verdict to justly right all wrongs and to redeem his remnant, which he will accomplish ultimately through his Messiah.<sup>13</sup> That the prophet can include the definite article (הָאֵר “the light”) is probably due to the fact that the book has already associated “a light” (אֵר) with the promised royal deliverer and Servant (9:2, 6[1, 5]); 42:6; 49:6) and the judgment that God would work through him (Isa 11:3–5). YHWH, thus, testifies regarding his Messiah’s work: “And I will let linger my judgment [וּמִשְׁפֵּטִי] for a light [לְאֵר] to peoples” (51:4).<sup>14</sup>

Second, YHWH declared through Hosea, “Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them with the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light [properly אֵר יֵצֵא וּמִשְׁפֵּטִי כְאֵר]” (Hos 6:5).<sup>15</sup> The prepositional phrase כְּאֵר (“as

<sup>12</sup>John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 519. Cf. Daniel Kendall, “The Use of *mišpat* in Isaiah 59,” *ZAW* 96.3 (1984): 391–405.

<sup>13</sup>Elsewhere in Isaiah, YHWH’s “arm” is the agent by which God rules, punishes, and saves (e.g., Isa 40:10; 48:14; 51:9; 52:10), and in one instance it is explicitly identified as his messianic Servant (53:1–2). See J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 427–28.

<sup>14</sup>Similarly, though the “judgment” is that of humans rather than of God, David associated the coming of the “the light” with God’s setting up human “righteousness” and “judgment/justice” as a beacon: “Roll on YHWH your way, and trust on him, and he will act and bring as the light your righteousness [כְּאֵר צְדִקָּךְ], and your justice as the noon [וּמִשְׁפֵּטִי כְצִדְרֵי יוֹם]” (Ps 37:5–6; cf. Prov 4:18; Isa 58:10). Here the prophet’s use of “the light” (הָאֵר) serves to mark not the time but the nature of how the Lord will manifest their upright behavior. Their proper judgments will be like the warmth and brightness of light overcoming the cool darkness of night to all who have experienced oppression or lived under condemnation.

<sup>15</sup>Whereas the MT of Hos 6:5 has וּמִשְׁפֵּטִי אֵר יֵצֵא (“and your judgments are as light going forth”), the context demands that the “judgments” be YHWH’s and the translation of יֵצֵא (“it will go forth”) is awkward. In contrast, the LXX, Peshitta, and Targum Jonathan all read וּמִשְׁפֵּטִי כְאֵר יֵצֵא (“and my judgment will go forth as the light”), which retains the same consonantal structure but different word breaks, rightly recognizing the *yod* not as the beginning of a type-2 pronominal suffix on a plural noun but a first common singular suffix on a singular noun, and properly viewing the *kaph* as a preposed preposition כְּ (“like, as”) on a definite noun and not as the second letter in a type-2 masculine singular pronominal suffix יָךְ (“your”). So Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 105ng; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, WBC 31 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 99n5d.

the light") is here not temporal but comparative. "The light" of the sun supplies an analogy for the role YHWH's daily prophetic announcements of justice were to play in Israel's everyday lives. Here "the prophet's words are deadly weapons" that slay the people through their covenantal indictments and curses.<sup>16</sup> The result is that with every speech act the Lord's "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט) continually goes forth like the sun's light breaking into the darkness. As Hosea already asserted of YHWH just two verses earlier, "Like dawn is established is his going forth" (6:3). YHWH's prophetic voice was like a beacon in the darkness. It stressed the seriousness of sin by anticipating YHWH's final verdict against it (Isa 3:14; 30:18; Ezek 39:21; Zeph 3:8; cf. Job 40:8), and it defined order and his pattern for their lives (2 Kgs 17:13; Isa 51:4; 58:2; Jer 5:4-5).<sup>17</sup>

Third, in Mic 7:8-10 (see the table below) the prophet's voice represents Jerusalem and expresses hope in God's merciful justice coming at the future day of judgment. In legal contexts, "darkness" (חֹשֶׁךְ) can serve as a metaphor for deep distress and often imprisonment (Ps 107:10-16; Isa 9:1; 42:7). In this text, Micah portrays righteous YHWH, represented by the metaphor of "the light" (הָאוֹר), as Jerusalem's hope for transformation and freedom (Mic 7:8). The Lord will execute his judgment-sentence (מִשְׁפָּט) against the city in such a way that he will justly free his bride from her dungeon of impurity and guilt and draw her to himself so that she can see him, "the light," and "look at his righteousness" (7:9). The result will be that Jerusalem's unnamed enemy will be put to "shame" (בִּוְשָׁה) (7:10). Again, the prepositional phrase לְאוֹר ("to the light") with a definite object is not temporal but expresses the future trajectory after God carries out his "verdict" (מִשְׁפָּט) and functions as a metonym for the righteous God himself who frees those once condemned.

These three texts bear many parallels with our passage, justifying that we read YHWH's promise of a daily "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט) in Zeph 3:5 as "the light" (הָאוֹר) for all victims and violators dwelling in Jerusalem's darkness. That is, God's certain and sustained manifestations of his final verdict against sin direct Zephaniah's audience to the only means for hope and deliverance through the day of the Lord.

The singular noun מִשְׁפָּטוֹ ("his judgment") in 2:3 referred to the "decree" of YHWH's day of wrath that some in Judah had already heeded.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in 3:8 the singular noun מִשְׁפָּטִי ("my judgment")

<sup>16</sup>Wolff, *Hosea*, 120; cf. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 109-10.

<sup>17</sup>Liedke, "שִׁפְטָה *špt* to Judge," 3:1398.

<sup>18</sup>The construction "to carry out/perform" (פָּעַל) plus "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט) occurs only in Zeph 2:3. Therefore, we should likely not equate it to the common compound of "to do" (עָשָׂה) with the singular object "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט), which usually refers to keeping a moral precept associated with the Mosaic covenant. Because מִשְׁפָּט in both 3:5 and 8 appears to refer to God's decision to punish worldwide human rebellion, the "judgment" in 2:3 likely refers to the same reality. Considering YHWH's strong pronouncements of retribution in ch. 1, the most natural "judgment" associated with

explicitly refers to YHWH’s ultimate judicial decision to punish with raging fury all those in the world hostile to his ways (cf. Isa 5:16; Ps 9:8[9]). What Zeph 3:5cd appears to refer to is a preemptive declaration of this future judgment-sentence into Zephaniah’s day.<sup>19</sup>

Mic 7:8-10	Zeph 3:5
<p>8 אֶל-תִּשְׂמַחֵי אִיבְתִּי לִי כִי נִפְלֵיתִי קָמְתִי כִי-אֲשֹׁב בְּחֹשֶׁךְ יִהְיֶה אֹרֶחַ לִי : ס</p> <p>9 זָעַף יִתְנַבֵּ אֲשָׁא כִי חָטָאתִי לֹא עַד אֲשֶׁר יָרִיב רִיבִי וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּטִי יוֹצֵאֵנִי לְאוֹר אֲרָאָה בְּבִדְקָתָנִי:</p> <p>10 וְתָרָא אִיבְתִּי וְחִכְסָהּ בְּנֹשֶׁת הָאִמְרָה אֵלַי אִינִי יִבְנֶה אֶל-הַיָּד עֵינַי תִּרְאֶינָה בָּהּ עַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְמַרְמָס כְּטִיט חוּצוֹת:</p>	<p>יִתְנֶה צְדִיקָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עוֹלָה בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר מִשְׁפָּטִי יִתֵּן לְאוֹר לֹא יַעֲדֵר וְלֹא-יִוֹדַע עוֹלָה בְּשֶׁת:</p>
<p>Do not rejoice against me, my enemy – when I fall, I will rise; when I sit in the darkness, <u>YHWH is a light</u> for me.</p> <p>The rage of <u>YHWH</u> I will bear, because I sinned against him, until he contends my legal-dispute, and executes <u>my judgment</u>. He will bring me to the <u>light</u>; I will look at...<u>his righteousness</u>.</p> <p>And my enemy will see, and <u>shame</u> will cover her – the one who said to me, “Where is <u>YHWH</u> your God?” My eyes will look at her. Now she will be for trampling like mud outside.</p>	<p><u>YHWH</u> is <u>righteous</u> in her midst. He will never do wrong. Morning by morning he will give <u>his judgment for the light</u>; it will never be lacking. But a wrong one never knows <u>shame</u>.</p>

III. HOW YHWH GAVE HIS JUDGMENT FOR THE LIGHT IN ZEPHANIAH’S DAY

Noticeably, the prophet has made clear that in his time injustice was reigning among Jerusalem’s leaders, resulting in improper worship (Zeph 1:4-6; 3:2) and the poor being oppressed (1:9; 3:1, 3-4). We must, therefore, query as to what Zephaniah was referring when he spoke of God’s “giving his judgment for the light” every morning? The joining of the verb “give” (נָתַן) with “judgment” (מִשְׁפָּט) is relatively rare in the OT, but we see it with respect to YHWH’s bringing justice to the oppressed (Job 36:6) and to his allowing Babylon to punish Judah for their sins (Ezek 23:24). Close parallels are also found with respect to his working justice for the oppressed by giving them food (Ps 146:7) and his displaying (giving) his glory among the nations by judging them (Ezek 39:21). Irsigler

the Lord in 2:3 is his “decree” to punish sinners. For more on this reading, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Addressees in Zephaniah 2:1, 3: Who Should Seek YHWH Together?,” *BBR* 30.2 (2020): 192-95, 197-98.

<sup>19</sup>So too Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 178.



helpfully sees Zeph 3:5 referring to every instance of Yahweh's "judging and saving help 'in the morning'" (e.g., Ps 5:3[4]; 30:5[6]; 46:5[6]; 59:16[17]; 90:14; 143:8; cf. Gen 19:15, 23; Exod 14:24, 27; Josh 6:15; Isa 17:14; 33:22).<sup>20</sup> I will now identify five ways that Zephaniah himself suggests God daily manifests "his judgment for the light," and then I will reflect on the more ultimate, long-term morning-by-morning fulfillment that the features in Zephaniah's seventh-century context typologically anticipated.

#### A. Through Prophetic Indictment and Curse

As Hos 6:5 highlighted, God's words through prophets like Zephaniah "slayed" the hearers, cutting them down with covenant indictments and curses and highlighting that the only possible way of protection from the great and near day of the Lord's wrath was through repentance and hope (cf. Isa 33:14-16; Joel 2:11-14; Zeph 2:1-4). Zephaniah warned that YHWH would cut off from Jerusalem all the "remnant of Baal," who in context were Judeans engaging in syncretistic worship (Zeph 1:4-6). They had "turned back from following YHWH," even failing to seek him or inquire of him (1:6). The city was "rebellious and defiled," having grown deaf and irresponsive to the voice of God and having failed to trust or draw near to him (3:2). As such, God's day of wrath would come against the shepherds who devoured rather than protected their sheep (1:8-9; 3:1, 3-4) and against all who took sin lightly, acting as though God would never punish (1:12; cf. 1:17). "In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed" (1:18), for his judgment "is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation" (3:8).

Clearly, the prophetic mouthpiece was one of the key means by which YHWH proclaimed his final verdict against sin.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, I question whether it was the only means Zephaniah had in mind.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Allgemeiner ist der Vers von dem bekannten Motiv der richtenden und rettenden Hilfe Gottes 'am Morgen' her motiviert" (Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 335; cf. Joseph Ziegler, "Die Hilfe Gottes 'Am Morgen,'" in *Alttestamentliche Studien. Friedrich Nötscher Zum Sechzigsten Geburtstag 19. Juli 1950*, ed. Hubert Junker, BBB 1 [Bonn: Hanstein, 1950], 281-88).

<sup>21</sup>So too Calvin, "Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai," 273-74; Keil and Delitzsch, "Zephaniah," 151; Richard D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary*, Minor Prophets Exegetical Commentary (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 320.

<sup>22</sup>Against, e.g., Keil and Delitzsch, "Zephaniah," 151. Robertson claims that the context "demands that the actual enactment of justice be involved" and that "the proclamations of the prophets" are not enough to satisfy this; he fails, however, along with most others, to actually clarify in what way divine righteousness is evident every day (*The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 322).

*B. Through Just Rulings of Judges*

The awesome God of Israel “is not partial and takes no bribe” but instead “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (Deut 10:17-18; cf. Job 36:6; Ps 146:7). Operating as YHWH’s agents, judges in ancient Israel were to render impartially true and just verdicts every morning: “Judge at the morning with a just decree, and deliver one who has been robbed from the hand of one who exploits, lest my wrath go forth as fire and burn so that there is none quenching, on account of the face of the evil of your deeds” (Jer 21:12; cf. Deut 1:16-17; Ps 101:8).<sup>23</sup> When a judge failed to act justly in the present, he ensured that YHWH would act justly against him in the future. And this is exactly what Zephaniah declared would happen against Jerusalem’s corrupt leaders (Zeph 2:8-9; 3:3-4).

Nevertheless, any time some of them heeded God’s call to “render a judgment of truth” and “peace” and to “show loyalty and compassion” (Zech 7:9; 8:16), they were displaying the unchanging God’s just decree and by this supplying a foretaste of when the Lord would “render to each one according to his deeds” (Matt 16:27; cf. John 5:29; Rom 2:6). One way YHWH displays his judgment for the light was by executing justice through the judges’ righteous verdicts morning by morning.<sup>24</sup>

*C. Through YHWH’s Punishing Nations*

The prophet Ezekiel would identify that YHWH’s judging the rebels of the world was nothing less than his setting his glory among the nations (Ezek 39:21). From Zephaniah’s perspective, the Lord displayed his judgment for the light by destroying neighboring nations around Judah and thus identifying that he and not them was their surest refuge (Isa 20:6; Ezek 29:16). But those in Jerusalem resisted growth by failing to repent after seeing YHWH punish their neighbors.<sup>25</sup> “I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins.... I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your shelter would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.’ But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt” (Zeph 3:6-7). When her sister Israel to the north fell in 723 BC, Judah should have recognized the seriousness of sin and returned to the Lord (Jer 3:10). Instead, she “did not fear ..., but she went and was a harlot—even she!” (3:8). Similarly, when God by the hand of the Assyrians overcame the twenty-fifth Egyptian Cushite

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. Ziegler, “Die Hilfe Gotten ‘Am Morgen,’” 285-86; Sabottka, *Zephanja*, 107; Irsigler, *Zephanja*, 355.

<sup>24</sup>Sabottka notes how Scripture commonly compares God’s law with the sun in the way it metaphorically guides one’s way (2 Sam 23:3-4; Ps 37:6; Prov 6:23; Hos 6:5; Isa 51:4; Mal 4:2[3:20]; cf. Ps 19:1-7, 8-15; Isa 42:1, 3; Hab 1:4) (*Zephanja*, 108).

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 320.

dynasty in 663 BC (Zeph 2:12; cf. Nah 3:8), Judah should have felt warned that sin bears consequences.

God's punishing others was an ever-present reminder of his justice and therefore stood as his "light," pointing to his greatness and beckoning and guiding all who would turn to him as the supreme place of refuge. Repentant turning was always the stated purpose of YHWH's curses against his own people (Lev 26:18, 21, 23-34, 27-28), and Zeph 3:6-7 notes how God equally intends his curses against the rest of the world to operate comparably (Isa 24:4-6; cf. Deut 30:7). Yet the majority in Jerusalem would not fear God, and this failure would result in their losing their place of refuge and in their receiving YHWH's fiery punishment (Zeph 3:7).<sup>26</sup>

#### D. Through Daily Substitutionary Sacrifices

YHWH proclaimed his holiness and his final guilty verdict against sinners through the daily rituals at the temple.<sup>27</sup> Expressions of worship like the morning incense offerings (Exod 30:7), freewill offerings (36:3), prayers (Pss 5:3[4]; 88:13[14]), and songs (59:16[17]; 92:2[3]) all pointed to humanity's neediness and YHWH's sufficiency and worthiness. But at the temple the most explicit daily expression of YHWH's judgment against sin was through the burnt sacrifices, which the priests offered morning and evening (Exod 29:38-46; Num 28:1-8; cf. Lev 6:1-5), thus testifying to the sustained overflow of God's mercy. Burning a representative substitutionary animal as a "pleasing aroma" to YHWH allowed him to "meet with the people of Israel" and remain in their midst (Exod 29:41, 43; cf. Lev 9:3-4, 6). The ritual announced how God's justice was served only through the death of the sinner (or a substitute), and the act emphasized the Lord's holiness, his necessary hatred of sin, the need for punishment, and the beauty of pardon. It also pointed to the reality of new creation (cf. Isa 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:19; Mal 4:2; Matt 4:15-16; Luke 1:79; Eph 5:8, 14; Rev 21:23-25). Every dawn recalled the way light overcame darkness in the beginning (Gen 1:2-3).<sup>28</sup> God's "compassions" are "new to the mornings," and his faithfulness is great (Lam 3:22-23).

Earlier in the book, Zephaniah marked the day of YHWH as "a sacrifice," with the wicked in Judah and especially her leaders being target victims of the slaughter (Zeph 1:7-8). He then highlighted how these were only some of the sinners whom the fire of God's jealousy would consume as sacrificial victims (1:17-18; cf. 3:8).

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Calvin, "Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai," 273-74; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 320.

<sup>27</sup>See Klaus Seybold, *Satirische Prophetie: Studien zum Buch Zefanja* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985), 111; Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 335; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 173-74. Sweeney limits Zephaniah's perspective to this context alone, whereas Irsigler reads the reference more broadly, including all examples of God's supplying his judging and saving help in the morning.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 174.

Israel's daily sacrifices were but pictures of this greater, more ultimate sacrifice, which God would enact either on his sacrificial substitute (Ps 22; Isa 52:13-53:12; Hos 14:4-8; Zech 13:7-9) or on the sinners themselves (Isa 34:6; Jer 46:10; Ezek 39:17).

With every burnt offering, God proclaimed his judicial decision or "judgment" to eradicate evil. Sadly, Zeph 3:2 stressed how corporate Jerusalem was failing to properly "draw near" to her God, which likely was short-hand for not approaching him through sacrifice with contrite hearts (Lev 9:1-10:3; cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:16-17[18-19]; Mic 6:6-8). Because they failed to seek him or inquire of him (Zeph 1:6), God spurned their offerings (Isa 1:11; Jer 6:20; Mal 1:10) and was readying his just fires of fury for them (Zeph 1:18; 3:8). Oh, that they would learn from the daily parables offered even through a corrupt priesthood (1:4; 3:4).

*E. Through YHWH's Sustained Common Graces*

Smith and Roberts both propose that YHWH's "judgment" in Zeph 3:5 refers to the way God orders and sustains the created natural world day by day (Gen 8:22; Jer 33:20).<sup>29</sup> Disappointingly, neither commentator attempts to clarify exactly what he means within the overall flow of Zephaniah's message. We already noted how the temple's morning liturgy celebrated saving grace as new creation. We now must consider whether the common graces associated with daily providence in any way relate to YHWH's future judicial decision to destroy sinners from among all nations and kingdoms (Zeph 3:8).

We know from elsewhere that God's love for the world moves him to cause his sun to rise on both the evil and the good, the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45). I see at least four ways in which God's daily oversight of nature would announce his judgment against sin and by this stand as the light, either guiding people out of darkness or condemning them due to their sustained insubordination.

(1) The prophet tags Jerusalem's judiciary as "evening-wolves" who complete their oppressive activity under the cover of darkness (3:3b). Their nocturnal actions suggest that something in them possibly recognizes YHWH's sovereignty (at least as a social construct) and the wickedness of their activity so that they want to hide it. That is, their abusive, self-exalting tendencies are marked as sin and as worthy of punishment by the very fact that they engage in these in the night. The challenge with this view is that Zephaniah stresses in 3:5e that "a wrong one never knows shame."

(2) While I differ from Berlin on my understanding of the function of the preposition in לְאֹרֶךְ ("for the light") in Zeph 3:5 (see

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Job 38:12, 31-33; Ps 104:28-30; Isa 40:26. Smith, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Zephaniah," 240; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 214; cf. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 320; Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 591.

above), she provides a helpful addition to how YHWH's judgment is manifest every morning. The prophet portrays the day of YHWH as "darkness" (1:15) and links the sins of Judah's judges with the "evening" (3:3). In view of such assertions, Berlin claims that "God makes his judgment visible in the light (= the sun),"<sup>30</sup> by which she most likely means that the daily pattern of light overcoming darkness through the rise of the sun metaphorically testifies to how YHWH will overcome all evil in the end.

(3) Earlier, the prophet portrayed the fiery day of the Lord as a reversal of creation and as an echo of the earlier flood judgment (Zeph 1:2-3, 14-16, 18; cf. Gen 1:20-28; 6:7; 2 Pet 3:5-7). Nevertheless, before his fury is poured forth (Zeph 2:2), he has supplied an extended season of days for those in Judah and beyond to hush in reverence (1:7), to seek YHWH together in righteousness and humility (2:1, 3), and to wait on him in faith (3:8). For God to justly supply sinners deserving of wrath not only pardon but a context of "kindness and forbearance and patience" in which to receive it (Rom 2:4; cf. 9:22) apparently demands payment manifest in substitutionary atonement. We see such implied in YHWH's provision of garments of (animal) skins for clothing (i.e., a foreshadowing of substitution) after Adam and Eve sinned and in response to Adam's statement of faith in the offspring promise (Gen 3:20-21; cf. v. 15). Furthermore, in God's establishing the Noahic covenant, it was only in response to the pleasing aroma of a burnt offering that he pledged to withhold a future global deluge-judgment (Gen 8:20-22). Thus, common grace is itself blood-bought, purchased ultimately through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice to which Noah's sacrifice pointed. Every experience of sun and rain is itself a testimony to God's just judgment that beckons individuals to conform to his righteous standard.

(4) Rather than sparking repentance, the delay of God's wrath in Judah only increased rebellion (Zeph 1:4-6, 17), oppression (1:9; 2:1, 3-4), and indifference (1:12; 2:2). In the final judgment, such sins among Zephaniah's contemporaries would stand as exhibit "A," substantiating their guilt and establishing their condemnation. And because sin is not only worthy of punishment but is itself part of the punishment (e.g., Rom 1:24, 26, 28), the callousness of Judah's leaders was itself an outworking of God's "judgment" (that sin demands punishment) that would culminate in their destruction. As John notes, "And this is the judgment—that the light has come into the world, and the humans have loved the darkness more than the light, because their works were evil" (John 3:19; cf. 1:9). And again, Paul writes, "But in accordance with your hardness and impenitent heart you are storing up for yourself wrath at the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God" (Rom 2:5). Judah's persistent evil and callousness were themselves testimonies that

<sup>30</sup>Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 125, 130; cf. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, vol. 3 of KAT 13 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), 284, 286, 288-89.

God's punishment for sin included spiritual imprisonment that would climax in eternal damnation.

In summary, Judah's tendency to hide their sin in the dark, God's display of light's triumph over night every dawn, the wicked's enjoyment of daylight due to blood-bought common grace, and their sustained God-given rebellion continued to testify to YHWH's just decree. Those in Judah and beyond should have seen such "light" and repented.

#### *F. Synthesis*

Morning after morning YHWH worked his punishing and saving judgment for the light in manifold ways (e.g., Ps 5:3[4]; 30:5[6]; 46:5[6]; 59:16[17]; 90:14; 143:8). In Zephaniah's day, the Judeans experienced a foretaste of YHWH's final verdict to punish sin through the prophetic indictments and curses, the just decisions of judges for good and not harm, the destruction of neighboring nations, the daily substitutionary sacrifices at the temple, and the gracious context for repentance matched by the sustained rebellion of the people. Each of these expressions of justice stressed the seriousness of sin. God's daily expressions of judgment operated as early manifestations of "the light," guiding Judah in the way of righteousness and identifying in various ways how God would triumph over all darkness and evil (e.g., Isa 9:2[1]; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; Mic 7:8-10).<sup>31</sup>

These daily portraits of judgment should have aroused Judah's sinners to repentance with the rays of divine light diminishing the shadows in their hearts. However, at the time of Zephaniah's prophecy, the majority of Jerusalem had remained unresponsive. And so long as they practiced evil deeds and refused to follow "the light," they would experience the day of YHWH as "darkness" rather than "light" (Isa 59:9; Amos 5:18, 20; cf. John 3:19).

#### *IV. YHWH'S JUDGMENT, THE LIGHT, AND JESUS CHRIST'S LIFE AND MINISTRY*

Zephaniah 3:5 contrasts the sinful tendencies of Jerusalem's leaders with YHWH's righteousness, and it notes how God daily gives foretastes of his final verdict (i.e., "his judgment," *בְּשִׁפְטוֹ* / *κρίμα αὐτοῦ*) to punish sin. In Zephaniah's day, people encountered such typological glimpses through numerous means of judging and saving, including the prophets' indictments and curses, any upright decisions of the judges, YHWH's punishment of neighboring nations, the daily temple sacrifices, and God's forbearance toward rebellious people. Each expression of justice stressed sin's seriousness and supplied an early manifestation of the "light" (*אֹר* /

<sup>31</sup>Cf. John 1:4-5, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46.

φῶς) that was to lead Judah in the right path and stressed how God would ultimately triumph over all darkness and evil.

Scripture commonly associates light with God's decision to overcome darkness and to judge sin. The pattern is first set at creation where light triumphs over darkness (Gen 1:3). It then appears in historical events like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:15, 23), the plagues against Egypt and the exodus (Exod 10:22-23; 14:19-20, 24, 27), and in the ruin of Jericho (Josh 6:15). Both Testaments commonly associate the coming of light with God's new creation that overcomes the old order (Isa 9:2; 58:8, 10; 60:1, 3, 19-20; Mal 4:2; Eph 5:8, 14).

Such is the biblical context of Zephaniah's declaration that "morning by morning [YHWH] gives his judgment for the light" (Zeph 3:5). It is also the setting into which prophets spoke parallel truths. Isaiah, after noting YHWH's commitment to "let linger my judgment for a light to peoples" (Isa 51:4), noted how the remnant of his day hoped "for the light" but only experienced darkness (59:9). They longed for God to right wrongs and redeem his remnant, and this he would do when his "light" – the messianic King, Servant, and Conqueror – would arrive, bringing God's light-giving judgment (e.g., Isa 9:2, 6; 42:6; 49:6; Matt 4:15-16; Luke 1:79; John 1:4-5, 9; 8:12; 9:5; Rev 21:23-25). Similarly, through Hosea YHWH noted that through the prophetic speech "my judgment goes forth as the light" (Hos 6:5) – a judgment that included Israel's exile and a third-day resurrection/second exodus that, as "certain as dawn" (6:3), both YHWH and his Messiah would effect (1:10; 3:5; 6:2; 11:10-11; 14:4-8; cf. Rom 9:26). Finally, righteous YHWH himself will render his "judgment" and stand as "the light" (Mic 7:8-9) as he works for the salvation of his remnant people (vv. 18-19), ultimately through his shepherd King (5:2-5; 7:14-17).

Building on this biblical framework that includes Zeph 3:5, John 3 addresses similar realities with similar vocabulary when it contrasts the coming divine wrath with the light of the Son of God that leads to eternal life.

Whoever believes in him [i.e., God's Son] is not judged [κρίνεται]. But the one who does not believe in him is already judged [κέκριται], because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment [ἡ κρίσις] – that the light [τὸ φῶς] has come into the world, and the humans have loved the darkness rather than the light [τὸ φῶς] because their works were evil. For everyone who is doing wicked things hates the light [τὸ φῶς] and does not come to the light [τὸ φῶς], in order that his works will not be exposed. (John 3:18-19)

John 3 speaks of Christ's incarnation as the intrusion of "light" into the world and associates it with God's "judgment." Both Zephaniah and John speak of "judgment" and "light," both speak of judgment as the light, and both speak of this judgment operating as

the light in the present yet in a way that anticipates a greater future illumination. John portrays Jesus as God's "light" (John 1:4-5, 7-8, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46) and was convinced that God the Father granted Jesus his Son authority to judge and that he would do so on the final day (5:26-29). This implies that John, whether consciously thinking of Zeph 3 or not, would have viewed Zephaniah's motif of God's "judgment as the light" as a predictive foretaste that both clarifies and anticipates Christ's final judgment. Nevertheless, those who fail now to come to the light that God has revealed in the person of his Son (John 1:4-5, 9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46) are already condemned, with God's wrath remaining on them (3:36). Indeed, for fear that others will both identify and condemn their shameful deeds for what they are, they remain in the darkness, just like the shameful political and religious leaders of Zephaniah's day (Zeph 3:2-5).

Building off the five ways God gave "his judgment for the light" in Zephaniah's day, we see comparable expressions linked with Jesus in John's gospel. First, Jesus is the ultimate prophet who proclaimed the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance before God (John 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Second and third, he is the decisive judge who judges justly and truly and who provides the only means of passing from death to life; he is also the one who will execute final judgment against the unrepentant on the last day (5:22-24, 27-30; 8:16; 9:39; 12:31, 48; 16:8-11). Fourth, he is God's Lamb who came to take away the sins of the world (1:29, 36; 3:15-16); he did this by bearing God's wrath as he served as a sacrificial substitute for his sheep. These are believers from the Jews and others scattered throughout the earth (10:16-18; 11:51-52; cf. Rev 5:9; 7:9). Fifth, even before the sun ever rose upon the earth, Jesus was the source of all life (John 1:1-3), and his life became the light leading to life for mankind—a light that darkness cannot overcome (1:4-5). His sacrifice paved the way for sinners today to see the sunrise rather than wake up to a flood of judgment (see Gen 8:20-22; cf. Matt 5:45; Acts 14:27). And each glimmer of such heavenly glories should nurture humility at the Lord's mercy for letting darkness dissipate and should move one to consider how a just God could let light overcome night.

One day, God's glory shining through the Lamb will be the only light. Those redeemed from the nations will walk in it, and night will be no more (Rev 21:23-25). This is the ultimate hope to which Zeph 3:5 points. May we celebrate that God's judgment is new every morning! Great is your faithfulness, O Lord!