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# Jesus Will Gather the Scattered: Zephaniah's Vision of the Global Church

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> All the nations you have made shall come
> and worship before you, O Lord,
> and shall glorify your name. (Ps 86:9)

With these and similar words, David and other psalmists foretold a great missional ingathering associated with the days of the Messiah. Other prophets like Isaiah also announced how Jesus would draw to himself a multiethnic worshiping community who would declare in that day,

> Give thanks to the LORD,
> call upon his name,
> make known his deeds among the peoples,
> proclaim that his name is exalted. (Isa 12:4)

And with words directed toward the messianic servant:

> I will make you as a light for the nations,
> that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

We could multiply to the hundreds similar Old Testament passages.

In our day, the very gospel that the prophets promised—the good news coming from God concerning his Son (Rom 1:1–3)—is spreading, saving, and satisfying some "for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). Jesus's triumph over death and his Spirit's empowerment of his followers ignited this outward kingdom advance (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), and today these Old Testament prophecies are being fulfilled.

What an amazingly glorious God we have who would save and satisfy sinners who believe, all through the substitutionary triumph of his Son. And how amazing that every new salvation among every people group on the planet is fulfilling predictions the Sovereign Lord made thousands of years ago.

**Hope for Missions in Unexpected Places**

The Old Testament speaks not only about the Messiah but also about *missions*. Jesus's Scriptures announced that "repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), and "to [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).[1]

Speaking about his fellow Jews, Paul noted that "the prophets and Moses said … that the Christ … would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22–23). And Christ has done and is doing just this as faithful followers become his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (1:8; cf. 1:1; 13:46–47). "From Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum," Paul "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:19), operating as one of Jesus's chosen instruments to carry his name "before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). And as the church today joins Paul in proclaiming Christ, we "fill up the word of God" (Col 1:25, author's

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A previous draft of this essay appeared at *DesiringGod* 23 July 2025: https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-will-gather-the-scattered.

[1] For reflections on the significance of Luke 24:46–47 for Luke's purpose in both his Gospel and in Acts, see Brian J. Tabb, *After Emmaus: How the Church Fulfills the Mission of Christ* (Crossway, 2021).

translation), realizing in our day the kingdom's advance as the ancient prophets predicted.[2]

Have you considered looking to the Old Testament prophets to understand better God's heart and purpose for missions? This essay considers how Zephaniah, one of these ancient spokesmen for God, "proclaimed these days" of the church (Acts 3:24). We will see how Yahweh[3] promised to gather and transform a multiethnic remnant of worshipers — the offspring of some that God once scattered across the earth in punishment.

**Who Was Zephaniah?**

Zephaniah was one of Yahweh's prophets—a heavenly ambassador sent to enforce God's covenants with his people. Through the progress of history, God has established formal relationships with different groups to fulfill his saving purposes climaxing in Christ. These covenants are always built upon promises and responsibilities. Whether addressing the covenant with creation through Adam and Noah or those redemptive covenants associated with Abraham, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus, the Lord's prophets have instructed, confronted, and motivated God's covenant partners. Zephaniah prophesied during the days of Judah's King Josiah (ca. 640–609 BC; Zeph 1:1), and this prophet assisted the king in battling rampant idolatry and in bringing spiritual reformation.[4] Zephaniah urged a remnant from Judah and other lands to seek Yahweh

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[2] See Jason S. DeRouchie, "'Him We Proclaim': Paul's Motivation, Means, and Mandate for Missions in Colossians 1:24–29," *TMSJ* 36.1 (2025): 65–87. For a biblical-theological overview of the theme of missions from Genesis to Revelation, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "By the Waters of Babylon: Global Missions from Genesis to Revelation," *MJT* 20.2 (2021): 6–30; cf. Jason S. DeRouchie, "God Always Wanted the Whole World: Global Mission from Genesis to Revelation," *DesiringGod*, 5 December 2019, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-always-wanted-the-whole-world.

[3] This essay regularly refers to God by his personal name, Yahweh, which he has disclosed through his various covenantal relationships in Scripture.

[4] The prophet likely preached in the fall of 622, after the Book of the Law was found in the temple but before the king's spiritual reforms had fully taken effect (see 2 Kgs 22–23). For the author's argument for this particular date and for clarification on why it is important, see Jason S. DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, vol. 32 of *ZECOT* (Zondervan, 2025), 7–9.

together to avoid punishment and to wait on Yahweh to enjoy lasting salvation.

Zephaniah had a royal lineage (his great-great grandfather was the reformer King Hezekiah, Zeph 1:1), which clarifies why he knows so much about the wickedness of Judah's leaders (1:8–9; 3:3–4) and why he is so interested in international affairs. He is aware of the activities of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria (2:5–15), and he expresses hope that God will one day fulfill the promises he made to Abraham to overcome the universal curse by blessing all the nations of the earth (3:9–10; cf. Gen 12:3; 22:17–18).

The prophet also appears to have been a black Jew with a biracial heritage linked to Cush (his father's name was Cushi; Zeph 1:1), which was the center of ancient black Africa.[5] This clarifies why Zephaniah shows a unique interest in Cush, highlighting its devastation (2:12) and using it as the sole example of international salvation (3:10). It is out of this context that his vision for missions becomes most clear.

**Zephaniah's Day of the Lord**

As a "seer" (1 Sam 9:9), Zephaniah saw the darkness in the hearts of many of his contemporaries, and he foresaw the dark clouds of judgment that were encroaching over the earth. God was preparing to replace the old order with the new during what he later calls "the day of the LORD" (Zeph 1:7, 14).[6] This "day" is less an extent of time (e.g., a 24-hour period) and more an event in time. Moreover, it is not only a day of punishment, portrayed through images of cataclysm, conquest, and sacrifice; it is also a day when God will renew the entire creation.[7]

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[5] Cush had good dealings with Judah in the centuries preceding the prophet (e.g., 2 Sam 18:21; Jer 38:7; 39:16). For more on Zephaniah's ethnic heritage, see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 64–66; cf. Gene Rice, "The African Roots of the Prophet Zephaniah," *JRT* 36 (1979): 21–31. For more on God's heart for black Africa, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Long History of God's Love for Africa," *DesiringGod*, 7 April 2022, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-long-history-of-gods-love-for-africa.

[6] Cf. Zeph 1:8–10, 15–16, 18; 2:2–3; 3:8, 11, 16.

[7] Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Day of the Lord," *TGC Essays* (2020), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-day-of-the-lord/.

**The Day of the Lord as Re-creation**

The prophet's opening words imply creation's reversal and movement from life to death, for God speaks of a great ingathering of four creatures in opposite order to their creation in Genesis (Gen 1:20–28; cf. Hos 4:3).

> "I will surely *gather* everything
> from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.
> "I will *gather* man and beast;
> I will *gather* the birds of the heavens
> and the fish of the sea,
> and the rubble with the wicked.
> I will cut off mankind
> from the face of the earth," declares LORD.
> (Zeph 1:2–3, author's adapted translation)[8]

Jesus likely alludes to this text when he predicts his future return as the agent of God's wrath: "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will *gather* out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace" (Matt 13:41–42).[9] As in the days of the flood (Gen 6:7), Yahweh would remove the wicked "from the face of the earth." And having overcome his enemy, God will have opened the door to generate a new creation.

**One Ingathering, Two Purposes**

The old-covenant prophets use forms of the verb "to gather" to speak of two parallel end-time realities: (1) Yahweh will "gather" the faithful remnant through a second exodus restoration (Mic 2:12), and (2) he will "gather" the world's wicked for battle (Zech 14:2) and punishment (Isa 24:22; cf. Hos 4:3). This latter purpose appears in Zephaniah 1:2–3 and then shows up again later in the book, accompanied by the parallel verb "assemble."

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[8] Where the author has "gather," the ESV translates "sweep away." For the author's rationale, see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 79–80; cf. Jason S. DeRouchie, "YHWH's Future Ingathering in Zephaniah 1:2: Interpreting אָסֹף אָסֵף," *HS* 59 (2018): 173–91.

[9] Cf. Matt 3:12; Luke 11:23; John 15:6.

"Therefore, wait for me," declares the LORD,
"for the day when I rise up as witness.
For my decision is to *gather* nations,
to *assemble* kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all my burning anger;
for in the fire of my jealousy
all the earth shall be consumed."
(3:8, author's adapted translation)[10]

God's faithful remnant from Judah and other lands must patiently anticipate the day of his rising as covenant witness because ("For") Yahweh still intends to gather people groups ("nations") and political powers ("kingdoms") for punishment. Our God "acts for those who wait for him" (Isa 64:4).

Significantly, along with using the verbs "gather" and "assemble" in the context of future punishment (Zeph 1:2–3; 3:8), Zephaniah later uses the same verbs to speak of the anticipated new exodus — the great global "ingathering" for salvation.[11] In 3:18 he employs the verb "gather" in this positive sense, and then Yahweh declares,

Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.
And I will save the lame
and *assemble* the outcast,

[10] Following the Greek translation of the Old Testament, I have "as witness" (לְעֵד), but the ESV, following the Hebrew, has "to seize the prey" (לָעַד). The difference is a single vowel. Scripture commonly portrays Yahweh as "witness" or "accuser" in judgment contexts (e.g., Gen 31:50; 1 Sam 12:5–6; 20:12; Job 16:19; Jer 42:5; Micah 1:2; Mal 3:5). In contrast, the term "prey/plunder" is rare, and Scripture never uses it as something Yahweh claims for himself (see Gen 49:27; Isa 33:23). Therefore, knowing both the majority's rebellion and the minority's repentance, he will justly sentence by acting as a legal witness and judge.

[11] On the new-exodus theme in the prophets, see Isa 11:10–12:6; 35:8–10; 43:18–19; Jer 16:14–15; 23:3–8; Zech 10:8–12; cf. Isa 2:2–4; 43:5–7, 18–19; 60:1–7; 62:10–12; Jer 3:16–17; ; Hos 3:5; 11:1, 10–11; Mic 7:15; Zech 8:20–23. For more, see Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus," *NDBT*, 478–87.

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 *assemble* 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. (3:19–20, author's adapted translation)[12]

Yahweh's ingathering to punish and his ingathering to renew are both associated with the single day of the Lord. This fact, along with how the verbs "gather" and "assemble" occur with both realities, suggests Zephaniah perceived one ultimate ingathering with two purposes. This seems to be Jesus's interpretation when he declares, "Before [the Son of Man] will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:32).[13]

**When and How Does the Ingathering Occur?**

We turn now to consider how Zephaniah's hopes of a great ingathering relate to modern-day missions. When and how is Zephaniah's future ingathering for punishment and renewal fulfilled? He and later biblical authors clarify how the ingathering for curse and blessing are worked out in space and time.

**Many Colors and Cultures Praising God**

One reason why the remnant from Judah and other lands must wait for Yahweh is because God intends to restore and renew an international remnant of faithful peoples. "Wait for me … *for* at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord" (Zeph 3:8–9). It is in this second reason for Godward perseverance that the prophet clarifies his hope for an international community of disciples who would find refuge in God.

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[12] The author has replaced the ESV's "gather" with "assemble," following the ESV's own translation of the Hebrew in 3:8.
[13] Cf. Matt 13:29–30, 47–48; Luke 3:16–17.

Some "peoples" (plural) from the nations and kingdoms in verse 8 will not be destroyed in Yahweh's fires of wrath but will instead be transformed into worshipers of the living God. Yahweh will purify their "speech" (Greek = "tongue/language") so that they will together call upon Yahweh's name and serve him (3:9; cf. Rev 7:9–10). To call on Yahweh's name (cf. Zeph 3:12) is to outwardly express worshipful dependence on him as Savior, King, and Treasure (see Ps 116:4, 13, 17).

The prophets often linked calling on Yahweh's name with the day of the Lord and God's future work in the messianic era (Isa 12:4; Zech 13:9). For example, after Joel notes Yahweh's promise to pour out his Spirit on Yahweh's day (Joel 2:28–29), the prophet adds, "The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (2:31–32). The cataclysmic imagery parallels Zephaniah's portrayal of the day of the Lord (Zephaniah 1:15), and the phrase "call on the name of the LORD" is identical to Zephaniah's language (3:9). What Zephaniah adds is that crying out to Yahweh will be accompanied by transformed "speech" (Greek = "tongue") and a remarkable unity among those God saves.

**Reversing Babel's Curse**

Zephaniah portrays this new creation and international speech change as the reversal of past punishment. "From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering" (Zeph 3:10). The prophet portrays the offspring of those once scattered as priests bringing offerings to the Lord from the northeast region of Africa.[14] Genesis first speaks of this territory as the end of one of the four rivers flowing from Eden (Gen 2:13), so the prophet is likely implying that the descendants of those once exiled from the garden are now spiritually following the rivers of life back to their source to enjoy fellowship with the great King. This is an apt portrait of the multiethnic community that will enjoy Yahweh's presence in the consummate new creation (Rev 22:1–2; cf. 5:9–10; 7:9–10).

[14] Centered in modern Sudan (cf. Jer 13:23), Cush was one of the most southern and western kingdoms of the Old Testament age (Esth 1:1). The rivers are likely the White and Blue Nile (see Isa 18:1–2).

Furthermore, this region of Africa and the people associated with it were named after Cush, Noah's grandson through Ham. Cush's son Nimrod built ancient Babel (Gen 10:8–10), from which Yahweh dispersed all the peoples of the earth. "[The place] was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the *language* of all the earth. And from there the LORD *dispersed* them over the face of the earth" (Gen 11:9). From this point forward, Yahweh's saving blessing would have to cross both geographical and ethnological boundaries, and this is exactly what is promised to happen through Abraham and his offspring (Gen 12:3; 22:17–18).[15]

The Hebrew word used in Genesis 11:9 for "the language" God confused is the same as that translated "speech" (or "tongue") in Zephaniah 3:9. And when it says that God "dispersed" the peoples, it uses the same word for "my dispersed ones" in Zephaniah 3:10. Indeed, these are the only two biblical texts that conjoin the terms for "speech/language" and "disperse/scatter." Earlier, Yahweh announced Cush's demise (2:12), but now he predicts Cush's rise (3:9–10). The very people group that built Babel, resulting in Yahweh's scattering of humanity and the formation of nations, will now have a remnant offspring whom God will gather as worshipers, initiating a new universal people of God and reversing Babel's curse.[16]

**Birth of a Multiethnic Community**

Likely alluding to Zephaniah 3:8–10, John recalls Caiaphas's prediction about Jesus: "[He died] for the nation [of Israel], and not for the nation only, but also to *gather* into one the children of God who are *scattered* abroad" (John 11:51–52; *cf.* 10:16).[17] The Church today, made

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[15] Cf. Gal 3:8, 16, 29.

[16] For more on this theme, see DeRouchie, "By the Waters of Babylon."

[17] Cf. Matt 12:30; Luke 11:23. In John 11:51–52, John uses the verb form of the noun "gathering" from Zephaniah 3:8. The old Greek of Zephaniah 3:10 does not translate the entire Hebrew line but has only, "From the ends of the rivers of Ethiopia they [i.e., the peoples from verse 9] shall bring offerings to me." However, Symmachus, the last of the rival Greek versions of the second century AD, uses in Zephaniah 3:10 the same Greek term for "scatter" (διασκορπίζω) found in John 11:52 and reads, "Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, those beseeching me — the children of *those scattered* by me — will grant to me a gift."

up of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ, is the gathered community that was once scattered.[18]

Luke supports this conclusion by portraying Jesus's death and exaltation and the early outworkings of the Great Commission as initiating the fulfilment of Zephaniah 3:8–10. Several scholars argue that Luke's account of Pentecost alludes to Genesis 11:1–9 and portrays the church's birth as the beginning reversal of the tower of Babel punishment.[19] Others go further, arguing that Luke draws on Zephaniah 3:8–10 to structure his early narrative.[20] Note the following three features:

First, in the context of explaining a mission of making worshipers "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:17–21 cites Joel 2:28–32, which depicts the day of the Lord as cataclysm and mentions "calling on the name of the LORD," just as Zephaniah does (Zeph 3:8–9; cf. 1:15). Yet present only in Zephaniah 3:9–10 is the vision of transformed "speech" (LXX = "tongue," γλῶσσα) and united devotion, both of which Luke highlights when detailing the outpouring of "tongues" (γλῶσσαι, Acts 2:4, 11) and the amazing kinship enjoyed by the early believers (2:42–47).

Second, Luke stresses how God saved devout Jews "from every nation under heaven" (2:5) to prepare the context for the global ingathering that follows. Nevertheless, ancient Cush (known as Ethiopia in the New

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[18] When portraying Jesus's triumphal entry in John 12:13–15, the Gospel writer further alludes to our prophet by conflating Zephaniah 3:14–15 with his citations of Psalm 118:25–26 and Zechariah 9:9. This implies that John saw Jesus's saving work in Jerusalem to be realizing, at least in an initial way, Zephaniah's hopes for Yahweh's reign and saving presence at the day of the Lord. For this argument, see Christopher S. Tachick, *"King of Israel" and "Do Not Fear, Daughter of Zion": The Use of Zephaniah 3 in John 12*, Reformed Academic Dissertations 11 (P&R Publishing, 2018); Jason S. DeRouchie, "Zephaniah, Book Of," *DNTUOT* 890; DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 298–301.

[19] E.g., Jud Davis, "Acts 2 and the Old Testament: The Pentecost Event in Light of Sinai, Babel and the Table of Nations," *CTR* 7.1 (2009): 29–48; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary; Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Baker Academic, 2012), 1:840–44.

[20] Jerry Dale Butcher, "The Significance of Zephaniah 3:8–13 for Narrative Composition in the Early Chapters of the Book of Acts" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1972); DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 245–48.

Testament) is not listed among the nations from which came the Jews and proselytes who heard the 120 "telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (2:10–11). Despite having Zephaniah 3:9–10 in mind, Luke leaves this group out because he sought to portray God's saving the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) as directly fulfilling Zephaniah's prediction that worshipers from the region of Cush would lead the ingathering of the nations to Yahweh at the end of the age (cf. Isa 56:3–8). This Cushite politician is the first Gentile convert mentioned in the book of Acts!

Third, the birth of the church at Pentecost and the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch are "last days" events (Acts 2:17; cf. Isa 2:2–4) that fulfill what was to happen "at that time" of Yahweh's great day (Zeph 3:9–10). With this in mind, Luke's citation of Joel 2 stresses how cataclysmic darkness would *precede* the day of the Lord (Acts 2:19–20), and this suggests that the cataclysmic events associated with Christ's passion (e.g., Luke 23:44–45) signal that his substitutionary death fulfilled for the elect Zephaniah's envisioned punishment of Yahweh's ingathered enemy (Zeph 1:2–3; 3:8).[21] Furthermore, Jesus's victorious resurrection climaxing in the ascension marks the day of Yahweh's rising as covenant witness (3:8) to ignite the global ingathering for salvation (3:9–10). The only passages in Scripture where "witness" (μάρτυς) or "testimony" (μαρτύριον) occur with "rising, resurrection" (ἀνάστασις) are Zephaniah 3:8 and Acts 1:22 and 4:33. Hence, I conclude that Jesus's death and resurrection initiate fulfillment of the international punishment and renewal that Zephaniah associated with the day of the Lord (Zeph 3:8–10).[22]

In broader fulfilment of Zephaniah's hope for renewal in 3:9–10, the New Testament clarifies that Jesus's first coming marks the beginning of the end of the first creation and initiates the new creation, which corresponds to the new covenant (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Heb 8:13). In this age, missions has resulted in Jews and Gentiles in Christ together making

[21] He is indeed the sinless substitutionary lamb whose sacrifice satisfies God's wrath against us, thus securing the forgiveness of our sins (Isa 53:7, 11; John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).

[22] See J. Bergman Kline, "The Day of the Lord in the Death and Resurrection of Christ," *JETS* 48 (2005): 757–70; Dane C. Ortlund and G. K. Beale, "Darkness over the Whole Land: A Biblical Theological Reflection on Mark 15:33," *WTJ* 75 (2013): 221–38.

up one people of God, the church (Gal 3:8, 14, 29; Eph 2:14–16). Jesus is shaping this international community into "a kingdom and priests" "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9–10; cf. 7:9–10). In fulfilment of Zephaniah 3:10, we as priests are offering sacrifices of praise (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15–16; 1 Pet 2:5) at "Mount Zion and … the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb 12:22).[23] Nevertheless, we await the day that the "new Jerusalem," in which we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6; Col 3:1), will descend from heaven as the new earth (Rev 21:2, 10; cf. Isa 65:17–18). In that day, our journey to find rest in Christ's supremacy and sufficiency (Matt 11:28–29; John 6:35) will culminate in lasting satisfaction with the absence of all curse (Rev 21:22–22:5).[24]

**Already-But-Not-Yet Day**

Zephaniah saw the single "day" of restoration happening progressively. This already-but-not-yet view of the future is evident most clearly in 3:16–18, which I translate,

> In that day [when Yahweh rises as a witness], it will be said to Jerusalem,
>
> "Do not fear! O Zion,
> may your hands not grow slack.
> Yahweh your God is in your midst.
> As a Mighty One, he will save!
> May he rejoice over you with merriment;
> may he renew you by his love;
> may he celebrate over you with song!
> Those tormented from an appointed time I have gathered.
> They were away from you; a burden was on her, a reproach."
> (Zeph 3:16–18)[25]

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[23] Cf. Isa 2:2–3; Zech 8:20–23; Gal 4:26.

[24] For more on the inaugurated and final glories of Christ and his church realizing Zephaniah's vision of renewal at the day of the Lord, see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 42–47.

[25] My translation differs significantly from the ESV. For justification of my interpretive conclusions on 3:16–18, see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 281–90.

Zephaniah 3:10 portrayed the international "daughter" of those once scattered bringing offerings to Yahweh. In 3:16–18, the transformed Jerusalem stands as the center of King Yahweh's end-time reign and thus the locus of his international community's identity.[26] The multiethnic peoples from 3:9–10 now inhabit the new Zion as the new Israel of God (Zeph 3:13–14; cf. Gal 6:16). Most significant for our purposes is that, in this future day, the unidentified divine messenger will declare that God has already mustered those he has redeemed ("I *have gathered*," 3:18)[27] but that the remnant's full deliverance is still to come ("he *will save*," 3:17). Indeed, there remain enemies that could cause them fear, so the future prophet will urge the faithful neither to be afraid nor to act fearfully (3:16). In this new context, they will bear witness to Yahweh's excellencies "among all the peoples of the earth" (3:20).[28]

Zephaniah foresees the days of the church. Already the great King has gathered and is keeping his own, but only in the end will he fully save, satisfy, and sing over them.[29] Do you now hear the promised prophetic voice, urging you to step fearlessly onto the front lines of the kingdom's advance? With missionary zeal for ingathering, Jesus implores,

> Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.... Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you... Some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives. (Luke 10:2, 19; 21:16–19).

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[26] Prophetic materials often associate the multiethnic, redeemed community with the transformed Jerusalem/Zion (e.g., Ps 87; Isa 2:2–4; 4:2–6; Jer 3:17; 33:16).

[27] The ESV places Zephaniah 3:18 in the future, but the Hebrew more naturally reads (using *qatal*), "I *have gathered*." Perhaps more than any other verse in the book, 3:18 offers many interpretive challenges. For a full discussion and conclusions, see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 286–90.

[28] For this interpretation of the statement "I will give you for a name and for praise among all the peoples of the earth" (Zeph 3:20, author's translation), see DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, 295–97.

[29] For more on this theme, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Rejoicing Then and Now: Pleasures on the Day of the Lord (Zeph 3:11–20)," *BSac* 181 (2024): 259–75.

**Gathering the Scattered**

Zephaniah was among "all the prophets" who foretold Christ's sufferings and the church's rise (Acts 3:18, 24; 1 Pet 1:10–11). In his first coming, Christ served as the *object* of God's wrath for his chosen people, and by this he sparked a global mission movement that continues today. Yet soon missions will be no more, for Christ will appear a second time fully to save and satisfy his own and to operate as the *agent* of God's wrath against the wicked (Heb 9:27–28).[30] Thus, "the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will *gather* out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace" (Matt 13:41–42). Indeed, with echoes of Zephaniah (Zeph 1:7, 18; 3:8), both Paul and Peter affirm that the Lord Jesus will come in blazing vengeance on his enemies, consuming the current heavens and earth (2 Thess 1:8–9; 2 Pet 3:7, 10). Thus, while in one sense the day of the Lord has begun for the chosen people, bringing the dawn of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), in another sense the day of consummate ingathering is still future for both God's saints and enemies (Matt 25:32–33; Luke 3:16–17).[31]

Between Christ's first and second appearings, the reigning, saving, and satisfying God has commissioned the Church to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20; cf. Acts 1:8). As ambassadors for Christ, we implore others to be reconciled to God while there is still hope (2 Cor 5:18–20). The time to repent will be no more when the Son of Man has "gathered all the nations" and separated "people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:32).

When he consummates the new creation, Christ will forever remove tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain; he will lastingly satisfy and declare as sons those he saves; and he will condemn the wicked to eternal torment (Rev 21:1–8). Then the "great multitude … from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" will cry out, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (7:9–10). In that day, missions will be no more, but praise to God will indeed radiate across the miles and through the ages as "the kingdom of the world" will have become "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (11:15).[32]

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[30] Cf. 2 Tim 4:8.

[31] See also Matt 13:47–48; 25:32–33; 2 Thess 2:1–4; Heb 10:24–25.

[32] John Piper notes, "Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall

With every advance of the kingdom, God fulfills ancient prophecies for a day of gospel light and global praise (e.g., Ps 86:9; Isa 42:6). In this era, the church is on a mission of rescue. May the saved and surrendered proclaim Christ by suffering and sharing, by word and deed (Col 1:24–29). Long ago, God *scattered* our forefathers in punishment, but in these last days, he is *gathering* an omni-ethnic community of worshipers to call on his name (Zeph 3:9) and to "proclaim that his name is exalted" (Isa 12:4; cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Until missions ends and worship remains, let us strive to take part in realizing the saving hopes of prophets like Zephaniah.

on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever." John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2010), 15.