

# Zephaniah

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## Section 9 of: **The Minor Prophets**

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Very commonly in the prophets, *glory touches judgment*. These are their themes, with the iniquity that provokes the judgment, and the characters that attach to the glory that follows.

But these things, judgment on iniquity and glory succeeding, have been, again and again, in the *history*, as they are, again and again, in the *prophecy*, of Scripture.

The day of Noah was such a day — a day when judgment introduced glory, or a new world. So the judgment on Egypt was accompanied or waited on by the deliverance of Israel, their triumphant song, the presence of the glory in the midst of them, and their journey onward to the land of promise. So the judgment on the Canaanites or Amorites was at once followed by Israel's taking of their inheritance.

The day of Nebuchadnezzar was a kindred day of judgment. The spirit of prophecy lingers over it. Not only does it, anticipate it in earlier prophets, as Isaiah and Micah, but it is, at the time, or about the time, poured out very largely, as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah witness.

And that day, the day of the Chaldean invasion and triumph, was truly a remarkable crisis. The iniquity of the kingdom of Judah was then full, as that of the Amorites had been in the day of Joshua. Sad, however, it is indeed, that things should have taken such a turn; that the iniquity of the Jew was now full, and that the Gentile was called out to judge it, as once the iniquity of the Gentile had been full, and the Jew, the man of God, was called out to judge it.

But the Chaldean was not only a real, but a representative, or mysterious person. He stands forth in the prophets as telling us of coming and final judgments. His sword visited not only Judah and Jerusalem, but the surrounding nations. His was a day in which the God of all the earth was rising up, and the world had to keep silence. It was a miniature or inchoative judgment of all the nations. It was "the day of the Lord," in spirit or in principle. The sword was furbished for the slaughter. The dominion went from "the daughter of Jerusalem," for the house of David was reprobate, and the Chaldean took the throne under God, so to speak, away from the Jew.

Judgment, however, never closes the scene. As we said, glory touches judgment, in the ways of God. Judgment cleans out the vessel, and then glory fills it. It takes away what hinders the presence of the Lord, and then the kingdom is established and displayed, as Zephaniah, together with all the prophets, show us. The Apocalypse is the great closing witness of this. There judgment makes way for glory again; and that, *finally* — in other words, that which offends and does iniquity, the great reprobate, apostate energies, are all judged and removed, and the day of millennium brightness begins to run its course.

It is judgment, judgment; over them sing, over them sing; in continuous succession, because no steward of God has been faithful, or given an account of his stewardship. Adam, the Jew, the Gentile, the candlestick, all, in their day, have been untrue to Him that appointed them; and "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, He judgeth among the gods." The garden was lost by Adam: the land of their fathers by their children, or Canaan by Israel; the Gentile was as faithless as

they, and power passed from the head of gold' to the breasts and arms of silver, thence to the belly and thighs of brass, and then to the legs of iron, and the feet which were of iron and clay. There was no *delivering up* to God of that which had been received from Him. The stewards have been removed, one after the other, and their stewardships have been taken away from them, in the stead of their delivering of them up, or giving a just account of them: Thus it has ever been, and thus is it still, and there is no exception to this till we look at Jesus. With Him all stewardships are accounted for; for which is committed to Him in the due season is *delivered up*, and not *taken away*. And, what a volume, I may say, on the glories of Christ does that one sentence in 1 Cor. 15 write for us: "then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God." It signalizes Him in the face of the whole world, and in contrast with all the generations of the children of men, from the very beginning to the very end. 'Every stewardship committed to others is taken away, because of the faithless hand that had betrayed it; but He delivers up His, as having fulfilled all the purpose of Him who had entrusted Him with it. In Christ, but in Christ only, all the promises of God are yea and amen. When He takes the kingdom He will at the end, or in the due moment, "deliver it up." Precious words! But we see the kingdom taken away from Saul, and from the house of David; and then, when given to the Gentile, taken away from him in like manner, again and again, in a series of judgments or overturnings, till He came whose right it is; and then for the first time we get a stewardship accounted for, and a kingdom delivered up.

In this day of the Chaldean, on which we are now looking, with Zephaniah, everything, as it were, is judged. As in the Apocalyptic day, or as before the great white throne, all is judged *personally or individually*, so now in the light of the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, all is judged *nationally*. There is Judah, and there is Jerusalem; and the people around Edom, the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Ethiopians and the Assyrians; north, south, east, and west, all come in for this common and complete exposure, and that, too, in all its minute distinctions; the remnant of Baal, the name of the Chemarims with the priests, idolaters, those who swear by the Lord and by Malcham, the backsliders and the careless, and those who wear strange apparel, are all severally visited; and the candle of the Lord searches out those who are settled on their lees, and who despise the fear of judgment. Nothing escapes. All is naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. And the Judge of all the world does right; they that have deserved many stripes get them, while others are beaten with as few; for, God is no respecter of persons. He renders to every man according to his deeds.

But, "the remnant according to the election of grace" are recognised here in Zephaniah, as everywhere. "The meek of the earth," they are called; and they are told to wait on the Lord under the hope that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. (Zeph. 2: 3; Zeph. 3: 8.)

And then, as we said, glory comes in after judgment. Some features of millennial blessedness are presented to us. It is told us, that with one life or language the nations of that kingdom, "the world to come," shall worship the Lord the God of Israel. The confusion of Babel shall be at an end; a sample of which was given at the Pentecost of Acts 3. The distant parts of the earth, those beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, shall take part in the common acknowledgement of the Saviour-God of Israel. Israel shall be purified, saved from all fear of evil any more, and be glad with all the heart, because the Lord their God is in the midst of them.

These are the days of the kingdom. The judgments have cleansed the scene, the remnant have been carried through them, the earth witnesses the salvation of God, and the name of the Lord is owned in the joy and service of, His restored people.

The mourners in Zion, moreover, have taken to them the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The lamentations of Jeremiah are heard no more; for the captive daughter of Zion has been brought home with every band that was about her broken off; and she that was led a captive, of whom it was written, "This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after," is made a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

Such things are here, in the third chapter of our prophet, and such things are the common themes of all the prophets, in anticipation of the kingdom of the Lord following upon the day of the Lord.

Glory, however, shines here, in one very attractive character. The harp of Zephaniah has one note of very peculiar sweetness. The personal delight of the Lord in His people is given to us in words which savour of the Song of Solomon itself in its rapture and affection. "The Lord thy God, it is said to Zion, I will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

This is the Bridegroom rejoicing over the bride, as had been anticipated by Isaiah, long before this day of Zephaniah. (See Isa. 62: 5) This is as if the Lord were taking the place which the rapturous song of the King of Israel put Him into, when He says, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" (Cant. 7: 6)

It is the *personal joy* of the Lord in His people that is thus anticipated by Zephaniah — the brightest, dearest article in all their condition. It may remind us of a little sentence in our own 1 Thess. 4 — "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This is all that is said of us there, after our translation. Glories might have been detailed, and the various joy of the heaven of the Church; but it is only this, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is *personal*, like this passage in Zephaniah; but, had we affection, we should say, it is chief in the great account of our blessedness.

One further thing I would notice. There are two suppers laid out before us in Rev. 19 — the supper of "the Lamb," and the supper of "the great God." The supper of the Lamb is a scene of joy in heaven: blessed are they that are called to it. It is a marriage supper. The supper of the great God is the fruit of the solemn, terrific judgment that closes the history of the earth as it now is, the judgment of this present apostate world, when the carcasses of the confederated enemies of the Lord are made the food of the fowl of the air.

Ezekiel notices the last of these two suppers, and gives us as full a description of it as John in the Apocalypse. Zephaniah just glances at it as he passes on with his account of the acts of the Lord in the day of His wrath. (Ezek. 39; Zeph. 1: 7)

"The day of the Lord is at hand," says Zephaniah; "for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests." He does not, however, go into the scene, as Ezekiel and John do. What the sacrifice or the feast is, and who the guests that are bidden to it may be, he does not let us know. For there are voices and under-tones in the perfect harmony of Scripture. Certain truths and mysteries are given a chief place here and there, while at other times the same truths are only assumed, or passingly, incidentally, touched on. But all this does but yield us that grateful, artless unison, that lives in all the parts of the book, giving us witness that it is but *one hand* that sweeps all the chords of that wondrous harp which is the present "harp of God," till other harps be formed by the same hand to celebrate the glories, of His own name, and the fruit of His own work for ever. (Rev. 15: 2.)