

7 - ZEPHANIAH 2:1-3 – PERHAPS YOU WILL BE HIDDEN

*Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect before the day passes away like chaff, before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. **Seek the Lord**, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; **seek righteousness; seek humility**; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord.*

- Zephaniah 2:1-3

Zephaniah prophesied to Judah and Jerusalem at the same time that Jeremiah was preaching - around 618 BC. This was 9 years before King Josiah's death in battle, 13 years before Nebuchadnezzar's first captivity of Judah (which included taking Daniel to Babylon), and 32 years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC.

Zephaniah did not cry out telling the people to repent. Nor did he encourage the people to turn back to the Lord. Instead, Zephaniah spoke only the Lord's message to the people of Judah and Jerusalem - that the day of their judgment and overthrow was set. There would be no national revival because God's patience had been exhausted. Judah had already been marked for slaughter. As the Lord said through Zephaniah:

*I will utterly sweep away everything... (1:2)
I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem... (1:4)*

Be silent before the Lord God!

(Indicating that the people were powerless to defend their actions or even their thoughts before the Lord, so they could not possibly have anything to say. Judgment is coming. Do not petition the Lord for mercy or seek forgiveness! Only be silent in the face of the Lord's accusations!)

For the day of the Lord is near; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice

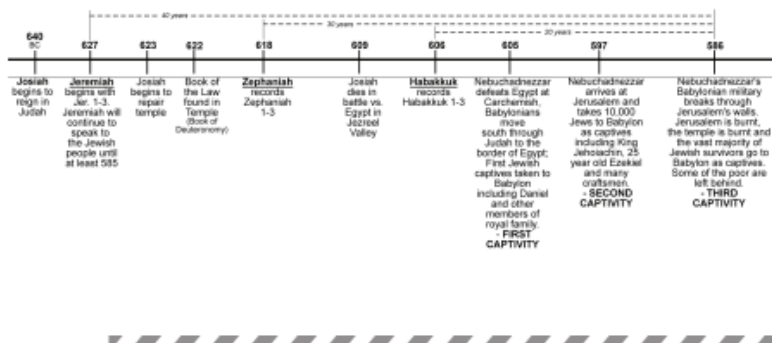
(The sacrifice was to be the nation of Judah.)

and consecrated his guests ...1:7

(The Babylonians, who were going to destroy Judah and Jerusalem, were the consecrated guests who would offer the sacrifice. This is similar to Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 46:1-10, warning that Egypt would be offered as a sacrifice by the Babylonians in 605 BC at the battle of Carchemish. It is also similar to Ezekiel 39:17.)

*The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there...1:14**Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation...2:1*

Jerusalem would be conquered and burnt by Babylon 32 years later in 586 BC.



The only encouragement or guidance the Lord gave the believers in Judah and Jerusalem (which would have included Jeremiah, Habakkuk, King Josiah, and a very young Daniel) was to prepare their souls. In fact, in Zephaniah 2:1-3 even the faithful (*"all you humble of the land who do his just commands"*) are specifically included in the list of those living in that "shameful nation" that would be punished.

Accordingly, the true believers were told to strengthen the fortress of their soul with the knowledge of God in order to be in the place of God's rest during the days and years leading up to the destruction and judgment which was guaranteed to come. They were told by Zephaniah to seek the Lord, to seek righteousness, and to seek humility. They were to prepare themselves for impact - brace themselves for national judgment. They were to seek the Lord and enter his rest.

This is the same rest the wilderness generation and David's generation were invited to enter. If these believers in 618 BC would humbly seek the knowledge of the Lord, their souls could remain at rest during the disasters that would take place over the next 32 years and during all the events that would follow.

Nine years after Zephaniah's prophecy, King Josiah would die in battle with Egypt. Then, the first Babylonian captivity would take place in 605 BC. This first captivity consisted of the members of the royal family (Daniel included) being taken into Babylon for training. In 597 BC, 21 years after the prophecy, King Jehoiachin, Ezekiel, and skilled craftsmen would be taken captive to Babylon. And, finally, after 20 years of Babylonian oppression (605-586 BC), Judah would fall and Jerusalem would be destroyed.

Zephaniah called the believers in Judah to prepare their souls because there was a chance they would be hidden in God's rest

during those 32 turbulent years. The availability of this rest to each individual would depend on whether or not their soul had been fortified with truth and reality.

It is important that we realize they were not promised supernatural deliverance or protection from the negative effects caused by cultural oppression, famine, the Babylonian siege, mass starvation, the invasion of the city, the destruction of homes, or deportation to Babylon. Instead, they were told that if they sought the Lord, obeyed his commands, lived in righteousness, and embraced humility then “*perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord*”.

Hidden from what?
The Babylonians?

No, because many of the righteous were taken away in the various captivities (605, 597 and 586 BC). These godly captives included Daniel in 605 BC and Ezekiel in 597 BC.

Would they be hidden from the famine and starvation?

No, because even Jeremiah suffered through times where bread was lacking, including the famine of 598 and the siege of 588-586.

Would they be hidden in battle fighting for the righteous cause of the Lord?

No, because even Josiah, the righteous king, was killed in battle in the Jezreel Valley by Egyptian Pharaoh Neco on his way to help the fleeing, splintered Assyrian governmental forces in their final stand against the rising power of General Nebechadnezzar and his father Nabopolassar (the king of Babylon) in 609 BC.

So, what did Zephaniah mean when he said that the believers in Jerusalem “perhaps may be hidden” on the day of the anger of the Lord?

The phrase “perhaps may be” in the ESV translation comes from the Hebrew word *‘u-lay*, which literally means “it may be that”. This is not a promise that they “would be” hidden, but is a conditional promise based on each individual’s level of success in five areas described in the same verse:

1. Seeking the Lord
2. Being humble
3. Doing what the Lord commands
4. Seeking righteousness
5. Seeking humility

These are five characteristics of a person who is renewing their mind with the truth of God’s words, and transforming their soul into the image of Christ. These people were the ones who would understand God’s promises and be empowered by his truth. They would have the capacity in their souls to trust God’s ways, even in times of distress and confusion. Those who seek the Lord will learn from him. Those who humble themselves will lay down their false ideas and corrupted worldviews and accept God’s truth. With their mind on Christ they will be able to enter into God’s rest, continuing to be righteous in deed and humble before the Lord. They will be able to hold on to the promises of God because they know God’s ways, God’s character, and their own role in preparing for the coming eternal Kingdom. They will not faint. They will not give up. They will stand strong on the day of evil. And, when they have done all to stand, they will continue to stand. (Eph. 6:13-14)

So, there was a chance that the believers facing these evil days could do so successfully with a soul fully at rest in God and fortified with faith in the knowledge of God. These believers would have prepared their souls to face the evil day, and would be ready

for either deliverance or for death without losing their faith or their confidence. They would remain steadfast in the rest of their souls. They would maintain the peace that passes understanding.

However, if they did not seek the Lord or know his Word and his Ways, they would be like seeds sown along the side of the road or in the weeds. And as in Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:20-23, they would not be able to produce the fruits of righteousness because of one of two problems:

The first potential problem is that their roots are too shallow and when the sun rises the plant is scorched (13:5-6). According to Jesus this means that "he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, but when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."

The believer at rest, having trusted the promises and knowing the ways of the Lord, will not alter their confidence or confession in the midst of hardships or when being persecuted because of their confidence. The believer with no rest and no understanding of the Bible will quickly fold - not only in the face of persecution, but even in the midst of nothing more than a storm. Their house (soul, mind) should be built on the rock - hearing Jesus' words and doing them (Matt. 7:24-25), but instead it is built on sand. This kind of believer is the one "who hears these words of mine and does not do them" (Matt. 7:26-27).

The second potential problem is that the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of riches are the weeds that grow in soil intended to grow instead the seeds of the Word of God.

A mind overwhelmed with worry or over-confident of its temporal control will also prevent the production of righteous fruit by choking out the truth (Matt. 13:7, 22). Being overly concerned

about worldly problems and overly confident of worldly power will absorb the resources in the soul that are intended to be given to the Word of God. Without truth, a person cannot enter God's rest because their thinking will be empty. In vanity, they will continue to worry about things they cannot control, or in their vain imagination they will trust in false beliefs that merely create the illusion of being in control. Both worldly fears and confidence will choke your soul by preventing you from inhaling the promises of God. This, like having no root, will keep you from entering into God's rest.

The ignorant believer will be scorched with heat like a plant with shallow roots in gravel.

The believer focused on either the troubles of this age or the powers of this age will stop inhaling truth, and will choke like a plant trying to survive surrounded by weeds.

On the other hand, the believer who knows, understands, and trusts the Word of God will produce God's rest in their soul (Matt. 13:8-9, 23). They will be "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers..." (Psalm 1:3).

Today is the day to prepare your soul.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

Hebrews 3:15

While the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

Hebrews 4:1

The believer at rest, having trusted the promises and knowing the ways of the Lord, will not alter their confidence or confession in the midst of hardship or persecution.

*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest,
So that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.
For the word of God is living and active*

Hebrews 4:11-12

If you do not hear the Word of God, you will not know the Word of God.

If you do not know the Word of God, you cannot know God's ways.

If you do not know God's ways, you will easily and quickly decide the world's ways are the best ways, but they are the ways of the false god or idol you have set up in your soul in the place of the Lord.

8 - TWO GREAT PROMISES

The Bible teaches that God's "eternal power and divine nature" are clearly understood by everyone, since they are revealed in creation itself. Our own selves and the world we live in reveal God's power and character. But, those of us educated by and conformed to modern Western culture may have a hard time accepting the fact that this evidence exists in nature, because we think as secular humanists. Yet it is true. Creation itself testifies not only to the existence of God, but also to his eternal power, and it provides details of God's personal character - that he is organized, creative, well planned, caring, providing, personal, eternal, transcendent, and more.

There is also detailed revelation that has been recorded from the beginning of time in written form and collected in what we call the Word of God, or the Bible. In the text of Scripture the plan of God and greater detail regarding his eternal character are revealed. This revealed information can all be classified as promises of God. Keep in mind however, that not every "promise" in the Word of God is something we would desire or find pleasant in our fallen human state. The natural man might not consider many of God's promises to be positive things.

Some of the promises in the Bible can be likened to things we might use our three wishes from a genie in a bottle on. They are things we would not hesitate to call blessings. These promises guarantee what God is going to do for us. They may manifest in our temporal lives by being fulfilled in a moment, or in days, or months, or even years.

