

Session 6

January 8, 2023

JOY IN PLACE OF FEAR

Zephaniah 3:9-20

The prophet Zephaniah came from a long line of Judah's leaders, going back to King Hezekiah (one of Judah's "good" kings). His prophecies—like most—looked forward to a coming judgment in the country's near future (what I call a *partial* fulfillment), but also looked far into the future to an *ultimate* fulfillment. Hence, his frequent references to the *Day of the Lord* warned of coming judgment to Judah in the Babylonian captivity (the *partial* fulfillment), but looked further into the future, to the ultimate fulfillment in the End Times.

The focal passage highlights the positive results of God's cleansing among His people. It's all about His remnant. Righteous Judah would find refuge in Him once the captivity ended; a partial, "foreshadowing" fulfillment that will ultimately be realized for all of God's people at Christ's return and God's final judgment. Three key provisions are mentioned.

God's promise (vv. 9-13). Once the judgement has passed, God will be left with a purified people who will relate to Him in an appropriate, holy way. Each verse describes a different characteristic of God's restored people. In verse 9, they will *call upon* Him with pure words (see Is. 6:5) and with "a single purpose." The phrase refers to oxen under a single yoke, pulling in the same direction. In verse 10, they will *bring offerings* to Him. In verse 11, they will *humble themselves* before Him. In verse 12, they will *take refuge* in His *name*; that is, depend upon "all that God is" for their protection. In verse 13, they will relate to God (and by implication, to one another) in truth. The result is peaceful rest and a quiet contentment. For reflection: *Look in verse 13 again. What is the connection between telling the truth and finding rest? Could it be that the old proverb, "There is no pillow so soft as a clear conscience" is correct?*

God's presence (vv. 14-17). In these verses, the focus is on God moving among His people. He is personified in at least three ways. First, He is depicted as a loving father. Generically, Zion is another name for Jerusalem. The term *daughter* is one of endearment. It can refer to virtually any female relative, including those adopted. The construction can refer to the Holy City itself, but more likely the inhabitants; God's redeemed people, now restored in both fellowship and worship. Notice the triad in verse 14: Zion, Israel, Jerusalem. Regardless of the term, all are called to *sing, shout, be glad* and *rejoice*. Second, He is depicted as King. Verse 15 gives the reason for all this joy: the people's punishment has been removed because the enemy (in this case Babylon) has been turned back. Normally, the king remains in a safe position far from the battle lines. But here, the reigning King is among (literally, is *in the midst of*) His people. Third, more than just a King, The Lord is a *warrior who saves* (v. 17). Note the warmth and compassion this warrior shows His people. Again, notice the triad: He will *rejoice over them*; He will *bring them quietness*; He will *delight in them*. For reflection: *Think about the personifications in the text: father, king, and warrior. How do each of those roles diminish our fears and build our confidence?*

God's provision (vv. 18-20). In these verses, God's people are not only delivered from their oppression, but they will be exalted. It begins by God gathering His people (v. 18). Those driven from their festivals are those who have been forbidden to worship. The last phrases are difficult

to translate, but the sense is that those returning will demonstrate God's faithfulness while shaming the oppressors. In verse 19, the enemies will be "dealt with;" literally, *put back in proper order*. Those who had been disgraced will be restored and exalted (presumably by those who once disgraced them). Notice this gathering will come from *throughout the earth* (v. 19) and their honor will come *from among all the peoples of the earth* (v. 20) as well. This is a further indication that this final vindication of God's people will be fulfilled ultimately at His return. For reflection: *Knowing that God's people will ultimately be victorious may not seem very helpful to those presently living in defeat. What would you say to the millions of believers who are currently living in oppression or facing persecution?*