

ZEPHANIAH: GOD'S JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

IV: Preventing God's Punishment

(Zephaniah 2:1-3)

I. Introduction

- A. Unlike the other Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah had a genealogy of four generations, so he was a man "of prominence and even of royalty." (B. K. C., O. T., p. 1523) He offered the prophetic view of the upper class.
- B. However, upper and lower class prophets **both** wrote of judgment and blessing for God's people in "the day of the Lord," a phrase Zephaniah used more often than any other prophet. (Ibid., p. 1524)
- C. Zephaniah 2:1-3 called the nation of Judah to repentance because of the imminent judgment of God. The passage offers invaluable insight on revering the Lord beneficially, so we view it for our edification:

II. Preventing God's Punishment, Zephaniah 2:1-3.

- A. God's prophet Zephaniah had a message for the wicked people in Judah in Zephaniah 2:1-2:
 - 1. He called the nation of Judah to gather together to express its repentance and confession of sin, a call to gather that is repeated to emphasize the need for a sense of urgency, Zephaniah 2:1a; Ibid., p. 1529. The problem of spiritual complacency noted back in Zephaniah 1:12 is addressed by this command.
 - 2. God's prophet addressed Judah as a "nation not shamed," meaning the wicked were so calloused by their sin that they had no sense of shame, v. 1b; Ibid. This was a dangerous state of mind for a nation that was ripe for judgment simply because it meant the people were calloused against even wanting to repent.
 - 3. Zephaniah emphasized the need to take advantage of what little time was left of God's patience, urging Judah to repent before God's decree that He would punish the nation literally "gives birth" to that punishment, Zephaniah 2:2a; ftn. to the English Standard Version of verse 2.
 - 4. The prophet also noted that once the time for repentance had passed, it would forever be gone, v. 2b:
 - a. He urged Judah's people to repent "before the day passes like chaff" (*kemos 'abar yom*, Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 952). This illustration of a gusty breeze swiftly picking up and blowing a pile of chaff away so that its fragile contents are irretrievably, widely scattered over the countryside emphasizes the fact that once God's punishment begins to fall on a people, the opportunity for repentance and restoration in God's blessing will by then have irreversibly and permanently perished!
 - 5. In Zephaniah 2:2c,d, God's messenger repeated a reference to the painful, burning anger of the Lord, the day of God's fierce anger and its effects in punishment as an added warning to repent.
- B. God's prophet then had a message for the godly remnant in Judah, Zephaniah 2:3:
 - 1. Turning to address the godly remnant, Zephaniah urged them as the humble of the land who performed God's just commands (Zephaniah 2:3b) to heed three admonitions, Zephaniah 2:3a,c,d:
 - a. Zephaniah first urged the remnant to seek the Lord, a figurative expression for heeding His will, v. 3a.
 - b. Zephaniah then urged the remnant to seek righteousness, to focus on righteousness in life, v. 3c.
 - c. Zephaniah finally urged the remnant to seek humility, to live humbly before others and the Lord, v. 3d.
 - 2. In reward for heeding these three admonitions, Zephaniah noted that the remnant might be graciously hidden by God from His punishment when the Lord's fierce anger was expressed on the wicked, Zephaniah 2:3e. [The same principle of the godly remnant in Judah being delivered from harm at the time of God's national punishment appears both in Ezekiel 9:4-5 and in Habakkuk 2:4b.]

Lesson: (1) To prevent God's severe punishment from coming upon the nation of Judah, sinners in Judah were to gather together to repent and confess their sins with a sense of shame, taking advantage of what little time was left before God's wrath fell, aware that once His punishment arrived, all hope for avoiding it would be completely gone, and they would only face the severely painful effects of God's wrath. (2) As for the godly who lived in the nation, they were to obey God's will, to live righteously and humbly before the Lord and other people. In reward, God would hide them from His expressed wrath when it fell on the sinners.

Application: (1) If we are aware that we are in sin, (a) we need to repent and confess that sin (b) with an awareness of our guilt (c) while precious time is still left before God's punishment falls, (d) knowing that once it does fall, it will irretrievably do so to where we will experience God's painful discipline. (2) If we are upright but we live among ungodly people, (a) may we see our need even as the godly to (+) obey God's will, to (+) live righteously and (+) humbly before the Lord and other people. (b) In reward, the Lord will hide us from His expressed punishment that will be administered upon the sinful.