

## **Zephaniah 3:18-20 – Gifts to be desired!**

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Handfuls, Henry, Armstrong, Gaebelein, Geneva, Barnes, Clarke, ps137, 89:33-34, Poole, JFB, Calvin, Trapp, Gill, Eclectic, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Even though God promised through Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zephaniah to protect, provide for, and propagate his bride, she rejected him. She rejected him coldly. So God turned away from her and allowed her to be taken into captivity. But later, after his people were sorry for the wickedness and looked to the coming Savior, God returned and showered his bride with gifts that were precious, needed, and unforgettable. This is what you will hear about as we close our time in Zephaniah's prophecy.

Our headings are:

**I will give you freedom to worship**

**I will give you freedom from your enemies**

**I will give you freedom from your shame**

Our goals are: **That you will know that in spite of the struggles the church is facing today, God is willing, ready, and able to restore her if she repents, and give her all she needs.**

**I will give you freedom to worship**

18 "I will **gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly**, Who are among you, To whom its **reproach is a burden**.

**1. After God's people repented in Babylon and their relationship with God restored, their first thought was to restore worship.**

They realized they were missing worship and they longed to return.

**Psalm 137:4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! 6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth — If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.**

Seeing their sorrow, God said: "I will gather you." And when God said that he would gather them, no one could stop this from happening!

**2. Consider the details of why they were sad.**

The temple was in ruins. **There were no sacrificing of the burnt, sin, trespass, grain, and peace offerings.**

There was **no gathering of Israel 3 times per year to celebrate the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles feasts** – feasts which pictured the work of the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father.

The **Sabbaths and their celebrations were a distant memory.**

The **Ark of the Covenant**, which symbolized the presence of God among the Jews, **was gone**, and the Jews had no way of getting it back.

There were no boys and girls **memorizing and repeating the law** as they played in the streets of Jerusalem and prepared for the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

There **was no justice**...and no courts for men to go for justice to preserve righteousness.

The **hope of the spread of the kingdom as Solomon prophesied in Psalm 72, had disappeared**

Even after they repented, **the people of God were held in hatred or scorn in Babylon** and so were not free to worship God as they should have.

**Celebrating these feasts and being regularly in worship in Jerusalem were commanded by God.**

Deuteronomy 12:18 "But you must **eat them before the LORD** your God in the place which the LORD your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and **you shall rejoice before the LORD** your God in all to which you put your hands.

Deuteronomy 27:7 "You shall offer peace offerings, and **shall eat there, and rejoice** before the ...

**This condition of being separated from God's worship hurt his people very much. In fact, a better word of sorrow is "burden."** The point was they were being crushed by the hurt.

### **3. So God comforted his people by reassuring them of the freedom to worship!**

#### **4. Lessons:**

**a. Satan always goes after true worship.** If he can't stop it, he will try to pervert it. This is what he did to Judah. This is exactly what he is doing today? There is a lot of worship in North America but the Devil has been quite successful in corrupting it. He took away Psalm singing. He put female leaders in. Sin is avoided in the pulpit. The Sabbath has become like a joke. Discipline is missing. There is the act of worship, true worship is missing.

**b. Are you thankful for your freedom to worship? Are you sad when you are not able to worship?** A baby can have the nicest clothes, but he needs nutrition to survive! So come to worship. Support the worship of God. Don't let God take it away from you like he did to the Jews. He delights in your worship. Use your freedom from sin to worship.

**c. Nothing is sadder than when others don't worship God at all...like those who use Sunday for sports or for their own purposes.** It should make you cry when people take their kids play rather than to pray. It should make you work!

#### **I will destroy your enemies**

19 Behold, **at that time I will deal with all who afflict you.** I will save the lame; And **gather those who were driven out...**

#### **1. God dealt with those who make his people suffer.**

"I will deal with all" is a euphemism. **God dealt violently** with his people's enemies. Who were these enemies? The Assyrians who took the northern 10 ½ tribes captive and the Babylonians who took the southern 1 ½ tribes captive.

**The Assyrians and Babylonians were the tools of God, but that did not excuse what**

**they did to Israel and Judah.** So God rightfully judged them and restored his straying bride.

**Further to prove this judgment, the restoration of Judah and Israel was usually presented in connection with the destruction of those nations that were hostile to God's plan.**

Isaiah 60:14 Also the sons of those who afflicted you Shall come bowing to you, **And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet;** And they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 65:15 For behold, the LORD will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. 16 **For by fire and by His sword The LORD will judge all flesh; And the slain of the LORD shall be many.**

**God saved the lame (his wounded people) by breaking the power of the enemies.**

The Jews were like a mouse in the eagle's talons, but God would liberate them and protect them.

## **2. Along with the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Jews had more enemies: their own religious and political leaders.**

Ezekiel 34:4 "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, **nor bound up the broken,** nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 "So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 ... and no one was seeking or searching for them."

God had "deal" with these wicked leaders also so he could protect his church.

Ezekiel 34:29 "**I will raise up for them a garden of renown,** and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore.

## **3. Nothing could stop God from restoring his people and protecting them and he would do so at a time of his choosing.**

## **4. But was God pointing to a gathering and protection of the Jewish biological nation back in Jerusalem and Israel? No.**

Initially some Jews returned to **repair the temple, restore worship, and ready themselves for the spread of the kingdom** throughout the world, but that was only the **beginning of the restoration of Israel.** After the Jews returned Jesus came and broke down the wall of separation so the Gentiles would be included in his kingdom. That wall was broken down **through the preaching of the Gospel.** So you are the true Israel. You are Mt. Zion. Now

God continues to gather and protect his people who put their trust in Jesus and incorporates them into an indestructible kingdom and keeps them safe. This was God's promised this to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**5. Consider at least 2 reasons this promise of restoration and protection could not refer to a limited return of Jews to Jerusalem:**

**The Jews would be joined with an unnumbered people who could not physically fit** in the temple on Mt. Zion.

**God promised that all the nations would be joined to the Jews – but joined by their faith** in Jesus, **not by their nationality.**

Galatians 3:8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. 28 **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** 29 And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise.

**6. Lessons:**

**a. Wicked civil or ecclesiastical leaders who are causing trouble for God's people must know that they won't escape God's judgment.** This is the only way that God will preserve his church.

**b. Wait on God's timing for his judgment on the wicked.** Don't try to hurry up God's judgment. Fulfill your responsibility. Speak up when you can. Stand firm. Use the law. But don't go beyond it. Pray for God to judge the wicked.

**c. It is important to note that the true church is not represented by physical Israel.** So we are NOT called to support Zionism, the fight for the return of Israel to Palestine for religious reasons. (You might argue for that politically, but not spiritually!) Woe to those that do, for they seriously lie to the Jews and make them think they have some special significance in their unregenerate state. The true Israelite had faith in Jesus Christ. **The true Israelite** is protected! Remember the Apostle Paul:

Romans 9:6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. **For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,**

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; **but the elect have obtained it,** and the rest were blinded.

## **I will make people praise you**

19...I will **appoint them for praise and fame In every land** where they were **put to shame**.<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you back, Even at the **time I gather you**; For I will give you fame and **praise Among all the peoples** of the earth, **When I return your captives before your eyes**," Says the LORD.

### **1. God then caused his people to be praised as they repented, and he restored them.**

Deuteronomy 26:19 "and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken."

### **2. God's people were praised because their shame was removed, shame that was then placed on their persecutors.**

That's how God works. He did the same thing to Israel before.

Joshua 5:9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "**This day I have rolled away the reproach** of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

Yes, **“glorious things of thee will be spoken.”**

### **3. All the nations that did not even know Judah in the past respected and praised her.**

The nations knew that the formation of this indestructible kingdom was the work of God.

### **4. So when was this “appointed” time?**

This started after Babylonian captivity.

Esther 8:17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, **because fear of the Jews fell upon them.**

It continued during the New Testament times, even after biological Israel was rejected, and it continued to the end of the Bible.

Revelation 5:9...For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

## **5. Lessons:**

**a. The promise is the Christian church will flourish in the world and ultimately be valued and esteemed in the world.**

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, **to give you a future and a hope.**

**b. Your shame was removed when Jesus took your sin on the painful and shameful cross! Praise God!**

**c. Along with God's promise that is people will be praised is the responsibility of every Christian man, woman, child to love and live for the Lord.**

**Conclusion:**

**God gave freedom to worship, destroyed Judah's enemies, and caused the world to praise his Bride.** These are gifts to cherish. But Judah only received these things **because she looked to the Savior**, Jesus Christ. **She then brought in many new children who believed** as she. So this promise was given, not to the Jews only, but to all who truly believed. You are spiritual Zion. You are spiritual Jerusalem.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Watch, the church is under pressure, externally from the state and society, and internally, and there is corruption in the pulpit and in the pew.** But don't think God will simply bring the church out of her troubles because she is Christian in name. That was the mistake the Jews made.

**2. Work.** Fight against sin in Scarborough and in the church. Fight with repentance. Fight with the Word so men would see their need for repentance.

**3. Wait.** At the right time God will restore and establish the church and the world will then acknowledge that God is in her midst. And they will come to see and praise Christ's church! What a hopeful prophecy!

Finally: While the church is being punished, it is only temporary. One day it will be praised. If you are not a Christian, however, you will be punished for eternity in hell. But there is hope. Jesus' punishment on the cross could be counted as your punishment if you ask God. Will you ask God to count his punishment as yours?