

Zephaniah 3:14-17

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Speaking in the prophetic past, showing the certainty of what is predicted in the future, Zephaniah calls the people of Judah to shout for joy because the LORD their Suzerain God has overturned the sentence of condemnation against them and dismissed their adversaries. The people of God can thus lay fear aside and rejoice always because the LORD, the great warrior, is in their midst. They will dwell in intimate love and fellowship, in a world brimming with joy.

In the previous section, the LORD stated that He would destroy the proud and arrogant people on the day of judgment but would leave a humble and lowly remnant. That remnant would live righteously because they would have purified lips, and live under God's refuge (Zephaniah 3:12). In those days, the remnant of God's people will not deceive or exploit anyone for personal gain. Therefore the lowly and humble will enjoy security and peace (vv. 9–13).

The prophet Zephaniah, envisioning such a time of blessing and restoration, called the people of God to rejoice. With a loud voice, he issued three similar statements containing four imperatives: *Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!* (vs 14).

The phrase '*daughter of Zion*' refers to the community of people in Jerusalem who lived faithfully to the LORD. The phrase speaks of the gracious loving relationship that the LORD established with His covenant people (2 Kings 19:21). The term *daughter* implies that the LORD is a loving father. He loved His covenant people and cared for them, even while they "acted corruptly toward Him" and ignored Him (Deuteronomy 32:5). The phrase *daughter of Jerusalem* refers to the faithful remnant living in Jerusalem, those who were humble and lowly (Zephaniah 3:12).

The prophet used four imperatives (*shout for joy, shout in triumph, rejoice and exult*) to summon God's people to rejoice. Shouting is the normal way to express joy. "David and all the house of Israel" brought "the ark of the LORD" to Jerusalem "with shouting and the sound of the trumpet" (2 Samuel 6:15). Similarly, during the battle of Jericho, the LORD instructed Joshua and all the people of Israel to "shout with a great shout" so that "the wall of the city" may fall (Joshua 6:5).

Here in our passage, Zephaniah summoned the people of God to rejoice exceedingly, as indicated by the piling up of the verbs. They ought to do so *with all their heart*, which is the seat of choice. Yes, they had good reasons to have boundless joy: *The LORD has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies* (vs 15).

The phrase *He has cleared away your enemies* uses the prophetic past tense, to speak of a yet-future event in the past tense, to emphasize that its fulfillment is as certain as if the event had already transpired.

God would overturn the sentence of condemnation pronounced against His covenant people and would vanquish their *enemies*. Just as the condemnation was an enforcement of God's covenant treaty with Israel, the restoration also follows the provisions of the covenant treaty. God promised in His covenant treaty that even if the enforcement provisions were enacted against Israel due to their disobedience, God would still eventually restore His people (Deuteronomy 32:36). This includes a promise of vanquishing their *enemies*. Following is this promise from Deuteronomy, which contains a restatement and amendment of God's covenant with Israel:

“Rejoice, O nations, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And will render vengeance on His adversaries,
And will atone for His land and His people.”
(Deuteronomy 32:43)

Not only would the people of Judah rejoice in their freedom from their *enemies*, but also they would rejoice because God dwells among them. The prophet stated, *The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst* (vs 15). The book of Revelation asserts that in the new earth, there will be no temple because God will dwell on earth with His people, and He will be their temple (Revelation 21:3, 22). It would seem this would be a fulfillment. However, in this particular prophecy, the emphasis is upon *The King of Israel*. This emphasis might point to the thousand-year reign where Jesus will sit upon the throne of Israel (Revelation 20:4).

The LORD is the King of Israel. Though Israel and Judah had human kings, the LORD was and is the greatest King (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14). God promised King David that his descendant would sit on the throne of Israel forever, which will be fulfilled in the person of Jesus (2 Samuel 7:12-13; Matthew 1:1, 21:9).

In the ancient world, one of the tasks of a king was to fight for the people in times of war. In the book of 1 Samuel, we see an illustration of this practice with Israel. The people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:20). The LORD listened to the people's plea and appointed kings (1 Samuel 8:22).

Throughout the history of Israel, we see that the kings ultimately failed to protect the people. But the LORD is an invincible warrior. He will protect the people, and clear out their *enemies*. He “reigns and is clothed with majesty” (Psalm 93:1). All those human kings who ruled Israel are now dead. They ruled for a short time. But *the LORD* “will reign forever” (Psalm 146:10). Because the living and eternal God will one day dwell among His covenant people again, Zephaniah encouraged them, saying, *You will fear disaster no more* (vs 15).

Fear is the normal human reaction when facing threats. Human beings fear for their physical safety in perilous situations. For instance, shepherds were afraid when lions roared in the meadows of the Jordan (Amos 3:8). Also, ancient people feared destruction by wild animals (Job 5:22). But a day will come when God's people will not fear because He will dwell among them to protect them from all threats and danger (Revelation 21:3). At that time, the people will live in peace and security.

The prophet opened the next verse with the phrase *in that day* to let the people of Judah know that their restoration was still future. After punishing the nation, the LORD will restore a remnant. At that time, *it will be said to Jerusalem: Do not be afraid, O Zion* (vs 16).

The term *Zion* stands for the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, as in one of the previous verses (v. 14). It is a synonym for *Jerusalem*. According to Zephaniah, other people groups will encourage the people of *Jerusalem* not to fear. They will tell them, *Do not let your hands fall limp* (vs 16).

In Hebrew thought and culture, the *hands* were a symbol of power and strength (Deuteronomy 32:36). Thus, dropping *hands* symbolized discouragement and/or fatigue. Military and industrial power was largely dependent upon human muscle-power.

This would indicate that even in the newly configured earth, which will be filled with righteousness, and inhabited by God Himself, there will still be human industry (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:3). Revelation makes an intriguing statement that the new earth will have nations, and the “kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into [the New Jerusalem]” (Revelation 21:4). It seems that the human adventure will escalate and elevate, because there will be human industry with teamwork, collaboration, and shared purpose, but with an absence of self-seeking, exploitation, and violence.

Here in Zephaniah, other peoples will encourage the inhabitants of Jerusalem not to faint, and will give them the reason for that: *The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior* (vs 17). This would seem to refer to the time when Jesus has returned to earth as a conquering king, and set up His reign upon the earth (Revelation 19:11-16, 20:4).

The term translated as *warrior* here is “gibbor” in the Hebrew language. Broadly speaking, it denotes anyone who is exceptionally important or powerful in some fields. For instance, Nimrod was a “mighty one on the earth” (Genesis 10:8). Specifically, the word is used in military contexts to designate a strong man who can perform heroic deeds (1 Samuel 2:4; Hosea 10:13; Amos 2:14). In our passage, the term is used for the LORD, the all-powerful God. No other warriors can withstand His power and judgment.

The all-powerful God of Israel will dwell among His covenant people. Zephaniah told the people of Judah that *the LORD will exult over you with joy* (vs 17), meaning that God will take delight in His people. They will no longer do things that displease Him. This would indicate a predicted future time when the earth has filled with righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

Additionally, *He will be quiet in His love* (vs 17), giving the people a new life and allowing them to enjoy their fellowship with Him. The word translated *be quiet* can also be translated “rest.” This phrase is interesting because God is referenced twice. *He* (God) will rest (*be quiet*) in *His love*. This could indicate the interconnectedness between Jesus, who is God’s Son, His Father, the Spirit, and God’s people. Jesus will be one with His bride, which is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 5:31-32). It would seem here that this is predicting that God’s love will envelope all His people in a daily, tangible manner that will affect each person’s very existence.

Finally, Zephaniah said, *He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy* (vs 17). Oh, what a day of rejoicing that will be! God will be with His people and will find great delight in them.

Verse 17 paints an amazing picture of a people dwelling securely and safely, prospering in intimate, loving community and joy with one another.

Biblical Text

¹⁴ Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!

Shout *in triumph*, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵ The LORD has taken away *His* judgments against you,

He has cleared away your enemies.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;

You will fear disaster no more.

¹⁶ In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not be afraid, O Zion;

Do not let your hands fall limp.

¹⁷ “The LORD your God is in your midst,

A victorious warrior.

He will exult over you with joy,

He will be quiet in His love,

He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.