

Zephaniah 3:8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zeph/zeph-3/zephaniah-38/>

No nations are pursuing righteousness, so God announces His decision to destroy the earth and all nations. He says He will first rise up as a witness, which might refer to Jesus's first advent, where He resurrected and defeated death.

The LORD begins this section with the word *Therefore* (vs 8) to refer to what He had said previously. In the last section He spoke of judging the nations, hoping Judah would learn from their example and turn to Him to avoid destruction for their wickedness. Instead, they were eager to be wicked as well. *Therefore*, God now pronounces His intent to judge the entire earth. It seems His remnant followers are not doing their job of being a good example, perhaps meaning that there is no positive testimony to redeem the earth. So just as He did in the days of Noah, destroying the earth and starting over because it had filled with violence (Genesis 6:11), God is going to destroy the earth and start over once again (2 Peter 3:7, 12-13).

The pagan nations rebelled against God. They committed wickedness day after day. Sadly, Jerusalem was no better, "She did not trust in the LORD; she did not draw near to her God" (Zephaniah 3:2). Therefore, all nations were on the verge of facing judgment. The LORD introduces His judgement sentence in an interesting way, saying *Wait for Me* (vs 8). This might be an indication that there will be a significant time lag between this pronouncement of judgement and its implementation. As of this writing, it has been over 2,500 years so far.

This sentiment is echoed by Peter in his second epistle, noting that to God a day is like a thousand years (2 Peter 3:3-8). God's promise to judge the world is only being delayed because of God's mercy and desire that many come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

The Lord might delay, but His judgment is certain. To emphasize the certainty of His judgment, God added *declares the LORD* (vs 8).

The phrase *declares the LORD* is significant in the Bible. It is a prophetic formula and is an affirmation that the prophets speak on God's behalf. A prophet is someone who receives a message from God and has the responsibility to deliver that message to God's people. When the prophet Zephaniah said *declares the LORD*, he added weight and emphasis to his message, indicating that the message came directly from the LORD. As such, it would surely come to pass because God is faithful to His words (Numbers 23:19).

After the prophetic formula, the LORD told the people that they were to hope *for the day when I rise up as a witness* (vs 8). This phrase *rise up as a witness* might refer to the *witness* of Jesus raising from the dead, overcoming sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 54-55). In His first advent, Jesus did not come to earth to judge (John 3:17, 8:15). But on His return to earth, He will judge the nations. This phrase from vs 8 sounds similar to the prophesied scene of the return of Jesus described in Revelation 19:17-19,

Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation and all My burning anger (vs 8).

The particle *indeed* is emphatic. It adds weight to the divine statement: *My decision is to gather nations and assemble kingdoms*. The term for *decision* has the general meaning of justice. But here, it means “decision” or “determination.” The truth is that people come before a king or a judge for a judicial decision (Judges 4:5; 2 Samuel 5:2). God decided to *gather all the nations to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger (vs 8)*.

The terms *indignation* and *anger* are synonymous. They refer to the blazing wrath of the LORD against sin. According to the prophet Nahum, when the LORD comes in judgment, “His wrath is poured out like fire” (Nahum 1:6). In Zephaniah, the LORD expressed the same truth when He declared, *For all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal (vs 8)*.

The term *fire* denotes the physical manifestation of burning. In ancient times, people used fire to cook food (Exodus 12:8; Isaiah 44:15–16) and to serve as lights for them (Isaiah 50:11). They also used it to refine metals (Isaiah 1:25) and burn refuse (Leviticus 8:17). They also used *fire* as an instrument of warfare with which conquerors burned down the cities of the defeated (Joshua 6:24; Judges 1:8; 1 Kings 9:16).

In our passage, *fire* is used to demonstrate the judgement and power of God to judge *all the nations*. God is zealous to restore His creation to its original design. God promises He will create a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). No more will there be corrupt rulers abusing their authority to exploit others. Rather, there will be love and service to others, as God intended, and as He required in His covenant with Israel.

Thus, just as *fire* burns intensely, so God would pour out His fierce anger on the *nations*. His judgment will be universal, and the current earth will be destroyed, then replaced with a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). In the next section, God will assert that this purging of the old earth with fire will be a prelude to cleansing the earth, and bringing His people back to being righteous, loving rather than exploiting their neighbors.

Biblical Text

**⁸“Therefore wait for Me,” declares the LORD,
“For the day when I rise up as a witness.
Indeed, My decision is to gather nations,
To assemble kingdoms,
To pour out on them My indignation,
All My burning anger;
For all the earth will be devoured
By the fire of My zeal.**