

The Book of Zephaniah

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(1992 Study)

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1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank has not reviewed the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1992)

Zeph. 1:1 The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, who was on the throne for 31 years. However, it is not known what year of that reign Zephaniah began his ministry. By discounting the short (less than a year) reigns of two other kings and just counting the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, each of whom ruled for 11 years, we conclude that Zephaniah prophesied approximately 53 years (31 + 11 + 11) before 606 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Hizkiah could be thought of as good King Hezekiah. However, this Gedaliah is not the Gedaliah whom King Nebuchadnezzar made ruler over a small remnant of vinedressers he left in the land after Zedekiah was put off the throne (2 Kings 25:22). That Gedaliah, who lived later, was assassinated.

Zeph. 1:2 I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.

Verse 2 is another way of saying the land would be left desolate. In other words, this prophecy corresponds to what Jeremiah said about the land having to lie desolate for 70 years in order to fulfill its sabbaths (Jer. 25:11). Beginning in 606 BC, the land had to be utterly wiped clean of inhabitants, beasts, etc. Some question this date, saying like other Bible chronologers that it should be 586 BC, but we would dispute their claim and agree with the date 606 BC.

Zeph. 1:3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

The word “all” in verse 2 does not literally mean that every person would be consumed, for in the final analysis, the people were either destroyed literally or taken off the land into captivity. The emphasis is given at the end of the verse; namely, God would “cut off man from *off the land*.” Since Moab and Ammon were also taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar during the 70 years, they did not take up residence in the land of Israel. And for much of that time, Egypt was likewise in captivity at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. While the Israelites were in Babylon for the 70 years, the land lay fallow and hence became a desert, a wilderness.

Q: Did any other prophets prophesy at the same time as Zephaniah?

A: Yes, Jeremiah began to prophesy in the 13th year of Josiah’s reign, so Jeremiah and Zephaniah were contemporaries (Jer. 1:2). We are inclined to think that Zephaniah prophesied during the entire reign of Josiah. If so, Jeremiah started his ministry after Zephaniah.

“I will consume man and beast [all domesticated animals].” The animals were either slain for food by the invading Babylonian army or taken to Babylon. If wild beasts were included in this prophecy, they would have left the land of Israel when their prey, the domestic animals, left.

“I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea.” Birds tend to follow the people in order to feed off their crops, so when the people were removed from the land, the

birds would have migrated. Thus there was a chain reaction. When the people and the domesticated animals were removed, birds that fed on either crops or carcasses left. Birds zero in on the food, so generally speaking, if there is a great paucity of animal life, the birds leave too. Caged birds, used for Temple sacrifices, were no longer brought. And fish-eating birds left when the fish became scarce. During the 70 years, passersby and travelers noticed the desolation of the land.

Fishing normally occurred in the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee, and to a small extent in the Jordan River. Zephaniah was prophesying that the Lord would affect the water or the fish themselves. It is known, for instance, that when the Aswan Dam was built in Egypt, the sardine bed shifted to another area. When the Gulf Stream shifts, fishermen have to work in different areas. Therefore, a shift in currents in the Mediterranean could change the location of the fish along the coast of Israel. With regard to the Sea of Galilee, something happening upstream could affect the fish in that body of water. Moreover, since the people on both sides of the Jordan River were taken into captivity, no one would be fishing in the Sea of Galilee.

The resulting wilderness condition of Israel would deter anyone passing through the land from settling there. Hence the land was radically different for the 70-year period.

Comment: In the Kingdom, God will withhold rain from any nation that does not send representatives to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16-18). Here, too, during the 70 years, rain could be withheld. Without rain and water for irrigation, the land in Israel would quickly become a desert.

“I will consume ... the stumblingblocks with the wicked.” Both the statuary and the “wicked” worshippers of the statuary would be removed from the land. The idols were a blemish that had to be swept away.

Zeph. 1:4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;

Zephaniah’s prophecy was primarily directed to Judah. God would “cut off the remnant of Baal from this place [from Jerusalem as well as Judah].” Although the Bible does not specify, Zephaniah probably lived somewhere in Judah and would have gone into Jerusalem fairly frequently to deliver some of his messages. Of course when the people were either killed or taken into captivity, there would be no more worshippers of idols in the land, and the idols themselves were destroyed.

God would not only “cut off the remnant of Baal ... [but also] the name of the Chemarims with the priests.” The word “Chemarims” may be a derivative of sun worship; hence God would cut off sun worshippers and their priesthood.

Comment: A marginal reference is 2 Kings 23:5, which states that King Josiah “put down ... them also that burned incense ... to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the hosts of heaven.”

Reply: Yes, Holy Writ tells us that good King Josiah started a great reform to rid the land of idol worship. Now we can see that Zephaniah’s prophecy influenced Josiah and encouraged the reform. Josiah did all he could in a practical way, but some idols remained until 606 BC, when God made a complete sweep of the land.

There are two thoughts with regard to Jehovah’s cutting “off the remnant of Baal from this

place.” (1) The bulk of the Baal worship was cut off when the ten tribes went into captivity, but much still remained in the land and had to be dealt with. (2) While the reform Josiah instituted was very good, a remnant of Baal worship continued to exist. Josiah started in Jerusalem and worked his way out into the peripheral areas, but some pockets of idol worship were still there. God said He would make the reform thorough but not necessarily in the days of Josiah.

Zeph. 1:5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham;

“I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah ... and [on] them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops” refers to *private* worship. The antitype would be the worship of statues in private homes and on private property. In Zephaniah’s day, the people went up on their roofs at night to worship idols. Not only would God destroy the Temple and Jerusalem, but He would wipe the slate clean of all heathen practices in the land.

“I will also stretch out mine hand ... [on] them that worship and that swear by the LORD [Jehovah], and that swear by Malcham [Molech].” The problem was that heathen worship was *mixed in with* the worship of Jehovah, so the Israelites had their foot in two religious camps. A mixed religion is very dangerous.

Zeph. 1:6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him.

God would also cut off “them that are turned back from the LORD.” This segment of the populace formerly worshipped God but fell away and rejected or forsook Him.

Finally, God would cut off “those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him.” These Israelites refused to seek God and the path of truth. They refused to inquire after Him.

Comment: In verses 4b-6, the King James punctuation is accurate. Five classes would be cut off for impure religious or nonreligious practices. A semicolon divides the classes, and commas separate couplets.

Reply: In other words, for 70 years, God would clean the land of all kinds of false worship and atheistic tendencies. Zephaniah went into detail to show just how *thorough* the Lord’s reform would be—a thoroughness that was guaranteed! Hearing the prophet’s words, Josiah tried to establish the reform, and he will be blessed in the Kingdom Age for his efforts, even though pockets of idol worship remained. He risked his kingship and suffered unpopularity for a while, but when temporal benefits began to accrue from his reform efforts, the people followed him. Josiah must have been a wonderful leader and very unusual to win the confidence and support of the people. Other prophets tried to effect a reform through their message and were persecuted as a result.

Zeph. 1:7 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.

Comment: This verse applies to natural Israel, but of course it has overtones for the Christian. Revelation 19:17 comes to mind with regard to a feast yet future: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God.”

Reply: Yes, that is true when the content is spiritualized.

“Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand.” In other words, “Be silent, and listen to what the Lord has to say about the coming day of wrath.” Back there the day of wrath was 606 BC, which is the primary picture. However, there is also a connotation with regard to the day of wrath coming on spiritual Israel at the end of the Gospel Age. Both Zephaniah and Jeremiah prophesied of the drastic experience that the nation of Israel would have at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

“Hold thy peace ... for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.” The situation is the same with us. God is bidding, consecrating, sanctifying, and preparing His guests. We are studying prophecy and know that the day of the Lord’s wrath is coming. We are blessed to be able to study and have fellowship on these matters.

The “guests” in the type were the witnesses of the 606 BC sacrifice. The Prophet Ezekiel discussed an end-of-the-age sacrifice, in which the fowl of heaven will be called to feed upon the carcasses in the Gog and Magog setting (Ezek. 39:17-22). Thus there is a double fulfillment.

Not only was God telling those of Judah what He would do, but also He was showing favor to those who would witness the trouble. The implication to natural Israel was that if they would *hearken* to Him, they might be spared in the coming trouble. As an illustration, God delivered two people from the trouble in 606 BC: Jeremiah and Baruch. In fact, orders were specifically given by King Nebuchadnezzar not to harm Jeremiah. Thus the Lord selected consecrated people in past ages, and He dealt with them on a different basis than with those who turned their backs on Him and worshipped Molech or the host of heaven. Generally speaking, the populace did not believe Zephaniah, but the sincerely consecrated did—and God has dealt favorably with that class in all ages.

Comment: In the antitype, the feet members will be accounted worthy to escape the trouble that is coming on the world (Luke 21:36).

Q: Josiah had a reverent, remarkable Passover, the largest ever. Is this sacrifice in Zephaniah a play on words, saying that God would have a huge sacrifice also, but an unfavorable one?

A: It is possible that Zephaniah was alluding to Josiah’s Passover, but what makes us think the bidding of the guests is favorable is the word “sanctified.” God “hath sanctified his guests” (see King James margin). A sanctified class was bidden to the feast. For instance, we study about future events and the *severe* trouble that lies ahead, but the Lord is showing favor by giving us advance information. Of course the sacrifice Zephaniah was describing was a holocaust, a burning, a consumption, but two classes were bidden to this feast: (1) the guests, a sanctified favorable class, and (2) those who would be slaughtered, or sacrificed, hence an unfavorable class. The guests were favored with information regarding God’s purposes because they inquired. He would punish those who were not interested and did not inquire, but the class who sincerely worshipped Him would not be included in the coming judgment.

Comment: In principle, it is like our telling the unconsecrated, “Seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger” (Zeph. 2:3).

Zeph. 1:8 And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD’S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.

The sacrifice, or slaughter, would involve the punishment of princes, the king’s children, and “all such as are clothed with strange [foreign] apparel,” that is, those who had mixed themselves with foreigners and had adopted foreign customs. In other words, the spirit of innovation in religious practices is dangerous. For example, when King Ahaz admired an altar

in Damascus, he had it copied and put in the Temple and gave it greater prominence than the authorized altar (2 Kings 16:10-14). Therefore, the term “strange apparel” signified the mixing of foreign doctrines and practices that were inimical to the true worship of Jehovah. Certainly the worship of the sun, moon, and planets was a foreign custom.

Q: Would “strange apparel” also indicate a wealthier class who had been trading and merchandising with foreigners, getting money from them as well as their customs?

A: Yes, the term indicates fraternization, commercially or otherwise, which is dangerous.

Q: Were the princes and the king’s children singled out for punishment because their responsibility was greater?

A: Yes, and that is what happened to Zedekiah, who was captured and taken to Babylon. His sons were slain before him, and then his eyes were put out. The leadership was more responsible.

Q: Would the leaders be the victims of this great slaughter? Would they be fed upon?

A: Yes. A holocaust was coming, but it was meant to be a cleansing agent.

Zeph. 1:9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.

“In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on [over] the threshold.” Some Bible expositors associate this verse with the time the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant. Dagon, their idol, subsequently fell and broke so that its hands were on the threshold (1 Sam. 5:4,5). We do not think that application is correct, but the incident did lead to a custom, not only in Israel but also in other nations, whereby people entering a temple did not step on the threshold because it was viewed as having an ominous effect. Nor does verse 9 refer to the judgment Isaiah saw in vision when the doorposts and the Temple shook (Isa. 6:4).

The term “the same day” hearkens back to verses 4-6 and 8, which list some of the categories of evildoers to be punished and put out of the land in the trouble of 606 BC: those who were turned from the right way to an evil way, those who were not interested in God, those who wore strange apparel, those who worshipped the host of heaven, etc. The category of servants, which is now being discussed in verse 9, has caused puzzlement to some because it sounds contradictory. The wording seems to say that the servants leaped over the threshold to enter their *own* master’s house. However, the thought is as follows. The “masters,” the nobility of Zephaniah’s day, those in positions of prestige and power, sent their servants out to rob and plunder *other* people. Thus the servants, *on behalf of* their masters, entered homes with impunity and plundered the less fortunate, robbing them of what little they had and bringing back the goods to enrich their masters. When the servants returned with the goods, they were filling “their masters’ houses with violence and deceit.”

This plundering can also be thought of as figurative; namely, the masters enslaved and enriched themselves on those underneath their authority, and the immediate servants in the household proper were guilty of participating in this practice.

Zephaniah was denouncing masters who became wealthy by acquiring ill-gotten gains from others. They and the plunderers in their employ would be punished. The literal sense of the Hebrew gives this thought. In other words, verse 9 is talking not about renegades who turned *against* their masters but about servants who acted *on behalf of* their masters.

Zeph. 1:10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills.

In 606 BC, “the noise of a cry [would come] from the fish gate, and an howling from the second [quarter], and a great crashing from the hills.”

Comment: The hills were farther way, and the Fish Gate was close at hand. Therefore, verse 10 prophesied that the people would hear the trouble approaching, getting closer and closer. The sound would increase the element of fear.

Q: A marginal Bible note states that the Fish Gate was the Damascus Gate. Is that note true?

A: Translators have difficulty identifying the Fish Gate. It was on the west side of the city of Jerusalem and toward the north. Thus it could be either the Damascus Gate or the Jaffa Gate. We are inclined to think it was the Jaffa Gate, which was on the direct route from the Mediterranean Sea, and of course that body of water had fish. The Damascus Gate was for those who wanted to travel the trade route north to Lebanon and Damascus.

The “second [quarter]” was the portion of the city that was near the Fish Gate. This area was not necessarily the city proper but was probably an addition to the city that was outside the Old City. People brought fish from the Mediterranean into this second quarter to be sold through the local merchants. In other words, wholesalers brought their wares to a certain segment of the city to be sold directly to the people by merchants. Incidentally, another gate, called the New Gate, which is between the Damascus Gate and the Jaffa Gate, was introduced when the Muslims built a wall around the city.

The “howling” from the second quarter suggests the fear and distress that the people would experience as the threat came nearer. A “great crashing from the hills” was the sound of the army approaching with their armaments. Zephaniah highly dramatized what the future trouble would entail. The enemy would approach from the northwest because Jerusalem was fairly well defended on all sides except in that area.

Zeph. 1:11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off.

Maktesh was another quarter, or segment, of Jerusalem that would be threatened, and it probably pertained to the silver merchants. The lower Tyropoeon Valley was conducive to this type of trade, for the soil was good for pottery making and smelting.

Comment: According to Young’s *Analytical Concordance*, the word *maktesh* means “depression,” which would fit the thought of a lower place.

Reply: The word *maktesh* also means “hollow.” In addition, the word can be defined as “mortar” in the sense of a crucible or a bowl in which a pestle is used for grinding. Thus *maktesh* as a “depression” or “hollow” can also have the thought of a bowl.

In summary, the second quarter was the market with regard to the Fish Gate and produce coming from the Mediterranean. The Maktesh quarter pertained to merchants dealing with silver, smelting, and making molds. Thus the account is discussing different sections of the city. Earlier the subject matter was the character of individuals and the judgment coming upon them. Now Zephaniah turned to sections of the city of Jerusalem and the type of people who

would be affected by the trouble. The point was that all segments of the populace would be deeply affected in 606 BC. Religious attitudes had a bearing, and now the merchants and particularly the financial or economic factors were being treated.

Zeph. 1:12 And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.

Those who tried to hide when the trouble came would be ferreted out by Nebuchadnezzar's army. In the past, an egg was "candled" to see the yolk and make sure the egg did not contain an embryo. Therefore, to search with a candle was a colloquial term meaning that the invading army would look in every nook and cranny to get both the parties in hiding and the goods that were secreted. Those who hid would be caught and their goods taken as booty.

Moreover, God would "punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil [that is, He will do nothing]." This class was content in their sins, thinking they could continue in their corrupt practices. They obtained their gain through fraudulent practices and at the expense of others.

"Lees" would be something that is literally thickened or made stable. The King James margin has "thickened on their lees." The figurative interpretation would be those who sit on their bottoms, or behinds. The individuals of this class were so content and comfortable in their corrupt practices that they were ensconced, stabilized, and at ease in their wickedness.

Comment: "Lees" are also thickened dregs, or sediment, that settles in the bottom of wine.

Reply: Yes. Those of this class were so settled and confident that they said in their heart, "God will not interfere."

Comment: Their attitude was that of an infidel.

Reply: That is true. They felt that God was so busy with His huge universe that He was not concerned about what was happening down here with earth's picayune populace. But actually, when we can see that this planet is the first place where God created human beings, we realize He is very much interested. Infidels believe there is a God but not a revealed God who will interfere, so this class continued in the wicked ways they loved.

Comment: Psalm 94:8-11 reads, "Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

Reply: Any thinking person with some degree of conscience should put two and two together to know he is doing wrong and have a foreboding sense about sin, even if he is not too religious. But those of this class were hardened and confident in their sin.

Zeph. 1:13 Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

Verse 13 shows the suddenness of the trouble, the invasion, especially when combined with verses 10 and 18 about the cries and the howling and the fact that God would make "a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." There is similar wording in Amos 5:11 and Micah

6:15, although the time frame is a little different. The people were enriching themselves with their gain, but all their stored-up goods, crops, and houses were in vain because the enemy would take them as booty and spoil.

Comment: Deuteronomy 28:30 lists this punishment as one of the curses, so if the Israelites had really studied their Hebrew scrolls, they would have realized how many times their prophets were echoing the words of Moses.

Reply: Yes, they should have taken the experiences as signs of ill favor from God. If obedient, they would prosper temporally and be increased with goods and defeat their enemies.

Comment: The Kingdom promises are the opposite. “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:21,22).

Zeph. 1:14 **The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.**

Q: Does verse 14 start a series of verses that, along with the type, have a little more emphasis on the spiritual end-of-the-age picture?

A: The Pastor discussed the Book of Zephaniah that way in a late chapter in the *First Volume* and, in fact, treated Zephaniah almost wholly from that standpoint, but certain statements in this first chapter could only apply to the type. However, there is the suggestion of the antitype at the end of the Gospel Age. The trouble of 606 BC, in which the city and the Temple were destroyed, was devastating from Judah’s standpoint. To the people, it was the day of God’s wrath, but behind the type are spiritual overtones. Writers have suggested that the trouble back there at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar was like nearby *hills* with a big, ominous *mountain* way off in the distance, the mountain being the greater antitypical fulfillment yet future. The Pastor zeroed in on the coming trouble. As we proceed, we will try to show how to equate both fulfillments.

“The great day of the LORD is near.” Zephaniah was saying that his predictions would not happen tomorrow but that they were near. The trouble was only about 50 years away, so it was as if the sound was already approaching.

“The mighty man shall cry there bitterly.” The warriors would try to defend Jerusalem and Judah, but upon seeing the enemy, they would feel drained because of being so vastly outnumbered. They would be completely disheartened and drained of any former confidence of their ability to thwart the impending disaster. The primary application was the coming doom of Jerusalem in 606 BC, but when we spiritualize the picture, we see the coming doom of Christendom, the false Jerusalem.

Q: Does this prophecy of Zephaniah relate in the type to Ezekiel’s lying 40 days on his side (Ezek. 4:6)?

A: Yes, the 40 days were specifically for Judah and Jerusalem. However, Ezekiel was in captivity in Babylon by the river Chebar, and Zephaniah was a prophet in the days of Josiah in Judah, as was Jeremiah. Part of Ezekiel’s prophecy overlapped the period of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. Habakkuk was another contemporary prophet, but we do not know just when. It is important to realize that there is a carefully considered purpose to the sequential arrangement of the books of the Bible. The order is Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, who were all

contemporaries, even though nothing in the first two books indicates a definite date. Only by analyzing Nahum and Habakkuk do we get the gist of a time frame from clues in certain verses. Of the major prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were contemporaries. In summary—and roughly speaking—five prophets preached contemporaneously: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. The ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel covered 40 or 50 years, and we estimate the length of Zephaniah’s ministry as 31 years.

Zeph. 1:15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

Paraphrased with a punctuation change, verse 15 states, “That day is a day of wrath: of trouble and distress, of ruin and desolation, of darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness.” When this verse is read alone, we would say it is a picture of the great Time of Trouble. The wording “a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” reminds us of Joel 2:2 and Zechariah 14:6,7. The destruction in 606 BC was devastating to Judah, yet it is only a mini-picture when compared to the trouble at the end of this age.

When we look at the spiritual picture, we have to carefully delete certain verses that apply only to the type and that will not have a fulfillment in the near future. For instance, verse 2 states, “I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD.” Verse 3 says, “I will consume man and beast; ... I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.” And verse 18 mentions, “The whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.” In 606 BC, these things literally happened. The land was laid waste with no inhabitants, but this will not happen in the future. These verses were addressed to *Israel*, to the Jew, whereas a *Holy Remnant* will be specially saved and brought through Jacob’s Trouble. As said in the Book of Jeremiah, “For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee [Israel]” (Jer. 30:11). The point is that some things which literally occurred in the past will not occur in the future. Similarly, in regard to the prophecies against Babylon in Jeremiah 50 and 51, some verses literally happened in the type that will not have a future application. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we have to modify some statements as having only an application in 606 BC, and other statements have a double fulfillment.

Zeph. 1:16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

Zeph. 1:17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

Zeph. 1:18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Verse 16 applied literally in the type, whereas the antitype is spiritually “a day of the [seventh] trumpet.” Based on other Scriptures, we can say that verse 16 has a double fulfillment because some of the companion Scriptures are only symbolic. Thus there is justification to quote certain verses (or portions of verses) from this first chapter of Zephaniah as being also applicable at the end of the Gospel Age. For example, verse 18 reads, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath.” As shown in other Scriptures, money will become worthless and meaningless, with buyer and seller alike being affected. Crops will not be grown even for personal use, for they would just be stolen. People will not go through sweat and toil only to lose the produce at the time of its maturity.

While not every wicked person will die in the coming Time of Trouble, the Scriptures do say that the brunt of the trouble will be on the heads of the wicked. The trouble will be chiefly directed against those who have oppressed and taken advantage of others. The poor will rise up against the rich. Waves of anarchistic masses will overflow the earth (stabilized society), so the latter verses of this first chapter have a twofold fulfillment—606 BC and the near future.

“The whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his [God’s] jealousy.” Zephaniah 3:8, which has a spiritual fulfillment, is worded similarly and thus is very pertinent to the end of the age. “For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” A large portion of the third chapter pertains to the end of the Gospel Age—in fact, so much so that it is like a different segment of the book. Chapters 1 and 2 have a double back and forth literal and spiritual significance. The primary emphasis is on the literal with a secondary spiritual application in some cases. Chapter 3 is primarily spiritual.

With regard to the fire in verse 18, God mentioned His wrath in the Book of Ezekiel. When the enemy comes down at the time of Jacob’s Trouble, God’s fury will rise up into His face, and He will destroy the forces of Gog and Magog. “And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face” (Ezek. 38:18). In that case, God will be delivering the Holy Remnant. Here in Zephaniah, God said He would take away from Israel the people, the Temple, and their city, and that is what happened in 606 BC. God made “a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.”

Q: Will we be going into more detail on the spiritual application?

A: The Pastor covered the antitype in the *First Volume*. The type, the literal application, must be studied in order to accurately discriminate between that which is literal and that which is spiritual. For example, Bro. Russell mentioned Papacy and its strange apparel, and of course the kings would be the civil governments. In studying the Minor Prophets, we try to consider the prophet and his message to his people. Then we can generalize the spiritual lessons.

The following are broad guidelines for studying the Book of Zephaniah:

1. Chapter 1 gives the background for the trouble that came especially on Judah in 606 BC. The bulk of chapter 1 is against natural Judah, but there are innuendos regarding Christendom.
2. Chapter 2 speaks of other nations that also received judgments.
3. Chapter 3 shows that the entire world will experience judgment in the coming great Time of Trouble. The principles for this judgment are laid down in chapter 1. As one proceeds through the Book of Zephaniah, it is like shifting gears and going more and more toward the spiritual application. Chapter 3 has a special end-of-the-age emphasis, with the spiritual being primary and the literal, the natural, being secondary.

Zeph. 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired;

The “nation not desired” is primarily Israel, and secondarily Christendom. But in what way is Israel a “nation not desired”? Israel needed judgment in Zephaniah’s day because of the corruption.

Comment: Another translation has, “O nation without desire for repentance.”

Reply: The advice to the Holy Remnant will be to *repent*. Those Jews who have the right heart condition will have a marvelous destiny. The Masoretic and RSV have, “O shameless nation.” Out of that shameless nation of Israel, Zephaniah was seeking the meek and righteous element who wanted to be hidden. Just as with John the Baptist, advice at the end of the age will go to three classes who are concerned: (1) true Christians (the consecrated), (2) nominal Christians (the general public), and (3) Israel (the Holy Remnant).

Zeph. 2:2 Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD’S anger come upon you.

“Before the decree bring forth [judgment].” The decree would not change, but before the pronounced judgment came, the people could still repent. Zephaniah repeatedly emphasized the word “before.” “*Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD’S anger come upon you [Israel, the ‘nation not desired’].*” Zephaniah prophesied about 50 years before the trouble of 606 BC. Each day that passed in the prophet’s life brought the judgment a little closer, so preaching this type of message was appropriate.

Zeph. 2:3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.

In the context of the first two verses, verse 3 is instructing that righteousness and meekness have to be acquired *before* the day of Jehovah’s wrath. Is there a distinction between those who “have wrought” (past tense) God’s judgment and the instruction to “seek righteousness, seek meekness”? We sometimes describe certain unconsecrated people we know as “good, kind, and trying to do what is right.” In other words, they are trying to do that which is right according to their limited understanding, but more is needed in connection with the impending judgment. They have to “*seek*” righteousness and meekness; that is, they have to do a little more in *pursuing* those qualities. The RSV reads, “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the LORD.”

In the previous chapter, Zephaniah’s pronouncement of the Lord was, “I will utterly consume all things from *off the land*... man and beast” (verses 2 and 3). With regard to the *land* in 606 BC, no distinction was made between the good and the bad, for the land was rid of *all* inhabitants so that it could fulfill its sabbaths. However, the bad, the majority, were consumed with death, and the good, a minority, were taken captive. When Zephaniah’s sobering message came, the people had to search their hearts and conduct, and if they wanted to please the Lord, the burden of their prayer and desire had to be to do God’s will even more diligently than they might have in the past and to hearken to Zephaniah as well as to the Old Testament.

The name Zephaniah means “the LORD *hides* or protects.” God overruled so that Zephaniah providentially got his name at birth—long before he preached this message about *hiding*. His name indicates that his role was to seek out and encourage, enlighten, and strengthen the class who were righteously inclined so that they would be hidden in 606 BC, the day of God’s wrath. Incidentally, a New Testament example of providential overruling is that the tree Zacchaeus climbed had to be planted a number of years before Jesus’ First Advent began and Zacchaeus came on the scene.

When John the Baptist warned of coming trouble, various classes who feared the trouble asked him what to do (Luke 3:7-14). Advice was given to each class, as follows:

1. *To the general populace:* If you have extra clothing or food, give it to those who have none.
2. *To the publicans:* Take only what is appointed to you and no more.
3. *To the soldiers:* Do no violence, be content with your wages, and do not falsely accuse anyone.

The people understood that there would be a baptism of “fire” (*trouble*) on the nation, especially on the wicked. The refuse would be destroyed in the coming day of fire. However, when asked for advice, John did not tell the people to consecrate. Instead he gave specific instructions to three different classes.

With regard to 606 BC, the antitypical counterpart of Zephaniah’s message to the Jews is a warning of the trouble that is to come on Christendom in the near future, that is, to all nations and the people who are professedly Christian. John the Baptist’s advice is also appropriate for the end of the age. For the unconsecrated who hearken to that advice, their chances for survival will be greatly enhanced.

In Zephaniah’s day, those who sought meekness and complied with his advice were favored by being taken into captivity instead of being slain. The Apostle Peter spoke of the spiritual counterpart for our day: “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous *scarcely* be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Pet. 4:17,18). In other words, “Seeing that we understand about the future and are looking forward to the Kingdom, wherein a new heavens and a new earth will replace the old, we, as Christians, should examine ourselves very carefully to be sure we really are trying to please God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.” Peter was talking about the *end* of the Gospel Age—our day—when the change is about to take place. He was urging sobriety and not just careless talk about the beautiful Kingdom. First will come very *soul-searching* conditions. The apostle’s advice is to *Christians*, not to the world.

Zephaniah’s advice to seek meekness and righteousness was addressed to the nation of Israel as a whole. And John the Baptist’s advice was addressed more or less to classes of “worldlings,” that is, the general public. Therefore, to “seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger” applies not to us but to the general public. Christians are not to go into a closet to be hidden at that time. *Only as new creatures* do we want to be covered and pass through the trouble and, by *God’s grace*, become members of the Little Flock or, by *His extra grace*, get life as part of the Great Company.

To repeat: Peter’s advice is addressed to the consecrated, whereas Zephaniah and John the Baptist gave advice more or less to the general public. With regard to Israel in the near future, the righteous class, the Holy Remnant, will be hidden—they are *guaranteed* survival—for they are “written” in the book of survivors (Dan. 12:1; Isa. 4:3). That class will be handpicked to live through the trouble that will occur when Michael stands up. Aside from Israel, the nominal people elsewhere who are trying to do good *may* be hidden if they follow general counsel; that is, there is no guarantee, but if they refrain from doing violence or defrauding others and stay out of the way of the Lord’s steamroller, their chances of survival will be better. With Christians, the goal is to be faithful *unto death*, to survive as *new creatures*, not according to the flesh.

Zeph. 2:4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up.

Zeph. 2:5 Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant.

Starting with verse 4, the rest of the chapter is directed to specific places, some of which exist today. With regard to the Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron, verse 4 had a fulfillment in the prophet's day. From that fulfillment, we will try to extrapolate a little further, but first, we will discuss the fulfillment back there. King Nebuchadnezzar laid waste the *whole* land in 606 BC. When Israel went into captivity for 70 years so that the land would enjoy her sabbaths, other areas were included as well, for the *whole* land had to rest.

Comment: The cities are listed from south to north: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.

Reply: Yes, those cities were in Philistine territory, and so were the Cherethites.

“The word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines.” This scathing remark refers indirectly to Ham, who migrated that way and inhabited the land. Eventually the land and the people became corrupt, being described as seven peoples: Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites, Hivites, Hittites, Jebusites, and Perizzites. In this instance, the term “Canaan” referred to “the land of the Philistines,” a people who, generally speaking, occupied the valleys, the lowlands, in a fairly large area south and west of Judah.

The Cherethites were Cretans from the Isle of Crete, who dwelled in the same area with the Philistines. They, too, would be judged.

Zeph. 2:6 And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks.

Zephaniah prophesied that the land would be desolate and forsaken in the coming judgment, but *later* it would be used for shepherds and flocks. When the Israelites returned in 536 BC from their 70-year captivity, they would take over the places, pasturage, and dwellings that were formerly occupied by these various peoples. These verses also apply to the near future in harmony with Psalm 83.

Zeph. 2:7 And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

“And the coast[land] shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah.” This prophecy had a fulfillment when the Jews returned from their 70-year captivity. They occupied the Mediterranean coastland of the Philistine territory just described including inland portions—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron—all of which were in the land deeded to Judah. Therefore, it was logical for those returning from captivity to go to their former places and territory. “They shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity [in Babylon].”

To understand prophecy clearly, we must first consider the literal. Then the account can be studied to see if there is a double picture, an antitype. Literal history is important. Now we can see that the prophet was slowly beginning to change gears to give an admonition that will be worldwide. A little of that admonition is in chapter 2, but the bulk is in chapter 3.

The “[Holy] remnant” at this end of the age will also occupy these places. In the literal application, the land was laid desolate in 606 BC. In the future, a little before Israel's deliverance

from Jacob's Trouble, Psalm 83 will have some bearing. Verse 7 of that Psalm mentions the Philistines. The whole Psalm is like an unuttered prayer of Israel that expresses the thinking of the people in the near future when they are threatened on all sides by the Arabs. Even today Israel has enemies within and without its borders, but the trouble will be felt more keenly in the future. For example, the Gaza Strip is a thorn to Israel *within* its borders, and hostile neighbors are thorns *without*. Psalm 83, a prayer for deliverance, does not tell about the outcome. The cry for help will go forth: "O Lord, deliver us, for we are surrounded on all sides by our enemies. O my God, make them like a wheel, as stubble before the wind. As the fire burns a wood, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire; so persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm" (Psa. 83:13-15 paraphrase). This Psalm shows the problem that exists and that will *persist* and become *even worse* as we go further into the future before Jacob's Trouble.

Psalm 83 does not say these places are destroyed, but it does pinpoint them. What will be the solution in the Kingdom for these enemies of Israel? These Arab peoples will have to become subservient to Israel, for out of Zion will go forth the law and from Jerusalem will go the pronouncement, the word of Jehovah (Isa. 2:3). People will have to hearken and obey.

Q: The contrast between verses 4 and 7 seems to be significant. Verse 4 says, "They shall drive out Ashdod *at the noon day*," and verse 7 states, "The remnant ... shall lie down [peacefully] *in the evening*." Is the thought that after the astounding defeat of the Arabs, there will be a little period of peace and prosperity for Israel before the final invasion of Gog?

A: Yes. God will help Israel to defeat the enemies—until the hordes come down from the north in the Gog and Magog situation of Ezekiel 38 and 39. The numbers will be so overwhelming at that time that Israel will have *no hope* until God fights for the Holy Remnant *miraculously* and *single-handedly*, as it were. God will fight for His people as "in the day of battle" (Zech. 14:3). Many Jews will want to fight, even though the odds seem hopeless, and depending on the heart condition, such individuals can be of the Holy Remnant. The city of Jerusalem will be taken—actually captured—before God saves the Holy Remnant (Zech. 14:2).

The thought is not necessarily that there is no hope in the Kingdom for the Philistines—those of Ashdod, Gaza, etc.—but that when the Kingdom is inaugurated, not many will be on hand. They will come forth from the tomb subsequently and be treated like the world and given an opportunity to gain everlasting life. Based upon their obedience, these "strangers" will be reckoned as citizens of Israel (Ezek. 47:21-23).

Back to the question that was asked about a portion of verse 4: "They shall drive out Ashdod *at the noon day*." The term "noon day" means "high noon," that is, a critical time of judgment like midnight. In hot climates, noon is siesta time, when activity ceases. Thus this judgment in the near future will be *sudden*. The Arabs will be taken by surprise and be unprepared; their guard will be down. The Companion Bible supports the thought of a siesta.

Zeph. 2:8 I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border.

The previous warning pertained basically to the Philistines. Now the reproach is directed against Moab and Ammon, who had taunted Israel and "magnified themselves against their border." This taunting occurred when the king of Assyria invaded the land and took the ten tribes captive. Particularly Ammon did the taunting because the territory of the Ammonites more or less bordered that of the ten tribes. When the ten tribes were removed, the Ammonites moved into their land. In other words, they viewed the adversity of the ten tribes as a godsend, and they added to the hardship of the ten tribes by taunting them during the

process of their being taken captive. Being very avaricious, the Ammonites took advantage of the goods and the land of the ten tribes. This spirit was manifested twice: when the ten-tribe kingdom was taken captive and when Judah went into captivity in 606 BC, which was future from Zephaniah's ministry and prophecy.

Zeph. 2:9 Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.

The making of Moab and Ammon as Sodom and Gomorrah, respectively, is one time period, and the end of verse 9, "the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them," refers to a later time period. Moab and Ammon were made a desolation when King Nebuchadnezzar took Judah and neighboring peoples captive around 606 BC—about 50 years future from Zephaniah's day. Moab and Ammon "shall be [future tense] as ... the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation." Although Psalm 83 does not show a judgment being inflicted, we can sense that quite a visitation will come on these Arab peoples shortly before Jacob's Trouble.

On a tour of Transjordan about 30 years ago, we went to the sites of some of the former big cities, of which Petra was one. Today the cities are in ruins, yet previously they were a civilization. Basically, no people are presently living in that whole area, as we witnessed in a four- to five-hour ride from Amman, the capital of Jordan, down to Petra, which is a considerable distance south of the Dead Sea. Other than a few little hamlets, this area is empty and barren almost 2,500 years later. According to the Kings and Chronicles accounts, hundreds of thousands of sheep and goats from this territory were given as *presents*, which means that *millions* of sheep and goats were being raised there. The paucity of animals today is the result of a long-time curse that has been on this land. Indeed there was a harsh fulfillment on Moab and Ammon in 606 BC. Jordan is an artificial country that people formed in more recent times in connection with the Hashemite kingdom. The name Amman has been retained from the past.

Incidentally, in a barren area near Petra, which is 100 to 200 miles from Sodom, there is evidence today of the volcanic destruction that rained on Sodom and Gomorrah. Pieces of lava are extensively scattered about, some with the appearance of canon balls, showing that a *violent* explosion occurred at the time of the destruction. Now we can better understand why, with their limited vision, the two daughters of Lot felt they were the only survivors on earth and wanted to have children by their father. The two sons who were subsequently born were Moab and Ammon.

We will again consider the end of verse 9: "The residue of my people [Israel] shall spoil them [Moab and Ammon]." Then the thought is repeated: "And the remnant of my people [Israel] shall possess them [Moab and Ammon]." The fulfillment will take place in the Kingdom when Israel's borders are expanded. In 536 BC, Cyrus gave a decree for the Jews to go back to their land, but history shows that, in addition, the other peoples were subsequently permitted to return to their land. Egypt was also taken captive and made desolate, yet secular history contains no such record of that nation being devoid of a population—or Moab or Ammon. Thus we can see how valuable the Bible is from a historical standpoint. Moreover, the Bible is very specific, whereas much of history that is considered reliable is written by man. Not only do most of these authors have very little knowledge, but they lived many years after the fact—sometimes thousands of years later. The Bible presents history in a methodical way, yet people do not worship the Creator or sufficiently appreciate His Word.

When the Israelites came back from Babylonian bondage, they built Zerubbabel's Temple. A

little later Nehemiah was given permission by the king of Persia to rebuild the walls of the city. With a shovel in one hand and a weapon in the other hand—that is, under very troublous conditions from hostile neighbors—the Israelites rebuilt first the Temple and later the city. They first settled in Judah in order to build the Temple, and afterwards some of them went up to the north and began to populate that land. Only a minority of those who returned from Babylon were from the ten tribes, but that minority gravitated back to the homes of their ancestors. The point is that we do not have any historical record of the residue of the people occupying much of that land. In his earthly ministry, Jesus did some preaching in Transjordan but relatively little. Therefore, this prophecy in the end of verse 9 is relegated to the future. In other words, the prophecy has not had a past fulfillment in the sense of occupying the large territories of Ammon and Moab.

Then there is the matter of the deed to the land. For instance, the Scriptures mention Gilead. In the Kingdom, Israel will be so densely populated that the Jews will spill over into Gilead, the northern part of Jordan, which is basically Ammon. Relatively speaking, Moab is the southern portion of Jordan. At the time of Moses, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh were deeded properties east of the Jordan River in what is now called Jordan. Moab and Ammon were cut in half, so each of these two nations suffered some occupation back in Moses' day. However, as time went on, they enlarged their territories. Verse 9 is saying that the remnant, the residue, are to occupy these territories. In other words, the deed given in Moses' day will be reactivated in the Kingdom Age to embrace not only land west of the Jordan River but also a large tract of land on the east side. Therefore, this "residue" and "remnant" will be the Holy Remnant, who survive Jacob's Trouble. As they multiply and increase, they will possess these other territories, not totally but to a large extent, as in Moses' day.

Psalm 83 pertains to the Arab conflict with the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and hostile neighbors such as Syria. The setting of that Psalm shows the Israelis being so frustrated with this situation and the dark picture in front of them that they are praying for help. Since the people have not yet prayed in the manner described, the Psalm suggests that the circumstances will become more and more grievous—in fact, to such an extent that they will call on Jehovah for relief as they feel threatened with *extinction*.

The first chapter of Zephaniah and part of the second chapter speak of the complete desolation that occurred when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land and left no inhabitants. Although the judgment to occur on the Arabs in the near future will not be utter desolation, there will, nevertheless, be devastating developments to remove the Arab threat. This judgment will solve the problems with Israel's more local and surrounding enemies, but not with the distant ones, who will be dealt with when God saves the Holy Remnant out of Jacob's Trouble.

After the strong defeat of the Arabs in harmony with the prayer of Psalm 83, there will come a little period of peace so that Israel can become a land of unwalled villages and get much "cattle and goods," that is, experience prosperity (Ezek. 38:11,12). Something has to happen to give the nation a temporary sense of security. At present, the surrounding hostile element would have no reservations in sending missiles with an atomic warhead into Israel. Thus the threat is becoming more and more real as time goes on. For Israel to have a measure of security before the Gog and Magog situation means the Arab threat has to be eliminated. We think that Israel will act against the Arabs when the so-called Christian nations are at loggerheads with war and confusion occurring throughout the earth. Then Israel will be able to deal with the threat without Western interference. For example, the United States, England, and Russia intervened with stern threats to stop the success of the last war when Israel could have conquered Egypt. Not all Arab inhabitants will be removed from the land but a sufficient number to give Israel a decided victory.

In summary, we believe there is a double picture here in chapter 2. The primary picture is the literal one back in 606 BC. The secondary picture pertains to our day with overtones of a problem and judgment in the near future.

Zeph. 2:10 This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts.

Because of the taunting, Moab and Ammon will receive harsh judgment. With regard to the destruction of the future, those who die will come forth from the grave in the general resurrection and be dealt with individually under Messiah's established, organized, controlled rod-of-iron government. The Moabites and the Ammonites will return to their lands but under new and changed circumstances. Thus, in spite of the destruction of life, cities, and places, they will have an opportunity for everlasting life just like the rest of the world of mankind under the New Covenant in the Kingdom Age of blessing.

Zeph. 2:11 The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.

Verse 11 is unquestionably future. The last part of the verse is interesting: "Men shall worship him, every one from his [own] place, even all the isles of the heathen." No rain will fall on any nation that refuses to send a *representative* element to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles in the Kingdom (Zech. 14:16,17). Thus verse 11 is saying that the majority of people will remain in their *resident* places and worship God from there, while sending a delegation to Israel to represent them and show their obedience and submission to the new order.

For a while, a greater responsibility will be laid upon the *Gentile eyewitness survivors* of God's intervention on behalf of the Holy Remnant in Jacob's Trouble. It will be incumbent upon them to return to Jerusalem annually for the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, so devastating and awesome will the events be in the rescue of the Holy Remnant that the eyewitnesses *will want to go back* to manifest and give evidence of their submission.

"The LORD ... will famish all the gods of the earth." For "famish," the King James margin has "make lean," that is, "starve." Thus a little ironic but constructive humor is interjected into the account. In the type, sacrifices were brought to various deaf and dumb idols that could neither move nor eat. Because offerings will no longer be brought in the Kingdom, the idols will figuratively starve. All false religions and forms of worship will be exposed as impure and false, and thus will experience starvation and elimination.

Zeph. 2:12 Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword.

Zeph. 2:13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness.

Zeph. 2:14 And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work.

Verses 12-15 are presented against a backdrop of the previous castigation of the lands of Canaan (the cities of the Philistines), Moab, and Ammon. The next areas against which God's wrath will be directed are Ethiopia and Assyria, Nineveh being the capital of Assyria at that time. The "Ethiopia" of Zephaniah's day was Egypt. (At that time in history, Ethiopia dominated and embraced Egypt.) Notice that the judgment is stated very briefly: Egypt "shall be slain by my [God's] sword." Based on other prophecies, such as in the Book of Isaiah, we

believe that only a portion of Egypt will be affected in the coming judgment.

More detail attends the judgment on Assyria. If we put ourselves back in the day when Zephaniah wrote this prophecy, Assyria was the world power. The Assyrians and their kings were very cruel people, continually fighting. Assyria and Nineveh would be thoroughly despoiled future from the prophet's day. This judgment first occurred at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's father, that is, before the visitation of judgment by his son on Ammon, Moab, and the Philistine cities. In league with other powers, Nebuchadnezzar's father successfully defeated Assyria, and Babylon was part of the booty he received. Subsequently Babylon not only became a separate government but grew into a world empire. Although Egypt and Assyria were earlier world powers, the setting of Daniel's prophecy began with Babylon as the head of gold (Dan. 2:38).

“He [God] will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria [Ethiopia, or Egypt, was to the south]; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness.” When Assyria was laid waste, the capital was no longer Nineveh but became Babylon, for Babylon was the world power that succeeded Assyria.

These places were made such a desolation that Nineveh was only discovered or unearthed in the twentieth century. Probably more ancient writings were found in a library in Nineveh from one of the last kings than in any other place. At least 20,000 to 30,000 cuneiform tablets were found. Incidentally, Assyria covered parts of modern-day Iraq and Iran.

“Nineveh [would become] a desolation, and dry like a wilderness.” Desert sands covered this place and left only a few pillars, or columns. For example, what is called Baalbek in Lebanon has some gigantic stone pillars and nothing else. Nineveh is similar, although the columns are not as well preserved. Thus Zephaniah prophesied that Nineveh would become dry like a wilderness with the sand creeping in. The irrigation would stop, so there would be no vegetation. Birds perched on the top of the pillars and came in to lodge in the upper lintels and columns of the buildings. In other words, Nineveh became so desolate that birds which normally would be frightened by civilization and avoid the city moved in. The same was true with the wild beasts, so that Nineveh became a habitation of wild creatures such as hyenas.

The voices of the cormorant and the bittern would “sing in the windows.” These “windows” were open with no glass; they were openings on top of columns that allowed light to penetrate and thus illuminate the temples. Above the windows was a roof, or a covering. The birds perched and lodged there and chirped and sang. Zephaniah was describing a picture of utter desolation with the sounds of birds and wild creatures. For example, in the Temple of Dendara in Egypt, the guide who led us up an ancient staircase shouted and clapped his hands to scare away any bats, scorpions, or vipers.

“He shall uncover the cedar work.” Presidential palaces were paneled with cedar. Since the giant cedars were large trees, the logs were especially prized. Conquerors took the cedar work as a spoil and used it to panel their own temples. It not only beautified their structures but was like a trophy of the victory.

Comment: Leeser says, “Ruin shall be on the thresholds; for the cedar wainscoting shall be torn away.”

Zeph. 2:15 This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

“This is the rejoicing city that [previously] dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in!” Notice the exclamation point. “Every one that passeth by her shall hiss [whistle], and wag his hand.” The traveler who came on this situation whistled and wagged his hand, the latter expression meaning that he pinched his nose in disgust and waved his hand to indicate he wanted no part in the matter.

Nineveh’s boast reminds us of Revelation 18:7 with regard to Papacy or Catholicism: “How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” Isaiah 47:8 applies to Babylon, or Chaldea, “Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children.” Just as literal Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar boasted, and both the king and the empire had to be humiliated, so spiritual Babylon boasts and will be destroyed. Nineveh is also a picture of Papacy, or spiritual Babylon. Incidentally, Nineveh was destroyed 40 years after the repentance in Jonah’s day.

Comment: Verse 15 is a proof text that the Vatican will literally be destroyed.

Reply: Yes, that thought is certainly suggested, even though there are no details. The Vatican will become a stench.

Zeph. 3:1 **Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!**

Zeph. 3:2 **She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God.**

The pronoun “her” refers to Jerusalem in the type and to the professed people of God, nominal Christendom, mystic Babylon, in the antitype. Verse 1 is a summation, and subsequent verses provide details: “Woe to her that is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!” (RSV). She was rebellious because she “obeyed not the voice [the message of God’s prophets]; ... received not correction [refused instruction]; ... trusted not in the LORD; ... [and] drew not near to her God.” In verses 1-7, the natural application is primary.

Zeph. 3:3 **Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow.**

Verse 3 pertains to the civil leaders, likening the princes and the judges to ferocious, voracious, greedy animals that devour the prey in their hunger. As “roaring lions,” the princes use their voices to paralyze the prey, seize it, and eat it. As “evening wolves,” which hunt in packs at night, the judges ravenously devour the prey, even the bones. For verse 3, the Revised Standard has, “Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning.”

Zeph. 3:4 **Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.**

Verse 4 pertains to the religious leaders. Judah’s prophets were “light” in the sense that they did not take seriously the predictions and warnings of Scripture but read them superficially. They did not prepare the people for the trouble that was to come. In other words, they treated the Word of God *lightly*. Consequently, they abused their very mission of instructing the people. In addition, Judah’s prophets were “treacherous.”

Comment: The word “treacherous” is a reminder of the Epistle to Jude, which warns about teachers in the true Church who are like dangerous hidden shoals underneath the surface of the water. By failing to give proper instruction at the end of the Gospel Age, especially along moral lines, the teachers are causing the shipwreck of themselves and others.

Reply: Yes, they are like a broken reed that, instead of giving support to those who need help, snaps and pierces them in the side. These criticisms apply equally to type and antitype.

Comment: Micah 3:5,11 is pertinent. “Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.... The heads [civil rulers] thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.” While judgment was imminent for Judah, the priests and the false prophets were saying, “Peace, for everything is fine. No evil can befall us because God is among us.” The very next verse, Micah 3:12, warns that Jerusalem “shall become heaps.” “Jerusalem” in this context means Judah, the two-tribe kingdom, for the ten-tribe kingdom had already been taken into captivity.

Reply: The third chapter of Micah shows the motivation of the civil and religious leaders: money, reward, profit. The princes, the judges, and the prophets twisted the interpretation of God’s Word to suit the circumstance that would profit and/or benefit them. For example, the false prophets spoke peace and nice, smooth things, whereas the Scriptures prophesy warnings and admonitions of dangers to come.

How did Judah’s priests pollute “the sanctuary” and do “violence to the law”? One of the priests’ duties was to give instruction on how to distinguish between the clean and the unclean. Instead of providing guidelines and advice for proper decision making on this subject, they interpreted the Law in a bland and superficial way. Moreover, they accepted bribes and then favored the rich in their decisions.

Comment: A modern-day example of polluting the sanctuary occurs when priests and ministers who commit immoralities are not disciplined scripturally.

Reply: That is true, for they are usually conveniently transferred to another jurisdiction instead of being excommunicated.

Comment: The priests also made innovations in worship and added traditions of men, making null and void the Word of God (Matt. 15:6).

Zeph. 3:5 **The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.**

What is verse 5 stating in effect? Why did Zephaniah say that Jehovah in their midst “will not do iniquity”? The inference is that in all climes and conditions, God has *faithful* ministers and prophets who instruct those who have an ear to hear. God is faithful and just to make this provision, but who responds? Since the true prophets were in the minority, the people listened to the false prophets. For example, they hearkened to the 450 prophets of Baal rather than to Elijah, the *one* true prophet.

Comment: Zephaniah showed a contrast between the judges who were “*evening* wolves,” doing their work at night under cover of darkness, and God’s judgment, which comes in the *morning* light.

Reply: Yes, God brings justice to light every morning; He fails not.

Zeph. 3:6 I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.

Comment: If the people had stopped and considered, they would have realized that God has manifested justice, judgment, and punishment at different times in history. They should not have been so complacent in their sins.

Reply: That thought is true in a broad sense. For instance, a situation like Sodom and Gomorrah was crying for retribution, and that judgment was made manifest on the pages of history. However, chronology and history play a part here. Zephaniah preached in the days of King Josiah, which was about 50 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 606 BC.

But notice that verse 6 is stated in the past tense and hence refers to the judgment that had already occurred on the ten tribes at the hands of the king of Assyria. They were taken away earlier, and the cities were left without inhabitant. Now God was saying to the two tribes through the Prophet Zephaniah, “I have judged your kinsmen, and look what happened to them. Their cities were destroyed, their houses were rifled, and they are in captivity. Can’t you learn from their example? I, the same God of Israel, brought that judgment.”

If Judah would learn the lesson, their dwellings would not be cut off like those of the ten tribes. But Judah ignored the lesson and “rose early, and corrupted all their doings” (verse 7). Those of the two tribes went on about their daily procedures, continuing in habitual wrong habits and practices, as though nothing had happened.

Q: How does the spiritual lesson fit in here?

A: This verse does not apply to Christendom. We first have to understand the natural picture, and then later we can glean spiritual lessons from the part that applies to mystic Babylon. For example, in the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah, a half or a third of a verse may be spiritually based on a “thus saith the LORD” elsewhere. But here in verse 6, God destroyed the cities so that *no* inhabitants remained, and that destruction occurred *before* God gave this warning to Judah, whereas spiritual Babylon’s destruction will occur *after* God’s warning to Christendom.

Comment: An important principle to learn is that God’s punishment and justice will come for disobedience.

Reply: That statement will be especially true in the near future when Christendom does things that are a reminder of the Dark Ages. At that time, those who are wise-hearted will see the superficiality, the veneer, and the atrocious deeds of Christendom—that the system is like a whitewashed wall. The future persecution of true Christians will be a revealing repeat of past history, manifesting the injustices of Papacy and also those of Protestantism. From this standpoint, the “her” of verse 1 would be primarily the mother system, Roman Catholicism, although the daughters will share in that judgment to a certain extent.

However, in verse 6, Zephaniah was saying to Judah, “You have not learned the lesson of what happened to the ten tribes.” In contrast, the spiritual fulfillment is still future and will occur when Papacy and Protestantism begin to commit the same misdeeds that were done in the Dark Ages. The vast majority of the people living today know very little about past history.

Zeph. 3:7 I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling

should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

“I [God] said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their [Judah’s] dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them.” God had dealt with Judah in the past, instructing them with judgments, and He would bring a few more. In other words, between Zephaniah’s message in the days of King Josiah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 606 BC, God rendered certain judgments. For instance, Judah’s King Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt, and King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon. In addition, some of the elite Israelites, such as Daniel and the three Hebrew children, were taken captive to Babylon prior to 606 BC. These judgments were further evidences that Judah should have received instruction, but instead the two tribes persisted in wrongdoing, rising early and corrupting all their doings. The Pastor used the term “the irrepressible conflict,” meaning that the judgment piled up and up until finally God’s fury reached the boiling point and spilled over. Judah was not heeding what was happening.

Zeph. 3:8 Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

Zeph. 3:9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

Invariably, we use verses 8 and 9 in witnessing to show in what *manner* the earth will be destroyed; that is, a people will remain here on earth after the great Time of Trouble, and God will turn to them “a pure language, [so] that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”

Rather than review what is so familiar to all of us, we will go into some other points. What other Scriptures does verse 8 call to mind that dovetail with this prophecy of Zephaniah?

1. God’s “determination ... to gather the nations” reminds us of Ezekiel 38:1-9,18 with regard to Gog and Magog’s coming down to *Israel* in association with a number of other peoples. At that time, God’s fury will come up into His face.
2. God’s assembling the kingdoms to pour upon them His indignation, even all His fierce anger, sounds like Revelation 16:14,16, where the kings of the whole earth will be gathered together to *Armageddon*, “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”
3. In Joel 3:2, God says He will “gather all nations, and will bring them down into the *valley of Jehoshaphat*.”
4. Zechariah 14:2 states that God “will gather all nations against *Jerusalem* to battle.”

Comment: Zephaniah spoke of wolves and lions as animals of prey, picturing the greedy civil element. In contrast, God states, “Wait ye upon me ... until the day that *I* rise up to the prey.”

Q: Will God’s rising up to the prey be contemporaneous with Michael’s standing up (Dan. 12:1)?

A: Both events will occur about the same time. Michael’s standing up pertains to the deliverance of the Holy Remnant from Jacob’s Trouble. At that time, God will go forth and

fight against the nations and for His people as He previously fought in the day of battle (Zech. 14:3). Judgment will be visited on those who are not in heart kinship with the Lord at that time.

Depending on context, the word “then” can mean either “subsequently” or “contemporaneous with.” In verse 9, “then” has the thought of *subsequently, afterwards, or following* what was said in verse 8. After God gathers the nations to pour upon them His fierce anger, He will turn to the people a pure language so that they may call upon His name and serve Him with one consent.

Q: Is the thought of a “pure language” twofold? (1) There will be united worship with a pure religion whereby the people can all call upon God and serve Him with one consent. (2) There will be one language. Just as languages were confounded at Babel, so the condition will be reversed in the Kingdom (Gen. 11:5-9).

A: Yes, the language barrier will be removed so that the people can have unified thought. A common language goes a long way toward speaking with understanding. Therefore, the concept of one language seems to be implied in verse 9. In addition, the language will be “pure,” that is, without hypocrisy or error, for truth will be revealed on all subjects.

What is the thought of all calling upon the name of Jehovah and serving Him “with one consent”? In the Hebrew, the word “consent” is “shoulder.” To serve God with one shoulder means that all nations—a variety of people with different cultures—will pull together *in unison*. The picture is of a yoke, or a wooden bar that is attached, so that all are pulling in unison. For example, if individuals want to remove a tree from the ground, someone will say, “Get ready. One, two, three.” On the count of three, everyone pulls in unison. For the people to have unison in worship, there will have to be one language, proper understanding, unison of effort, and cooperation. The government will be upon Jesus’ “shoulder” in the Kingdom; that is, he will assume the responsibility of government in the next age (Isa. 9:6).

Zeph. 3:10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.

The “rivers of Ethiopia” are the Blue Nile and the White Nile. To find the source of the Nile River, one has to travel perhaps 1,500 or 1,800 miles. Hence “beyond the rivers of Ethiopia” is like saying “from the ends of the earth” or “from every corner of the earth.”

Q: What constituted “Ethiopia” back there?

A: Ethiopia was larger at that time, for it included Egypt, Nubia, Abyssinia to a certain extent, and present-day Ethiopia.

The “daughter of my dispersed” would be the scattered Holy Remnant in other parts of the earth. In other words, all Jews who survive Jacob’s Trouble will be handpicked—*wherever* they live in the world. The selectivity of survivors of the Gog and Magog invasion will include not only Jews in Israel proper but also Jews elsewhere who have been marked to become part of the nucleus of the Kingdom.

The “suppliants” are probably Gentiles who will ship the surviving Jews in their lands back to Israel. We are inclined to think that verse 10 should be rendered a little differently. Correctly translated, it should read, “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my suppliants shall bring mine offering, even the daughter of my dispersed.” For instance, Isaiah 66:20 mentions that the Gentiles will bring the Jews back to their homeland in all types of conveyances. “And they [the Gentiles] shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon

horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.” The Gentiles will make the offering, showing that they are now in sympathy with the new government. The blindness will be removed from both Jews and Gentiles in that day. In addition, other Scriptures show that the Gentiles will bring gifts and will help in the restructuring and in the building of Israel’s walls (Isa. 60:10).

Zeph. 3:11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain.

Verse 11 should start with a question: “In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me?” The answer is yes. “For then I will purge out [remove] those who are proud because my Kingdom is holy” (paraphrase). Those who remain will be the Holy Remnant—those who are in harmony with the “holy mountain.” Those with pride and wrongdoing will be removed in a weeding-out process. The “shame” of the Holy Remnant will be so noticeable that it will go a long way toward converting Gentiles when they witness the changed, contrite Jew (Ezek. 39:26).

Zeph. 3:12 I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.

The “afflicted and poor people” will be the Holy Remnant—a humble, contrite, repentant, purged Jewish element (Isa. 4:3,4). Although the information on the Holy Remnant is scattered in the Old Testament, a little here and a little there, it is plentiful with numerous references.

Zeph. 3:13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

Verse 13 is a further description of the Holy Remnant. When Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, they were meeker and more docile, and under the encouragement of Zerubbabel and Haggai the prophet, they did rebuild the Temple. However, as time went on, they reverted back to their old ways and nature. Therefore, verse 13 is speaking of a faithful *holy* “remnant” yet future. To a certain extent, verse 12 covers the Jews who came back from Babylonian captivity, but verses 12 and 13 are really zeroing in on the end of the Gospel Age. The Holy Remnant “shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.” When the Kingdom is inaugurated, “they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”

Q: Are Gentiles included in these verses?

A: Yes. Zephaniah spoke about the filthy, polluted nation of Israel and how God would mete out judgment for cleansing and have a Holy Remnant. But the picture embraces the Gentiles as well, showing that their behavior will also change. Of course they will be selected in broad terms and will not be handpicked like the Holy Remnant.

Comment: Verses 8 and 9 are a worldwide picture. Then verse 10 starts to zero in on the Holy Remnant and their conversion, or reformation, when God delivers them.

Reply: Yes. The conversion of the Holy Remnant will occur quickly, whereas the cleansing of the Gentiles will take the entire Kingdom Age. The general advice to Gentiles prior to the great Time of Trouble will be like that of John the Baptist—they are to pay their debts, be satisfied

with their wages, do violence to no man, etc.

Comment: Verse 9 will cover a long period of time. A “pure language” will be given to the people for the purpose of calling on the name of Jehovah and serving Him with one consent. However, not every Gentile survivor of the Time of Trouble will necessarily be so submissive. Then, starting with verse 10, the subject switches to the purged, contrite element, the Holy Remnant, who will serve God.

Reply: Yes. It will take time for the Gentiles to learn this universal language. The generation who survive the Time of Trouble, both Jews and Gentiles, will be instructed. Many Gentiles will say to the Jews, “We have heard that God is with you. We will go up to the mountain of the LORD so that He will teach us of His ways” (paraphrase of Isa. 2:3 and Zech. 8:23).

Zephaniah strongly castigated Israel: “You are filthy! You are corrupt from the top of your head to the tip of your toes—your princes, your prophets, your priests, and your judges!” His hearers would have felt he was using tough and insulting talk, likening them to ravening wolves. In referring to their condition, the prophet spoke *truth boldly*. Most of his hearers were angry, but the right-hearted element hearkened and looked inward. Thus Zephaniah gave a *carte blanche* condemnation of the people, yet among them were some with a proper heart condition. While his message was helpful in his day in regard to encouraging the people to go back to Israel and build the Temple, he was actually addressing individuals in our day. The main thrust will be fulfilled when God assembles all nations in the near future. While some of these verses had a partial application back there in the prophet’s day, the primary emphasis is on the end of the Gospel Age.

Zeph. 3:14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Zeph. 3:15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

Jehovah will be credited with the deliverance of the Holy Remnant, even though He will act through The Christ. The Saviors who come up on Mount Zion are the channel for bringing this blessing under the headship of Christ, yet the blessing will be attributed to God (Obadiah 21). The *King of Israel* will fight for and reign over His people. In speaking of the reign, Revelation 11:15 joins Jehovah with Christ. “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord [Jehovah], and of his [Jehovah’s] Christ [Head and body]; and he [Jehovah] shall reign for ever and ever.” God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained; whereof he [God] hath given assurance unto all men, in that he [God] hath raised him [Jesus] from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Jehovah will be *the King*, and Jesus will be a *subservient King*. The reign will be God’s, but He will purposely leave hands off and let Christ do the reigning on His behalf so that the people can be judged. Otherwise, when people sinned, they would go into Second Death right away. At the end of the Millennium, Jehovah will be the sole King, for Jesus will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, who will then be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Zeph. 3:16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.

Comment: The word “slack” is “faint” in the King James margin. Thus verse 16 goes back a little in time, that is, prior to the deliverance of the Holy Remnant from Jacob’s Trouble.

Reply: Yes, verse 16 is the encouraging message that will be given to the Holy Remnant to help them in view of what God is about to do. The Jewish survivors of Jacob's Trouble will be those who lift holy hands and hearts to Jehovah. The message at the end of the age *must tell* of the coming holocaust and then encourage the Jews to seek Jehovah.

Zephaniah warned of trouble coming on the nation of Israel because of their sinful condition, but he also gave instruction about the Holy Remnant. Both elements are needed in the message to be given in the near future. It can be spoken *authoritatively* to the Holy Remnant that if they are honest in their thinking and set their heart in prayer and in the worship of Jehovah, they will be spared. It will be said to them, "Do not be afraid, for the trouble will not come nigh thee."

Zeph. 3:17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save [the holy and the meek]." To the contrary, those who have perversely wrought judgment will not be spared. The top echelon of the nation, in their various categories, is corrupt and must change. Both back in Zephaniah's day and today, the leadership in Israel is corrupt, yet we cannot judge the hearts of individuals. The Scriptures assure us that the present leadership will be ousted and replaced in the Kingdom by the Ancient Worthies.

The fact that Israel has not repented as a nation shows that the people's heart condition as a *whole* is wrong and that they are not fit for the coming redemption. The people have not donned sackcloth, put ashes on their heads, cried, beat their breasts, and prayed unitedly to Jehovah. Nevertheless, in the midst of the nation is a right-hearted element, the Holy Remnant, who have not yet been in a position to make their voice heard. Accordingly, the Gentile perspective is currently on the nominal whole rather than on the afflicted few. When the Holy Remnant is brought to the fore, the Gentiles will see a completely different element. Many Gentiles are offended with the Jew because they think in a negative fashion in regard to business dealings, but God knows who He is choosing for the Holy Remnant. The rulership of earth today consists of the great, the mighty, the rich, and the educated, for the "poor people" who are in a more proper heart condition are bypassed (Zeph. 3:12). A wonderful time is coming, and the Lord knows what He is doing. There will be great rejoicing when the Kingdom is inaugurated in Jerusalem.

"He [Jehovah] will joy over thee with singing." Although God's voice will not be heard down here on earth, this verse proves that the Heavenly Father sings. The Bride class and the heavenly host will hear His magnificent voice.

Jehovah "will rest in his love, he will joy over thee." *Inwardly*, God will rest ("be silent"—KJV margin) in His love for the Holy Remnant. *Outwardly*, He will joy over them with singing; He will manifest His joy. In other words, what is inside—the thrill and the joy—must have an outlet.

Zeph. 3:18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

"I will gather them that are sorrowful ... to whom the reproach of it [the filthy, polluted nation, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter] was a burden." The individuals who comprise the Holy Remnant will take the message to heart and feel it personally as Daniel did. Various races of mankind have certain bad national traits or habits. For example, the Apostle Paul called the Cretans "liars," not meaning that literally 100 percent of the people were liars but a goodly

proportion (Titus 1:12). We see undesirable characteristics in other races as well. Only in the Kingdom will such traits be corrected—and even then, only in those individuals who hearken to the Lord’s instruction. The situation is beyond *human* redemption.

The point in verse 18 is that the humble class Zephaniah was speaking about—the Holy Remnant—see that the Gentiles hate the Jews. However, the hatred is due not to their own actions but to what the majority of Jews are doing. The reproach of Zephaniah’s message at the end of the present age will deeply affect the Holy Remnant. Prior to their full acceptance, they will be “sorrowful” and will cry and wail. The “solemn assembly” suggests the Third Temple with appointed feasts and observances.

Zeph. 3:19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

Verse 19 suggests that part of the Holy Remnant will be in other nations.

Zeph. 3:20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

Verse 20 refers to the *second* regathering, that is, to the regathering of Jews back to Israel *after* Jacob’s Trouble.

Comment: Verse 20 is a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 26:18,19, “And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken.”

Reply: Yes, chapter 26 is very remarkable. At that time, “it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23). The Gentiles will realize the Holy Remnant are a changed people.

Comment: Verse 20 is good in the Revised Standard: “At that time I [Jehovah] will bring you home, at the time when I gather you together; yea, I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes.”

The “captivity” to be turned back needs a little explanation. A regathering work that is quite numerous is going on now, *before* Jacob’s Trouble, but another regathering will take place *after* Jacob’s Trouble, as described by Zephaniah. Thus there are *two* regatherings back to the homeland. A failure to distinguish between the two can cause a lack of definition with some prophecies. God will reverse the Jews’ captivity and bring back to Israel that segment of the Holy Remnant which is saved in other lands.