

Restoration

A VISION OF RESTORATION

Focal Verses • ZEPHANIAH 3:14–20

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISCERN** the need for the just restoration of God's people; **PURSUE** trusting God for victory, hope, and renewal; and **CELEBRATE** the return of joy and God's glory in salvation.

In Focus

Indeed, it was a day of rejoicing! People were singing and praising God. A few years earlier, Chanel had been diagnosed with kidney disease. The only cure was a kidney transplant. The doctors were not hopeful because her blood type was rare, and she was in her early thirties. Her mother and aunt were mighty prayer warriors, and the church was supportive, but she was unsure if God would answer her prayers for a new kidney. Chanel's father started waning in his faith, but he tried to put on a good front for her.



One day, her doctor called and asked if she could come to his office within the hour. As she rushed out of the office, she called her parents, Miriam and Craig, and asked if they could meet at the doctor's office. They agreed and were there as Chanel walked quickly up the stairs to the doctor's office. The nurse, Lottie, asked them all to take a seat in the doctor's office. The doctor walked in, and Chanel could see the sparkle in his eyes. She smiled and jumped with joy when he said, "Chanel, we have found your kidney match."

Chanel shared her wonderful news during prayer service, and everyone began singing and praising God.

How do you celebrate your blessings from God? Identify ways you respond to God's restoration when He blesses you the way you want. How do you respond to God when He answers your prayers differently than you desire?

Keep in Mind

"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" (Zephaniah 3:19, KJV).

Focal Verses

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

Zephaniah. The first verse of Zephaniah's book of prophecy identifies his father as a Cushite, or Ethiopian, descended from King Hezekiah. Because he mentions the presence of pagan priests, the worship of Baal, and the practice of astrology in Judah, Zephaniah's ministry probably began around the time of the religious reforms undertaken by King Josiah in 621 BC. His position among other prophets is unique in that he prophesied during a period of revival. Zephaniah's message is clear: Judah's indifference and stubborn refusal to obey God would bring His wrathful judgment. This judgment would be threefold and would involve purifying, purging, and restoration. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and was one of the last prophets before the captivity.

Background

In Zephaniah 1 we learn that he is a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah led a religious reform that focused on serving the Lord alone and removing all other religious

relics, attire, and practices. Many scholars assume that Zephaniah prophesied before Josiah's reform and perhaps while the king was a child (cf. 2 Kings 22:1). According to Zephaniah, the day of the Lord is coming, and it is a day of judgment. God will judge the Children of Israel for worshiping foreign gods and mixing worship of the Lord with other religious practices (Zephaniah 1:5–6). God will judge the princes, judges, priests, and prophets who lie, oppress, and eagerly increase corruption—despite all of God's warnings (3:3–7). God will judge the enemies of Israel who at one time have oppressed them. God will not spare the wicked. They will be cut off, ruined, and desolated. In the process, God will judge the whole earth. But there will be a remnant of humble people from near and far that God will bring together. This remnant shall serve the Lord and do no wrong.

It can be hard to read about God's judgment. What reactions do you have when you learn about it in Zephaniah?

At-A-Glance

1. Zion Sings a Song of Joy (Zephaniah 3:14–15)
2. God Sings a Song of Joy (vv. 16–18)
3. Full Restoration (vv. 19–20)

In Depth

1. Zion Sings a Song of Joy (Zephaniah 3:14–15)

After nearly two and a half chapters of judgment, it is only fitting that Zephaniah would pen this song of joy and invite the Children of Israel to sing and rejoice. Just five verses prior, the prophecies of judgment turned into a message of hope. God's wrath is not the final word. God will give the people clean lips, and all of God's scattered children will worship and serve God on one accord. There will be peace, and they will have nothing to fear. This vision of unity and serenity invites the Children of Israel to praise the Lord because God acts on their behalf. God has removed any judgments against them. God has removed their enemies from oppressing them. And that same God is among them.

What song would you sing in response to how God has moved in your life?

2. God Sings a Song of Joy (vv. 16–18)

God's love restores the soul and spirit of the Children of Israel. In these verses, Zephaniah declares that there is a new day. This day is the day God will be a warrior who brings victory. This day brings God's rejoicing and renewal of God's people. Previously, the Israelites had undergone distress, anguish, and bitter cries (Zephaniah 1:14–15); now is the day of God singing. How great must this day be if it causes God to bring forth a song? He promises to lovingly gather the mournful and remove their disgrace with His love.

Close your eyes and imagine how you would feel if God started singing over you. What would cause the Lord to sing today?

3. Full Restoration (vv. 19–20)

In these final verses, we are reminded that God's restoration is complete. While the previous verses deal with the remnant's spiritual, emotional, and mental wellness, these verses address their social location. They have been oppressed, cast away, and robbed of their fortune. They did not get to experience whatever goodness came with their identity. Instead they were mocked and shamed for it. Due to their social location, they were treated as inferior. God promises to do more than remove their oppressors. God promises to bring the remnant together, give them a good name, and restore their fortunes. In this final vision, there is no lack in the remnant. They are full relationally because God loves them. They have an identity, and they have a community of gathered people. They are full socially because those who were not able to help themselves are in God's care, and they have full access to their fortunes.

What makes our restoration complete?

Search the Scriptures

1. God promises to do a lot of things in these verses, yet the Children of Israel are only asked to do two things: sing and fear not. Why do you think that these are the actions the prophet and the Lord asked them to take?

2. How is God's forgiveness at work in this text? (v. 15)

Discuss the Meaning

In order to truly appreciate today's readings, one must read the entire book of Zephaniah. It is only then that the full weight of God's redemption and restoration is clear. Just when it looked like there was no hope for redemption, God turns it all around and establishes a new

world order with God, the King of Israel, in charge. The Lord creates a kingdom where there is no suffering, no oppression, no shame, no enemies, and no disaster. Even their enemies are turned away or have clean lips (cf. 3:9), and they are forgiven people. All of their idolatry is behind them. The Children of Israel can live free from fear. Their God has given them the victory.

How do we trust God to bring victory in our lives today?

Liberating Lesson

Zephaniah paints a complex picture of restoration. Many changes are necessary in order for God’s children to be fully restored to a new day. God must turn from wrath, God’s people must turn toward serving God only, God’s people must turn away from oppressing each other, and enemies must turn away from oppressing God’s people. It seems nearly impossible to believe that all of this change can come, especially when we have suffered for so long. Yet there are two lessons from this reflection. We as God’s people can make different decisions that turn us in the right direction and make us active participants in our own restoration. Furthermore, Zephaniah reminds us that we do not act alone. God turns from wrath, God changes us, and God turns away our enemies. Restoration is only possible because God is in our midst.

How can we as a church participate in our own restoration? How has God changed us?

Application for Activation

1. Replace praise and worship with a traditional testimony and song service during a regular service to focus on responding to the Lord with joy.

2. Read Martin Luther King, Jr.’s book *Strength to Love*.

3. Plan a trip to your local museum that focuses on Black history and has a debriefing session on the impact.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Allen, I. C. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976.
Baldwin, J. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972.
Barker, Kenneth L. *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. Vol. 20, The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.
Keil, C. F. *The Twelve Minor Prophets: Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Trans. J. Martin. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954.
Ralph L. Smith. *Micah–Malachi*. Vol. 32. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1998.
Sweeney, Marvin A. *Zephaniah: A Commentary*. Editor Paul D. Hanson. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

Say It Correctly

Jeshurun. ye-**SHOO**-run.
Zephaniah. **ZEH**-fuh-**NYE**-uh.
Gibbor. ghib-**BORE**

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 190

Ezekiel 21-22
Psalm 78:9-16

DAY 191

Ezekiel 23-24
Psalm 78:17-24

DAY 192

Ezekiel 25-27
Psalm 78:25-31

DAY 193

Ezekiel 28-30
Psalm 78:32-39

DAY 194

Ezekiel 31-33
Psalm 78:40-49

DAY 195

Ezekiel 34-36
Psalm 78:50-64

DAY 196

Ezekiel 37-39
Psalm 78:65-72

Notes
