

Seek the Lord
Zephaniah 2:1-3

Seek the Lord

Although we start a new chapter in Zephaniah, the thoughts from chapter one continue through verse 3. Verse 4 starts the judgments on Israel's neighbors.

From the 2015 lessons on Zephaniah 2:1-3, there is an outline which highlights the repetition of certain words:

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- Two Gather
- Three Before
- Three Seek
- **Gather** yourselves together, yes, **gather**, O nation without shame,
 - **2 Before** the decree takes effect—
The day passes like the chaff—
Before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you,
Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you.
 - **3 Seek** the Lord,
All you humble of the earth
Who have carried out His ordinances;
Seek righteousness, **seek** humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the Lord's anger.

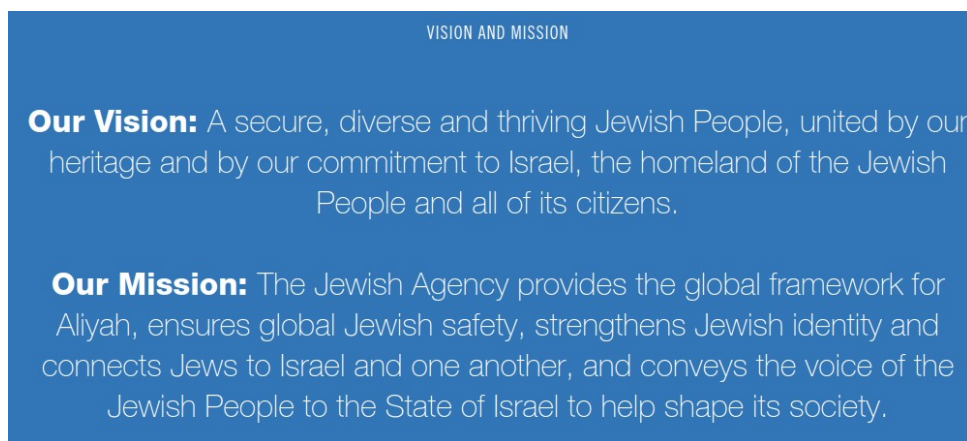
Zephaniah 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame,

The verb for gather is repeated, but in different forms. Zephaniah keeps throwing us off balance as we read the prophecy with the variety of literary techniques. The first is a reflexive: gather yourselves. And that is what the Jews are consciously doing at the present time. Some call it "Aliyah" or the "going up." This concept of "going up" is used in the New Testament to travel to or up to Jerusalem since it is on a mountain.

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From the Bible, we encounter two “gatherings” in reference to the “end times.” The first is in unbelief as we find here in Zephaniah 2:1. There is also a second gathering in belief at the end of the Tribulation for those Jews who will enter the Millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.

There are Jewish websites that can get a present day Jew on the path towards immigrating to Israel and becoming an Israeli citizen, like the “Jewish Agency.”



VISION AND MISSION

Our Vision: A secure, diverse and thriving Jewish People, united by our heritage and by our commitment to Israel, the homeland of the Jewish People and all of its citizens.

Our Mission: The Jewish Agency provides the global framework for Aliyah, ensures global Jewish safety, strengthens Jewish identity and connects Jews to Israel and one another, and conveys the voice of the Jewish People to the State of Israel to help shape its society.

<https://www.jewishagency.org/who-we-are/>

Notice that the advertisement uses “Aliyah” for the immigration movement.

Another website from the organization called “Nefesh B’Nefesh” provides information and facilitates immigration to Israel. They also call it “Aliyah.”

From the nbn.org.il website:¹

¹ <https://www.nbn.org.il/about-nefesh-bnefesh-new/nefesh-bnefesh-timeline-and-milestones/>

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What is Aliyah?

The Hebrew word “Aliyah” literally means ascent or rise, but for generations it has been used to mean “immigration to Israel.”

Israel has always been the center of the Jewish universe, but for centuries the dream of moving to Israel was just that, a dream.

In the 1880s, organized groups began to immigrate to Israel with the goal of building communities and settling the land. “Aliyah” became the official term for immigration to Israel when, in 1950, the State of Israel opened her doors to the Jews of the world and passed the Law of Return.

Our story

Nefesh B’Nefesh was founded in 2002.

Our mission is to **facilitate** and **celebrate** Aliyah, **advocate** for Olim, and **educate** towards a stronger connection to Israel.



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This organization has a graphic showing the process needed to immigrate (Olim) to Israel

The screenshot shows the website for Nefesh B'Nefesh, titled "The Aliyah Process". The page features a navigation menu with "Home / The Aliyah Process". Below the title is a section titled "Nefesh B'Nefesh's Streamlined Process" which contains five columns of information, each with an icon, a title, a brief description, and a "Learn more" button.

Step-By-Step Overview	Determining Your Aliyah Status	Documents You Will Need	Your Aliyah Flight	Shipping and Appliances
Nefesh B'Nefesh is here to help facilitate and make your Aliyah easier. The more you know at each stage, the better prepared you will be for your life in Israel.	Determining what your Aliyah status is can help in getting a better understanding of documents you will need, your rights and benefits and more.	From Birth Certificates to Proofs of Judaism, there are many documents you will need to make sure you have when making Aliyah. Learn more about what you need.	The moment you have been waiting for - now you just need to get a flight and you are home! Learn about how to book, luggage guidelines and more.	Browse our shipping and appliances library to get a better understanding of what you should (and perhaps should not) bring with you to Israel.
Learn more	Learn more	Learn more	Learn more	Learn more

<https://www.nbn.org.il/the-aliyah-process/>

The point is that Jews are gathering themselves. This is what the first verb in Zephaniah 2:1 says, “gather yourselves.” It is reflexive – “yourselves.” It appears that prophesy is in the process of being fulfilled. It will not be complete until the Rapture of the Church is completed.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a noted expert on end time prophecy, says this is fulfilling ancient prophesy before our eyes. While it is true from a prophetic perspective that the next event that must take place is the Rapture of the Church, events leading to the fulfillment of other prophesies are already in the works. There is an article worth reading by Dr. Fruchtenbaum on the pre-trib.org website at : https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/2021-Pre-Trib-Fruchtenbaum-Modern_State_of_Israel-Paper.pdf

He says there are two regatherings: one in unbelief and the second one in belief. He is adamant that what we are seeing currently in Israel today is leading to the fulfillment of the first regathering in unbelief. He uses

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three Old Testament passages to show this: Ezekiel 20:33-38, Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 22:17-22. Let us read these passages. It is unlikely that many of you would read these verses with a connection to the Tribulation in mind otherwise.

Continuing with Dr. Fruchtenbaum's comments:

“Concerning the Ezekiel 20 verses he says, “This historical frame of reference is the backdrop for the future. But this time, Ezekiel prophesies that God will regather His people from all parts of the world (v. 34). It should be noted that it is a regathering out of wrath and a gathering for wrath. The Jewish people were gathered out of the wrath of the Holocaust, during which six million Jews died. The events of the Holocaust set the world stage for Israel to become a state and for the Jewish people to be regathered in the land. That this gathering is not in faith, but in unbelief, is seen from the fact that God does it with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. Ezekiel repeats this phrase twice: in verse 33 and in verse 34. God's goal is that of Messianic Kingship, but the means of attaining it will be wrath and judgment. Hence, this is a regathering both out of wrath and for wrath.”²

There is a second regathering mentioned in Isaiah 11:11

Isaiah 11:11 Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea.

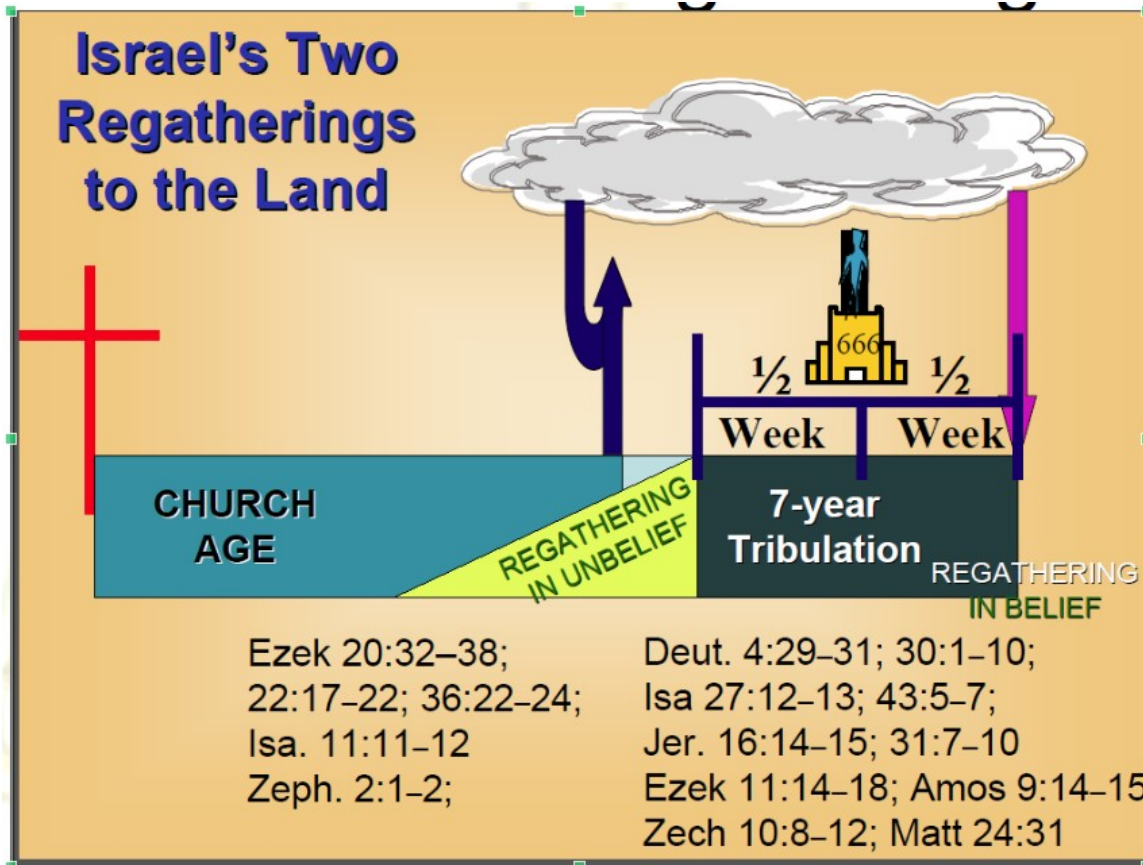
Isaiah 11:12 And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones

² https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/2021-Pre-Trib-Fruchtenbaum-Modern_State_of_Israel-Paper.pdf

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of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of
Judah From the four corners of the earth.

Robby Dean has a slide he has used multiple times to illustrate this:



<https://www.deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2006-Israel-009.pdf>

From Sweeney, referring to Zephaniah 2:1 and gathering which in some contexts refers to gathering sticks and chaff.

“The commentary on 1:7-18 above notes the metaphorical and ironic role that sacrifice plays in 1:7-18, especially since the people are invited to a sacrifice in which they expect to participate as worshipers, but in fact they are intended to serve as sacrificial victims. The gathering of sticks or wood is an essential element of the preparation of the sacrificial altar, and the prophet’s use of these verbs in the command to gather builds on this metaphorical and ironic strategy by portraying the gathering of the

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people as the gathering of the very sticks that are to be burned up as part of the sacrifice on the Day of YHWH. By this means, the implicit meaning of the prophet's summons becomes clear. The people are not summoned to consume the sacrifice; they are summoned to constitute the sacrifice. The rhetorical strategy of the prophet is therefore conveyed by the choice of the verb (KSHSH) to describe the people's assembly and the threat that the Day of YHWH actually poses to them. The combination of hithpolel and polel forms reinforces this strategy. The reflexive hitpolel form indicates that the action of the people is to be focused on gathering themselves. The polel form, however, is commonly used for the gathering of wood or chaff in the passages cited above, and conveys the normal expectations that they are to gather wood for the sacrifice.³

The current gathering in unbelief as described by Zephaniah 2:1 is less than complimentary.

Nation. This is a word of derision. Goy. As one commentator said, "The word speaks of a politically organized body of people under a single ruler or government. Here it is used with reference to the citizens of Judah living during the seventh century B.C. in a derogatory sense since it is usually the word the Hebrews used for unregenerate pagan nations."⁴

Zephaniah 2:2

Before the decree takes effect—The day passes like the chaff—

Before the burning anger of the Lord comes upon you,

Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you.

³ Sweeney, Marvin A., Zephaniah A Commentary, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, pages 114-115.

⁴ Wenstrom, William E. Jr., Exegesis and Exposition of Zephaniah 2:1-3, https://www.wenstrom.org/index.php?option=com_libwritten&view=libwritten&selCat=2&Itemid=124&task=display&view=summary&entryId=1577

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Arnold Fruchtenbaum uses this passage to show that the first regathering in unbelief comes before the “Day of the Lord” which starts with the Tribulation. So as he says, “In Zephaniah 1:7-18, the prophet described some features of a time he calls the day of YHWH (Jehovah) or the day of the Lord. This is the most common Old Testament term for the tribulation. The most common term today is “the tribulation” or “the great tribulation.” Then in Zephaniah 2:1-2, the prophet speaks of an event that is to occur before the period of the day of the Lord begins. In verse 1, the nation of Israel is told to gather together. It is clear from this verse that this is a gathering in unbelief for it is a nation not yet ashamed of her sins. In verse 2, the word before is used three times in relation to the preceding passage regarding the tribulation, one of which includes before the day of Jehovah itself.”

“While primarily dealing with the regeneration of Israel, Ezekiel 36:22-24, which was mentioned above, makes it clear that a regathering takes place before the regeneration. So, while other texts speak of a regathering in unbelief in preparation for judgment, these passages clearly state that this regathering in unbelief will occur before the tribulation actually begins.”⁵ (My underlines for emphasis).

Before the decree takes effect. The verb for “takes effect” means to bear children, to give birth.

**Zephaniah 2:3 Seek the Lord, All you humble
of the earth Who have carried out His
ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek
humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day
of the Lord’s anger.**

⁵ https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/2021-Pre-Trib-Fruchtenbaum-Modern_State_of_Israel-Paper.pdf

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Deuteronomy chapter 4 is a very powerful speech by Moses to the sons of Israel. Let us read verses 1-40. Verse 29 is the focus of this study since it says Israel will seek the Lord. But it is also a pattern of God's faithfulness to Israel in that just as God brought Israel out of Egypt, so God will bring Israel out of the world from the diaspora and back into their land in the Millennium.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

Deuteronomy 4:30 When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice.

Deuteronomy 4:31 For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

I have said before that Zephaniah 2:3 is like a mini gospel. Those who seek to know God have to have His righteousness. The gospel tells us that we are sinners. But Jesus was judged on the cross for the sins of the world, the penalty for sins. (John 2:2) Sinful man does not have God's righteousness. That righteousness comes by faith. And faith is an expression of humility, or grace-orientation. Satan sinned because of his arrogant pride. Those who seek the Lord have to understand that no sinful human can produce the righteousness of God. This righteousness comes as a gift from God as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ.

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Humility. Humility leads to faith which leads to righteousness which leads to fellowship with God.

All. Here is the word “all” again. In this case, all you who are humble.

Who have carried out His ordinances. Alec Motyer translates this as “who are determined to do as he decides.”⁶ He comments on this. “Typical of Scripture, the first move is to go directly to the Lord. Every other religion says, Become righteous, become humble, then perhaps God will accept you. But in the Bible the only way to flee from God is to flee to him. Absence of this earnest relationship invites condemnation, and this must now be put right.”

Seek. My understanding is that you seek something you do not have. Here it is a relationship with God based upon His righteousness as a result of a person’s humility toward God leading to faith in the Messiah (Christ).

Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger. Perhaps introduces some ambiguity. It is true that some believers will die in the tribulation as martyrs. But perhaps as many as 1/3 of the Jews will trust the Messiah/Christ as savior and be “hidden” from the Baptism of Fire that will sweep the earth prior to entrance into the Millennial reign of Christ the Messiah.

Consider the number of verses included in the Tribulation portion of Zephaniah. I count 40 verses (Zephaniah 1:2-3:8). Half of that should put the prophesy at half way through the Tribulation passages, say around chapter 2:2-3. If that were the focal point of the message, then that makes this the most important part of the prophesy to the unrepentant Jew during the Tribulation. Here is the gospel. Do you want to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire banished from the presence of God? Or do you want

⁶ Motyer, Alec, Zephaniah, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998, page 927

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to be in the joyous presence of the Messiah/Savior? Seek the Lord being provided His righteousness as a result of your humility in faith.