

**People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7**

People are the Problem

Prayer for Grace Bible Church in Pakistan: <https://www.gbcpakistan.org/>
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/17/asia/pakistan-punjab-church-attacks-arrests-intl/index.html>

Christians have the highest calling on earth. We are to be like Jesus Christ. It is not What Would Jesus Do (WWJD). We are not living Jesus' life. Besides, it is likely that WWJD theology would just apply human viewpoint to a situation even though it might be a "nice" human viewpoint. Our instructions are codified in the Holy Scriptures. As Christians, we are to love one another. Herman has taught this many times. Love observes a need; love attempts to fill that need. That love is guided by Bible information, sometimes called Bible Doctrine.

See [GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org) for info on WWJD:
<https://www.gotquestions.org/be-like-Jesus.html>

But this calling is not humanly possible to fulfill. We cannot do the will of God in perfect righteousness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you have seen some of the movies in which the hero, under great adversity saves the world and gets the girl. All the while he is performing unbelievable feats of strength and thought, most of which are near impossible. But we cheer him on till the end. In a sense, that is what every Christian is called to do: the impossible. But there is no way any one of us can achieve the impossible without the filling of the Holy Spirit. Then, and only then, can we achieve God's righteousness since it is the Holy Spirit acting through us. And subsequently, at the Judgment Seat of Christ we receive rewards for those righteous acts.

People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7

1 John 2:3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1 John 2:4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

1 John 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

1 John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

This week we encounter Israeli officials, both governmental and religious, that will be at the center of leading the people astray during the Tribulation.

Zephaniah 3:3 Her princes within her are roaring lions, Her judges are wolves at evening; They leave nothing for the morning.

Princes. This refers to the “executive” arm of government.¹ Based upon a perusal of the article on this Hebrew word in the TDOT, these “princes” are administrative officials subordinate to the king. There does not appear to be any requirement that these officials be blood relatives of the king as some of the commentators imply. There is no mention of a “king.” The governmental allegiances in the Tribulation are skewed. The Beast of the Tribulation may be the defacto “king.” Remember what the Jews in Jesus’ day said about Jesus as their king:

¹ Motyer, Alex J., The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary, Zephaniah, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p972

People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7

John 19:14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he (Pontius Pilate) *said to the Jews, “Behold, your King!”

John 19:15 So they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate *said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

I suspect there will be a similar attitude during the Tribulation.

Roaring. “The use of this word, which signifies the pouncing roar of the lion (Judg. 14:5), underscores the cruel, oppressive, and self-seeking power of the leaders.²” Note that we encountered this word in the book of Judges (14:5) when a lion came roaring in an attack against Samson. He, Samson, was strong physically and empowered by the Holy Spirit to take care of the lion. But the populace of Judah will be unable to obtain good leaders and will succumb to the forces of evil embodied in the Jewish rulers.

Leaders who are ruling for their own gain will destroy a nation if left unchecked. During the Tribulation, the Jewish rulers will have their hands full fending off political pressure from the Beast as well as the potential war from surrounding nations.

Judges. The concept of a judge was not a static concept in Israel. The function of judges changed in the time of Josiah which is when Zephaniah wrote. He would use the terminology of his day so people could understand his message. Here is some interesting information from the TDOT:

² Motyer, Alex J., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical & Expository Commentary*, Zephaniah, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p972

People are the Problem Zephaniah 3:3-7

“That the *sopêṭ* first appears as a professional judge in the time of Josiah is connected with general features distinguishing the political and constitutional historical Judah and Israel. The first period in which one can speak of an actual state is the Iron IIC period (ca. 850-586), a development due to Assyrian pressure on Judah. Archaeologically, too, this period marks the first appearance of an independent Israel and Judah. Now there appears in Judah a political administration in which important functions are centralized, a development characterized by the spread of literacy in Palestine, beginning in the mid-8th century. At the end of the 7th century, King Josiah established an independent judiciary as one of his reform measures, which aimed primarily at administrative centralization. This judiciary gave the king and his administration a handle on the local court system, which had hitherto been administered by the elders. It also affected the existing sacral courts at temples and sanctuaries throughout the land. Besides capitalizing on the forensic connotations of the vb *šāpaṭ*, the description of the new judges as *šōp^eṭim* may also be understood as a revival of the office of governor, to secure the interests of the populace within the royal administration.³”

A good question is whether this is the governmental structure in Judah during the Tribulation. The text would suggest this. Wikipedia describes the current system of government in Israel today as:

“The Israeli system of government is based on parliamentary democracy. The Prime Minister of Israel is the head of government and leader of a multi-party system. Executive power is exercised by the government (also known as the cabinet). Legislative power is vested in the Knesset. The Judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature. The political system of the State of Israel and its main principles are set out in 11 Basic Laws. Israel does not have a written constitution.⁴”

³ TDOT, Volume XV, pp425-426

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_system_of_government

People are the Problem Zephaniah 3:3-7

This would mean that the current system of government in Israel will change in the Tribulation. There are already changes being put in place to weaken the judiciary system, according to some. But that is another story.

They leave nothing for the morning. Not sure anyone has figured this out. It can mean that they are so ravenous that they consume the spoils of corrupt government quickly leaving nothing for the average citizen.

Zephaniah 3:4 Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; Her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law.

Prophets. Herman has covered prophets previously. Prophets received instruction from God which they then announced to the people.

Reckless. This word is used another time in Scripture, one which we previously studied:

Judges 9:4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.

This is from the narrative concerning Abimelech who did harm to Israel. The prophets who will arise, perhaps as a result of being “appointed” by officials rather than God will do great harm in Israel during the Tribulation.

Treacherous. The word means deceit, treachery. False prophets deceive people who believe they are true prophets of God. Instead, the false prophets in the Tribulation will deceive people leading them into great harm.

People are the Problem Zephaniah 3:3-7

Priests. Here is a helpful comment from a commentary:

“The *priests* in Israel performed multiple tasks, all of which affected profoundly the spiritual and social welfare of the nation. Among their duties was the responsibility to distinguish between the holy and the common (cf. Lev. 10:10). By this distinction, the people were kept from confusing the Creator with the creation. Through a proper maintenance of this distinction the holy God was kept distinct from the temporal and material substances of his creation. But at the same time, the remarkable fact was communicated that God could be known among his creatures.⁵”

Merrill Unger makes a profound statement in his Unger’s Bible Dictionary:

“There is no consensus of opinion as to the etymology of the Heb. kohen, but the supposition of Bahr (Symbolik, ii, 15), in connecting it with an Arabic root which is equivalent to the Hebrew root qarab (to draw near), answers most nearly to the received usage of the word. In the precise terminology of the law it is used of one who may “draw near” to the divine presence (Exod. 19:22; 30:20), while others remain afar off, and is usually applied to the sons of Aaron.”

Leviticus 10:8 The Lord then spoke to Aaron, saying,

Leviticus 10:9 “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—

⁵ Robertson, O. Palmer, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Grand Rapids:Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, pages 320-321.

People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7

Leviticus 10:10 and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean,

Leviticus 10:11 and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.”

Yet here in Zephaniah 3:4, we see that the priests profaned the “sanctuary.”

Sanctuary. This is not a word for the temple per se. This is a word from “holy.” It is “holy thing” or “holy place.” There is no definite article. It is possible to stretch the translation a bit and say they “profaned the holy.”

Law. This is “torah.” In its basic meaning, it is “instruction.” It often represents the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. Here, it is more than just the written word. This is the word that is taught, teaching from the books of Moses. This teaching is how the people are to order their lives. Christians learn Bible information with which to order our lives. There are so called “feel good” preachers on TV and other places that emphasize doing what is right in your own eyes, do what feels good. We saw the result of that kind of thinking in the book of Judges. Not Good. There is a saying that makes the rounds on the Facebook circuit that goes, “Wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it. Right is right even if no one is doing it.” So it will be in the Tribulation. Leaders will do wrong. Prophets and priests will teach wrong.

In part, that is what is what is wrong in America today. There are too few pastors who teach from the Bible.

People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7

Zephaniah 3:5 The Lord is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame.

The Lord is righteous. Only God is truly righteous. Remember Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Within her. Here is our word for “draw near.” Here it is a preposition. It shows up a few times in Zephaniah. Zephaniah 3:2 (verb); 3:3; 3:5; 3:11: 3:12; 3:15; 3:17). This concept will be dealt with in a later lesson. Once I started work on that lesson, it was readily apparent that the lesson preparation would take more time than I could devote to it this week.

Zephaniah 3:6 “I have cut off nations; Their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, With no one passing by; Their cities are laid waste, Without a man, without an inhabitant.

I have cut off. This has the sense of destroy. In Jeremiah it is used in this sense to destroy a nation.

Jeremiah 48:2 “There is praise for Moab no longer; In Heshbon they have devised calamity against her: ‘Come and let us cut her

**People are the Problem
Zephaniah 3:3-7**

off from being a nation! You too, Madmen, will be silenced; The sword will follow after you.

Corner towers. We saw this previously. It refers to the towers on the corner of a fortification which allowed soldiers to defend themselves.

Note the corner towers in the photo below.



The rest of the verse paints a picture out of a dystopian future movie with deserted streets, empty.

Zephaniah 3:7 “I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, Accept instruction.’ So her dwelling will not be cut off According to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.

Revere me. This is from the word “to fear” or to “respect” or to “revere.” Remember Proverbs 9 from Phil’s lessons on Proverbs:

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

People are the Problem **Zephaniah 3:3-7**

God is saying to get back to basics in a believer's life. It starts by recognizing who and what God is and having humility toward Him.

Accept instruction. Accept is the word used previously in verse 2. I suggested that an eager student of the word would do more than "accept" the instruction from God. He or she would "grab" it. Instruction here is the same word that is translated "correction" in verse 2. In that verse, the people did NOT accept instruction/correction. Here God says the logical person would accept, perhaps grab His instruction/correction. In the Tribulation, we know that as many as a third of the Jews will believe and be saved and continue into the Millennium. They will grab instruction wherever they can find it. Those Jews will have stories from humility unrivaled in history.