

**Zephaniah's New Language**  
**Zephaniah 3:9-10**

## **Zephaniah's New Language**

From Fox News this week: “After a six-month investigation, police in England have decided not to bring charges against a woman for silently praying outside an abortion clinic<sup>1</sup>.” How many things that are abhorrent to Christians are allowed and even forced on people? Yet, it was considered a crime to stand outside an abortion clinic and pray silently. As we get closer to the Rapture, our freedoms as Christians are being eroded. Reminds me of ancient times when Christians used the fish symbol to identify a safe haven.

“Briefly, the fish symbol is based on a Greek acronym for the phrase Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior. In Greek, the phrase is Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ. When we take the first letter from each word in that phrase, we have ΙΧΘΥΣ, which happens to be the Greek word for “fish” (ixthus or ictus—the spelling can vary in English). Some versions of the Christian fish symbol contain the Greek letters inside or underneath the symbol itself.”

“During the early days of Christianity, Christians were often put to death for practicing their faith, so they worshiped in secret places. A fish painted or etched on the outside door of a house let other Christians know that they would be safe and welcome inside. The ancient catacombs in Rome are filled with images of fish, carved there by Christians hiding from persecution.”

“Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior is a wonderful summary of biblical truth regarding the Lord, and the Christian fish symbol is a beautiful way to express faith in Him. But following Christ involves much more than sporting an ixthus on the back of one’s car. Jesus spoke often of the necessity of inward truth as opposed to outward shows of religion. Those

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/media/police-drop-charges-british-woman-silently-praying-outside-abortion-clinic>

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who use a Christian fish symbol should make sure they actually know Christ, trust Him as Savior, and obey Him as Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Onward, forward with Zephaniah.

**Zephaniah 3:9 “For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder.**

I am going to spend some time with this verse. It is interesting. But more than that, it is something that God will change for the Millennium/Kingdom. When you get there, listen for it.

**For then.** What happens after the Baptism of Fire engulfs the earth? The Millennium. Up until now, Zephaniah has dealt with aspects of the Tribulation. Zephaniah 3:8 is the point of separation between Tribulation and Millennium. From this point on, Zephaniah deals with the Millennium.

**I will give.** We need to spend some time with this word. It is like a piece of candy that bursts with flavor when you eat it. This is not the normal word for “to give.” The basic meaning is “to turn.” In my opinion, translators have missed the dynamics of this word in this context. So let us look at how the word is used in other places in the Bible.

**Hosea 7:8b ...Ephraim has become a cake not turned.**

The TDOT comments on this phrase in Hosea, “Flatbread is turned when being baked.<sup>3</sup>” So, in its simplest form, this word can mean to turn over like flatbread being baked.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-fish-symbol.html>

<sup>3</sup> TDOT Volume III, page 423

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But, it makes no sense to say “language is turned.”

The NASB generalized the translation to “give.” It is true that God will “give” “purified lips,” in other words, a purified language. But that avoids dealing with the meaning in this context. It doesn't really allow the Hebrew to shine through.

This word can also mean “to transform.” See how this word is used in Exodus chapter 7.

**Exodus 7:15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent.**

**The staff that was turned into a serpent.** “Was turned” is our word. This is not just a turning of the physical object but a transformation from one object into another different object.

**Exodus 7:17 Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.”**

**Exodus 7:20 So Moses and Aaron did even as the Lord had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood.**

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**It (the water) will be/was turned to blood.** Again, this is not just a “turning” but a transforming act.

So here, the essence of existing languages will be transformed into something new. The obvious conclusion is that there will again be one world-wide language. Remember, after the flood before the Babel incident, there was a single language world-wide. Then...

**Genesis 11:5 The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.**

**Genesis 11:6 The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. (One language facilitates cooperative efforts.)**

**Genesis 11:7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech.”**

**Genesis 11:8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.**

**Genesis 11:9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.**

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A single language enables better communication which results in effective cooperation. But mankind abused this language to accomplish goals conflicting with God's commands. God didn't want man to impress Him with what they could do. God wanted man to be impressed with what He had accomplished and what He promised to accomplish in the future. Their effort was supposed to be just trust Him.

**Purified lips.** Lips is a literal translation. The meaning is clear—language. Purified, which is a passive participle, can mean choice, chosen, cleansed, polished, purified. Some would say this purified language will be a form of Hebrew. The text does not say what the language will be. It could return to the original one world-wide language existing prior to the Tower of Babel. Or it could be a “purified” language that is tailored and optimized for God's purpose—worship of Him.

**To the peoples.** This refers to peoples of the earth. Typically, when this word is used of the Israelites, it is “My people.” This is something that will be world-wide.

**That all of them may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him.** The purpose of this language transformation is indeed to worship God. There are two verbs in the infinitive showing purpose. The first is “to call.” We saw throughout the book of Judges that when the people sinned and were then disciplined, they “called” upon the Lord. They returned to the source of their help, God. The second verb is “to serve.” This verb has a spectrum of meanings starting with to be a slave, to serve and to be a subject of. Serve is a good translation in this context. The implication is that this service is for worship. It says, “all of them.” The whole earth will be united, at least in the beginning of the Millennium, in worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Millennium, according to Herman, is to glorify Jesus Christ.

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**Shoulder to Shoulder.** Literally, “one shoulder.” Have you ever tried to move a heavy piece of furniture with help from someone else? What happens if you get your thoughts crossed and you think it should be moved in one direction and the other person thinks it should be moved in a different direction. It doesn't move. You are working against each other. Your shoulder is working against the other person's shoulder. This, “one shoulder” is like saying everyone is worshiping in harmony. The worship is coherent. Everyone is pushing in the same direction, saying the same thing with the same thoughts of worship of Jesus Christ. They can do this in the Millennium because they will have a single language that everyone understands. Instead of people building a tower to impress God, all the peoples will be worshiping God. Glorifying Jesus Christ.

The more I thought about this, the more I realized this is not just a new language. This is a language transformed into something way beyond what language is today. It is “purified.” Take the word for “transform.” Let us return to that passage in Exodus chapter 7, now that we have looked at all the words in this verse. In Exodus 7:15 it is used of the rod or staff of Moses that was transformed into a snake.

**Exodus 7:15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned (transformed) into a serpent.**

The staff was wooden and static. It was transformed (our word) into a serpent. The serpent was living and dynamic. So will be the language that the Lord will provide those in the Millennium. It will be living and dynamic. More than anything man has ever spoken before. It will be a language crafted by God to express spirituality like never before. This

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will go way beyond “speaking in tongues.” Just as the Tribulation will experience suffering like never before, the Millennium will experience spiritual joy like never before. And we will be there to observe the works of the Lord, Jesus Christ the King of Kings.

One commentator had a pertinent comment:

“Zephaniah does not dwell on the wonder of a united humanity as such, but shows it as a functioning reality; just as the central motivation of Babel was to organize life without God, so now the unified world centralizes the Lord, using its newfound speech to call on the name of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>”

As Alec Motyer goes on to explain, the judgments of Genesis surrounding the flood judgments, are now reversed. Prior to Babylon, there was a single language.

### **Zephaniah 3:10 “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, Will bring My offerings.**

**Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.** Beyond is literally “from across the rivers.” Beyond is OK. Remember that “Ethiopia” in the Old Testament is not the Ethiopia of today. The word is “Cush.” That area of Africa today would include northern Sudan and perhaps part of southern Egypt. And this is beyond the rivers. Looking at a present day map, most of it is desert with only the Nile as a large river traversing Egypt into Sudan. So, will Sudan eventually extend south into what is today Ethiopia? The thrust of the meaning is it is far away both physically but also culturally. Perhaps it is a reference to southern Africa. It is possible that this is a kind of parallel to the mission of the eleven in Acts chapter 1, “the uttermost parts of the world.”

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<sup>4</sup> Alec Motyer, Zephaniah in An Exegetical & Expository Commentary: The Minor Prophets Volume 3, page 952

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**Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"**

**Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;**

**Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."**

**My worshipers.** The word used here in Zephaniah is an unusual one. Zephaniah has used many unusual, sometimes unique, words to emphasize his message. This word can mean entreaty or fragrance as from incense or a sacrifice. There is an interesting reference in the New Testament that might shed light on this passage. Here is an extended quote from gotquestions.org:

“Second Corinthians 2:15 says, “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.” To understand what the apostle Paul meant when he said that Christians are the “aroma of Christ,” we must look at the verses immediately surrounding the expression: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the



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other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?" (verses 14–16)."

"For Jewish people, the apostle Paul's analogy of "the pleasing aroma of Christ" would present an immediate association. In the Old Testament, the scent of burnt offerings was described as "an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Genesis 8:20–21; Leviticus 23:18; Numbers 28:27). For the Gentiles, this phrase would suggest the scent of incense being burned as an offering to the gods. However, Paul had a more specific picture in mind."

"The apostle was speaking to the Corinthians about recent events in his ministry of evangelism. Despite all the difficulties and disappointments he'd faced while traveling from city to city spreading the gospel, Paul was able to reflect on God's goodness with thanksgiving. The apostle then compared this ministry of evangelism to the triumphal military parades that were common at that time in the Roman world."

"Paul's metaphor would be readily understood by his audience, with the apostle and his co-laborers portrayed as victorious soldiers in a triumphal procession. During these Roman military parades, captives of war would be marched through the streets as garlands of flowers were carried and incense was burned to the gods. The aromatic perfumes wafted on the air as spectators and those in the procession breathed in their fragrance. At the parade's finale, many prisoners would be put to death. Thus, the aromas were pleasing and life-giving to the victors, but they were the smell of death to those who had been defeated.<sup>5</sup>"

Here in Zephaniah, God's worshipers are a sweet savor. A double entendre perhaps. There is a hint, perhaps, that these could be non-Jews as well as Jews.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/aroma-of-Christ.html>

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**My dispersed ones.** Literally, scattered ones. Passive participle. They received scattering. Interesting, that the “scattered ones” or “diaspora” were scattered by God. In Genesis 1, people were to fill the earth:

**Genesis 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

But at the tower of Babel, the anti-God crowd resisted being scattered through out the earth:

**Genesis 11:4 They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”**

Scattered in this verse in Genesis is our word in Zephaniah in the verb form. In Zephaniah, God is gathering “scattered” ones who are believers in the Millennium. Another oblique reference to the Tower of Babel incident. The same root is used in Genesis chapter 11 concerning the Tower of Babel and being “scattered.”

**Will bring.** In other books, this verb can be associated with giving.

**Psalm 68:29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem Kings will bring gifts to You.**

**Psalm 76:29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem Kings will bring gifts to You.**

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**My Offerings.** This is not the same word for gifts we see in Psalms 68:29 and 76:29. This is the “minha.”

Minha or mincha offering is sometimes translated as grain or meal offering. It is not a blood sacrifice. A key insight is provided by gotquestions.org: “The grain offering is described as “a most holy part of the food offerings presented to the Lord” (Leviticus 2:10b). Grain offerings would often be presented after a burnt offering, which was an animal sacrifice God required for the atonement of sin. Blood had to be shed for the remission of sins to take place, so a grain offering would not serve the same purpose as a burnt offering. Instead, the purpose of a grain offering was to worship God and acknowledge His provision.”

<b>Levitical Sacrifices and Offerings</b>		
Burnt Offering	Substitutionary judgment	
Meal (Tribute) Offering	Bloodless; the value of Christ's death	Memorial to God's grace
Peace Offering	Fellowship	Shared meal celebrates peace with God
Sin Offering	Forgiveness	Purification for unintentional sin
Guilt Offering	Forgiveness	Purification for specific sin

Overview of Levitical Sacrifices and Offerings<sup>6</sup>

The table of sacrifices and offerings is just to put a context on the “grain/meal/minha” offering. Note the purpose of this offering is a memorial to God’s grace.

<sup>6</sup> <https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2005-Hebrews-130c.pdf>

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**Worship God.** In Zephaniah 3:9 the people received a transformed language whose purpose was to worship God. Here in the next verse, people from the extremities of the earth would bring a grain offering whose purpose was to show worship to God.

I suspect that any offerings and sacrifices in the Millennium will be a ritual like our communion, bringing to mind the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Almost like saying, "I understand grace and celebrate who and what Jesus Christ is: My friend and Savior."

**1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;**

**1 Corinthians 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."**

**1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."**

**1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.**