

At That Time

Current events comments:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/23/politics/iranian-militias-israel-hamas>

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/worldwide-caution.html>

The feelings of a Jew after the 7 October attack:

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/jews-of-the-left>

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

As an addendum to last week's look at these verses, there is an illustration of the loss of rewards from the Old Testament. King Saul was anointed by Samuel at the direction of the Lord God. But King Saul disobeyed God because he failed to follow the Word of God. So Samuel, the prophet of God, said:

1 Samuel 15:22 Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

1 Samuel 15:23 “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.””

Saul did not lose his salvation. But he had the high position and responsibility as king. He had a blessing that was removed. His son, Jonathan would not become king. David would. This is what Christians should be concerned with. God has a multitude of blessings/rewards stored up for each believer. They already exist. They are ours for simply walking by faith in the Spirit. But we have to know and understand our walk, by study of the Word. Promise plus Faith. Will you be embarrassed at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

This week we finish the text of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah 3:18 “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts—They came from you, O Zion; The reproach of exile is a burden on them.

Multiple commentators declare verse 18 to be difficult. One even goes so far as to say that this is the most difficult sentence in the book of Zephaniah.

Here is a sampling:

“O’Brien represents most commentators when she writes of Zeph 3.18, “Despite numerous attempts to solve this textual puzzle...none remains convincing, leaving the verse unintelligible.¹””

¹ (O’Brien, 2004, p. 126).²⁹ [Quoted from John de Jong, Making Sense in Zephaniah: An Intertextual Reading, A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 2015

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"Every clause of ver. 18 is difficult."²

Here are some examples of attempts at translation:

Zephaniah 3:18 (NIV) “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.

Zephaniah 3:18 (NET) “As for those who grieve because they cannot attend the festivals—I took them away from you; they became tribute and were a source of shame to you.

Zephaniah 3:18 (K&D) “I gather together those that mourn for the festive meeting; they are of thee; reproach presses upon them.

Zephaniah 3:18 (Amplified Bible) “As for those who grieve because they cannot attend the festivals—I took them away from you; they became tribute and were a source of shame to you.

Zephaniah 3:18 (Sweeney Translation) Those who have suffered from the appointed time when I punished you were a burden upon her, a reproach.

² K&D

Zephaniah 3:18 (Barker/Bailey Translation)The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you;

I will attempt to make sense out of it. The commentators that dealt with the Hebrew text appeared to be non-dispensationalists/ covenant theologians.

Let me deal with words in the order they appear in the Hebrew text.

Those who grieve. The word can mean grieve or weariness. It is a participle and could even mean “sorrowings.”

This word appears in the Old Testament eight times. Five of those are in the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah apparently related the sorrows of the judgment of God on Israel at the beginning of the exile of the southern kingdom with this word, grieving.

Lamentations 1:5 Her adversaries have become her masters, Her enemies prosper; For the Lord has caused her grief Because of the multitude of her transgressions; Her little ones have gone away As captives before the adversary.

Lamentations 1:12 “Is it nothing to all you who pass this way? Look and see if there is any pain like my pain Which was severely dealt out to me, Which the Lord inflicted on the day of His fierce anger.

Lamentations 3:32 For if He causes grief, Then He will have compassion According to His abundant lovingkindness.

Lamentations 3:33 For He does not afflict willingly Or grieve the sons of men.

Notice, that in four of the five uses of the verb in the book of Lamentations, it is God who is the source of this grieving. In Lamentations 3:33, God does not afflict willingly from his lovingkindness, but His righteous anger demands judgment on sin.

Now in Zephaniah, the single use of this verb is in relation to believers who they themselves are grieved (passive/reflexive).

This is the first word in the sentence. This gives it the place of emphasis.

Appointed feasts. There is a single word in the Hebrew. It is singular, not plural. Appointed. But what is appointed? The usage can be appointed feasts/festivals, place, or time. Without any word modifying or amplifying the noun the commentators felt free to interpret this as festival(s), time or place. Not being a Hebrew expert, I can only speculate that this could mean “appointment.” So what is that appointment? Throughout Zephaniah there is reference to “gatherings.” We know there is a gathering in “unbelief” possibly in progress today. There is also a gathering at the beginning of the Millennium and the end of the Tribulation to bring believers to Israel and to bring unbelievers to judgment. Each has an “appointment.” Believers go into the Millennium. Unbelievers go to Torments and from there to the Lake of Fire. So will those who know the timetable of the Tribulation and the transition to the Millennium be weary of the suffering during the wait?

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I will gather. Words from this root started appearing in Zephaniah in chapter 1 verse 2. God will gather and sweep everything from the face of the earth. In verse 3, he will gather man and beast to remove them. Then in chapter 3 verse 8, God is going to gather the (unbelieving) nations and destroy them.

This Hebrew word can mean to “gather” or to “remove.” That means it is gathered or removed from one place and put in another place. In chapter 1 verse 3

Zephaniah 1:3 “I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the Lord.

In chapter 1 verse 3, a list of living things will be removed “from the face of the earth.” The destination is not in focus, only the source, the earth.

Zephaniah 3:19 “Behold, I am going to deal at that time With all your oppressors, I will save the lame And gather the outcast, And I will turn their shame into praise and renown In all the earth.

Behold. Previously in more than one lesson I have pointed to this word and said it seems anachronistic in English. It might be better translated, “Look!” or “Pay Attention!” But, here, this is not just “Look” but it contains a first person singular suffix. This can mean, “Here I am,” or “Look at me.” Take for instance the call of Samuel.

1 Samuel 3:2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight

had begun to grow dim and he could not see well),

1 Samuel 3:3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was,

1 Samuel 3:4 that the Lord called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

1 Samuel 3:5 Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down.

1 Samuel 3:6 The Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again."

1 Samuel 3:7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him.

1 Samuel 3:8 So the Lord called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the Lord was calling the boy.

1 Samuel 3:9 And Eli said to Samuel, “Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Our word is used by Samuel to say “Here I am.” So imagine the Tribulation believers after months, perhaps as much as 3 ½ years of intense suffering call out to the Lord like some do, “Lord Jesus come quickly.” And then at the end of the Tribulation, when the judgments are full, He says, “Here I am.” Commentators don’t bring out the intensity of this word in this context. Zephaniah’s prophecy is saying, “It is finally over. Now for the blessings.”

Just imagine if someone could bring out the punch, the intensity, of each word of Zephaniah.

I am going to deal at that time With all your oppressors. Without going into the Hebrew, at the transition between the Tribulation and the Millennium, God is saying he will “deal with” all those who have persecuted and caused the Jews suffering. In the case of the Tribulation, these will be unbelievers, probably including unbelieving Jews. This may be the culmination of the blessing on Abraham:

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

I will deal with renown and praise in the next and final verse.

The final verse, verse 20, is written to emphasize the parallelism:

Zephaniah

3:20

**“At that time I will bring you in,
Even at the time when I gather you together;
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth, When I
restore your fortunes before your eyes,”
Says the Lord.**

At that time. This is that transition from the Tribulation to the Millennium/Kingdom. Remember, the Millennium has been characterized as the “front porch” of the eternal kingdom.

I will bring you in. This is a causative. God is caused, by His character, to “bring.” This is a word that is used in many contexts, so it is a vanilla kind of word for “bring.” Yet, here, God is the subject. He is doing it.

Even at that time. Repetition of the phrase for emphasis and parallelism.

When I will gather you. Up to this point, Zephaniah has been using a word for gather than can also mean remove. But here, in the final verse of Zephaniah, he changes the word. This word is not from the root of the word Zephaniah has been using for “gather.” The word here is the source of the word “kibbutz.” The point is that the final “gathering” will be different. It will be conducted by God (I will gather you) and He will gather only believers. It will be a gathering for intense blessing. It will be a blessing that will lead to the eternal blessings.

I will give. God gives in grace. This is our word from Judges, “natan.”

Renown. The Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) gives “For I give you for a name.” The word is not “renown.” It is “name.” By giving them a name, He is giving them renown. In the past, God has been active in naming special people. Take for instance the patriarchs:

Abraham:

Genesis 17:5 “No longer shall your name be called Abram (exalted father, or as Thieme once said, “father of high and windy places”), For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. But your name shall be Abraham (father of a multitude or as the text says, a father of many nations); For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.”

Isaac:

Genesis 17:18 And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!”

Genesis 17:19 But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (laughter); and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”

Jacob:

Genesis 32:27 So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”

Genesis 32:28 He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”

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Naming people, God recognizes or perhaps bestows on them recognition of spiritual achievement or of a blessing from God. So, in the future, God will bestow on the sons of Israel a name of renown.

Praise. This word is said along with “name.”

Deuteronomy 26:18 The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments;

Deuteronomy 26:19 and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.” (The two words in Zephaniah 3:20, fame and praise, are given as a promise in Deuteronomy in reverse order. This promise is realized in the kingdom.)

Among all the peoples of the earth. As Zephaniah completes his prophecy, he is linking back to its beginning. Here is that theme of “all” again. Israel will have fame and renown throughout all the peoples of the earth.

In a sense, there is an echo of the Exodus when the sons of Israel took from the Egyptians:

Exodus 12:35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing;

Exodus 12:36 and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

This renown and praise are a repetition of praise and renown in the previous verse.

Earth. In chapter 1 verse 2, God is going to sweep and remove “all” from the face of the earth. Except here, the earth is a different word. Take note. The word for earth in chapter 1 is “adamah.” It is, as some say, derived from “Adam.” This is the earth that is cursed because of Adam’s sin.

Genesis 3:17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground (adamah) because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

But in Zephaniah 3:20, a different word for earth is used. It is the same word used of the “promised land.” Eretz.

Exodus 3:7 The Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.

Exodus 3:8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land (eretz) to a good and spacious land, to a land (eretz) flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

In the Millennium/Kingdom, Israel will finally possess all of the good land promised by God to Abraham.

I restore. God is doing the restoring of Israel to the land. It is grace. The verb actually means “to return.” In other words, this gathering will return Israel to the land, but as we know from the book of Ezekiel, the land will be expanded from what it is today or for that matter what it has been previously.

Says the Lord. The prophecy ends much the way it began. It started with “declares the Lord” in verse 2. The word is changed here but the meaning is similar. God is providing the content of this prophecy. He guarantees, with His character, that this will happen.