

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

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Thank you Brother Ray, thank you Brother Allen for your prayer and I do want to thank the Heavenly Father for this privilege of service, and I do thank the brethren in Croatia for this invitation as well as for the convention theme and program, and we appreciate the services that we were able to hear that went before, and I want to send you the love from my wife Ruth, as well as from the Oakland County Bible students and the extended brethren that meet via Zoom from Toronto and other places, and I do want to thank our translators and our IT brethren who helped make all of this possible.

We know that it's a great sacrifice of time and energy on your part, brethren. We've been assigned Zephaniah the third chapter, verses 8 and 9, which read therefore wait you upon me, says the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the pray for my determination is to gather the nations that I may assemble the kingdoms to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my zeal, for then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with with one consent.

Dear brethren, we have before us such powerful lessons from just two verses the Lord God Almighty tells us to be patient, to wait for him to recompense all injustices I will repay, saith the Lord, that is in that day, the thousand year day of the Lord from 1874 AD onward. At some point after that day has begun, he plans to give a witness as to his judgments coming upon the earth, Particularly those who are out are under religious constraint, the terror or nominally Christian element. Yet it is plain he intends that all nations shall be included in his final judgment upon this old heaven and old earth, the current false religious arrangement and corrupt worldly organizations of all kinds, the heat of his anger, and in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed. Sounds very much like what the Apostle Peter wrote in 2nd Peter 3, verses 8 through 10 and 12. But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness but is long suffering to us ward not desiring that any should perish, but that all shall come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will arrive as a thief in the witch, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat the earth also, and the works that are Therein shall be burned up, looking for and awaiting eagerly unto the paracea presence of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. What the prophet Zephaniah wrote approximately 700 years earlier, Peter elaborates on for the benefit of you and I living at the end of the Gospel age, that age is being overlapped by the incoming millennial day, which is both the thousand year day of Christ's presence as well as the day of God. This includes opening with his judgments being executed upon all corrupt and religious, governmental, business and financial institutions that are in control of the elements of these old heavens and old earth. They will pass away in the fire of anarchy.

Zephaniah writes that the fire is symbolic of God's consuming justice. He writes that it melts or dissolves all the selfish systems that dominate humanity today. However, God does not intend to melt or destroy the literal earth, for he himself promised that the earth abides forever and will be inhabited. Ecclesiastes 1:4. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.

But the earth abideth forever. Psalm 104:5 who laid the foundation of the earth, that it should not be removed Forever, and Isaiah 45, 1 and 8. For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens, God

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

himself that formed the earth and made it. He hath established it he created it not in vain he formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord, and there is none else.

His symbolic fire represents literal trouble. His fire is intended to purify the religious and temporal societies so that restored humanity can flourish as they walk up the highway of holiness under the sweet influences of of the great Mediator, the Christ head and body together in glory. The fierce anger is against all unrighteousness. He understands that the people have been blinded by the adversary. The Lord intends to destroy the evil systems so that he can use the Christ along with the ancient worthies, to enlighten the minds of the people.

That is, he will give to the chastened masses of humanity the pure language of truth and righteousness. This implies a very dramatic change in every way from what the masses have now. Now it is all very confused, and actually, even as more light of truth shines forth, more methods of darkness increase. Certainly it is currently a time of great uncertainty for those who are not blessed with the understanding of God's plans and purposes.

However, we want to return to the subject of verse 8, God's wrath upon all nations. This is also known as the great Armageddon crash the worldwide time of anarchy, the winter time of trouble, before the summertime of the peaceable kingdom. We will consider from the Scriptures why God has such a ferocious time of destruction. We want to be able to both assure ourselves of why this must happen, as well as to be able to explain it to others, perhaps our loved ones, friends, and any who might be questioning why a loving and just God allows the increasing trouble Brother Russell's original title for the fourth volume was the Day of Vengeance. Later he renamed it the Battle of Armageddon because that was a common expression being used in the media of his day.

On page 14, he wrote his intentions on why he compiled that great work, the fourth volume.

The main object of this volume is not therefore, to enlighten the world, but which can appreciate only the logic of events, and will have no other but to forewarn, forearm, comfort, encourage, and strengthen the household of faith, so that they be not dismayed, but may be in full harmony and sympathy with even the severest measures of Divine discipline in the chastening of the world, seeing by faith the glorious outcome in the precious fruits of righteousness and enduring peace. The Day of Vengeance stands naturally related to the benevolent object of its divine permission, which is the overthrow of the entire present order of things preparatory to the permanent establishment of the Kingdom of God. End of quote and again from reprint 2306 reprint 2306 quote it is our duty to take note of the various manifestations of divine vengeance, the recompenses of justice, and to sympathize with these, and thus learn to apply our hearts unto wisdom. End of quote Plainly stated, the greatest time of trouble is the result of God's righteous retribution upon the nations. For all the evils of the accumulative sins against more or less light and knowledge.

It is a time of settling all the claims of justice. Retribution is a principle of divine law. Every injustice cries out for vengeance or penalty. An eye for an eye, a life for a life. Before we continue, we want to emphasize an important distinction.

There is retributive judgment for individual's sins against lighter knowledge and there is retributive judgment rendered collectively upon nations and systems that are guilty before God's bar of justice.

Regarding individual responsibility, we read the following Romans 12:1 that's that is a typo on my notes. Let me give you the right verse. Romans 12, verse 19 Sorry, I left the nine out. Sorry to my translators. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

For it is written. Dungeons is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord, and 1st Timothy 5:24 Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some men they follow after 2nd Thessalonians 1:6 seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you and Luke 12:47 48 and that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes for unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required and to whom men have committed much of him, they will ask the more we want to make a clear distinction between sin that Jesus ransom covers and sin which God's justice must punish, which is known as expiation. The ransom is applicable for all unintentional sins. These are referred to as Adamic sins.

These are the result of our inherited, fallen, or imperfect human nature. However, the sins that are committed when a person either knows better and or could have avoided it, God expiates with various chastisements. God's justice is always to be balanced. It is God's love and mercy that has provided the means for atonement for all Adamic related sins. If it were not for this provision through Jesus, there could be no hope for us at all.

For God's justice had declared to Adam from the very beginning regarding eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for in the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt surely die. There are a number of excellent reprint articles on this topic, but you may want to consider reprint 465-14-651 which expresses it best.

It is not our intention to spend more time on the subject of an individual's judgment for more or less willful sins. Suffice it to say that the foregoing verses do indicate that that God either chastens people for their personal sins in their lifetime, or he will arrange for that to be either done or concluded during the mediatorial kingdom.

As Zephaniah 3:8 indicates, we are considering God's retributive judgment on the nations and collective systems. National sins require national retribution or expiation in order to balance God's scale of justice. Now we want to consider the scriptural reasoning on this matter. Genesis 4, verses 8 through 11 and Cain talked with Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him, and the Lord said Unto Cain, where is Abel, thy brother?

And he said, I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, what hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground, and now art thou cursed from the earth, which has opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.

The voice symbolizes a witness or testimony. The earth opening her mouth to receive the spilt lifeblood symbolizes a form of record keeping by God. Even though God punished Cain, yet we will read that by sparing Cain's life, there would be a later expiation 4,000 years later. We will consider this in a moment.

Genesis 6:13, and God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold, I will destroy them from the earth.

This continued violence and corruption of mankind was apparently extremely sinful and was undoubtedly the result of the fallen angels interference with humanity by assuming human flesh and mating with women, thereby creating the hybrid race of beings known as the Nephilim. Genesis 6:1 5 Jude 6 and 7 and 2nd Peter 2:4 and 5. As a result of this, God sent the flood, which

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

caused the fallen angels to dematerialize the flesh bodies. Thereafter they are restrained from once again materializing flesh, and they are confined to Earth's atmosphere until the great day of judgment. The Nephilim, being a mutant unauthorized race of beings, were destroyed once for all time.

Humans, however, because of God's love and justice, working together, planned on providing his only begotten son Jesus, to be the ransom for Adam and all his descendants, so they will have a future opportunity. We might safely assume that God intended to only have a pure Adamic race survive the flood through Noah, his wife, three sons, and their three wives. Genesis 9:4 6 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat, and surely your blood of your lives will I require. At the hand of every beast will I require it.

And at the hand of man, at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso shutteth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God made he man. God's justice holds men responsible for a fellow man's blood or life.

Genesis 15:16 but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

God even took into account the heathen nations, and here we recognize that in God's wisdom there is a sense of accumulative guilt or retribution.

Exodus 34:67 and the LORD passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin and that will by no means clear the guilty and visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation. This is powerful. God is forgiving of iniquity, transgression, and sin, but will not forgive guilt and iniquity, even keeping an accounting of it for generations. How do we harmonize this? Actually, this is an excellent scriptural example of the Lord providing the means for Adamic sin forgiveness through Jesus ransom.

And yet those who are guilty of willful sins will not be forgiven. But at some point in time, perhaps generations later, God will expiate their guilt through chastisements.

Second Kings 21, verses 10 through 12 and 16 and the Lord spake by his servants the prophets, saying, because Manasseh king of Judah, hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth it, both his ears shall tingle. Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord and further in 2nd Kings 24:2 through 4 and the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians, bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Amman, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the LORD of the Lord, which he spake by his servants, the prophets, surely at the commandment of the Lord, came this upon Judah to remove out of his to remove to remove them out of his sight for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did and also for the innocent blood that he shed for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood which the LORD would not pardon. Again we read how the Lord does not pardon the shedding of innocent blood. There must be an accounting for his justice.

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

Over 50 years after Manasseh had died, the prophet Jeremiah stated the following regarding the coming destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 15:4 and I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

It is Jesus who has expressed this understanding of accumulative guilt of tribes and nations best in Matthew 23, verses 29 through 38.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore you be witnesses unto yourselves that you are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill you up, then, the measure of your father, you serpents, you generation of vipers. How can you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues and persecute them from city to city, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar.

Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto me. How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, you shall not see me henceforth, till you shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Jesus plainly declares that the justice of God has kept an account of all the unjust murders of those who he considered innocent. This account from Abel to Zacharias was going to be squared up by the horrific time of trouble that came upon Jerusalem and Israel from 69 AD through 135 AD at the hands of the Romans.

It was the ending of an age, the Jewish age, overlapping upon the opening or beginning of the new, incoming Gospel age. The Jewish nation was the most responsible. Before God they had the law of covenant, with all its favors of instructions along with the prophets God had sent to help correct them. Then, at the first advent, they had John the Baptist, Jesus the Messiah, the apostles, and other Christian witnesses. Yet as a people, they rejected Jesus and persecuted those sent by God to help them recognize their day of visitation, even as Jesus stated he would have gathered them to himself, but in hard heartedness they would not, and they refused.

They condemned him. Yet with all of this favor it made them all the more responsible. They rejected the light that was in their very midst. In fact, this makes him all the more responsible. So in God's wisdom he determined to visit all the accumulative retributive guilt upon that generation, visiting his wrath upon them as a nation unto the utmost.

It resulted in their expulsion from the very land he had given their forefathers. There began their long 1845 years of disfavor, ending in 1878 A.D. the nation was punished. That generation was punished. However, by the grace and mercies of God's plan of the ages, those Jewish people themselves shall be brought back in the mediatorial kingdom.

With this understanding we can now graph why the Lord has predetermined to have the greatest time of trouble at the end of this Gospel age, as Jesus prophesied. For then shall be great

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time no, nor ever shall be. Matthew 24:21 it is this simple philosophy that the more light one has or could have, if they are not being lazy or prideful, the more responsible they become. I'm going to repeat that it is this simple philosophy that the more light one has or could have, if they are not being lazy or prideful, the more responsible they become. During this Gospel age, with the Word of God being completed and available in almost every language, with all of the additional Bible helps, and additionally for over a hundred years, the harvest message, along with the wonderful increase of general education on every subject, there certainly remains no excuse for the death of any innocent ones.

How strange that with the New Testament being given, there were even more righteous people killed during this Gospel age than all the time preceding. It is no wonder then, that God had determined that his severest retributive judgment would come at the end of this Gospel age. It will come in one final blast upon the nations, with its harshest wrath upon the church systems and those that support them. It will be the Armageddon crash that will eventually sweep over the entire world and will bring resolution for the justice of God for all the righteous flood shed upon the earth after righteous Zechariah who died at the close of the Jewish age, until the death of the last innocent ones of this Gospel age by God's reckoning.

Your translators, if you'd like to take a drink, I will too.

The accumulative guilt by those who have the Word of God complete is enormous. So we read in the following Luke 18:7,8 in part and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, Though he bear with them long, I tell you that he will avenge them speedily and again second Thessalonians 1:4,10 from the Barclay translation so much so is this the case, that we cannot help telling God's other congregations how proud we are of you because of your fortitude and and your unswerving loyalty admits all the persecutions and the trouble you are going through. It all goes to prove the justice of God's judgment for it is designed to enable you to show that you deserve to be his citizens of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. For God in his justice is bound to square the account by sending trouble to those who trouble you, and by sending relief to you who are now going through troubles and to us too, when the Lord Jesus bursts from heaven onto the stage of history with his mighty angels and inflaming fire to execute divine vengeance on those who refuse to recognize God, and on those who refuse to recognize, to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Men like that will pay the penalty of eternal destruction and from the presence of God and his mighty glory.

These verses inform us of God's avenging justice from the time of the worldwide symbolic fire of anarchy at the conclusion of the gospel age, all the way through to the end of the little season wherein every individual will have had the opportunity to learn the truth and come into harmony with God's justice and God's love through Jesus. All those that disobey due to willfulness will then go into oblivion. The Second death Revelation 18, verses 4 and 5 and I heard another voice from heaven saying, come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

In context, these verses refer to our time, the time of the harvest separating of wheat and tares, and the bundling and the bundled tares will be set on fire the destruction of all the denominations that have defiled God's holy character with their false doctrines. Reread that there will be a time in God's plan, and that he would say, it is enough her sins have reached their limit, yet God's vengeance is to come upon all unrighteous systems and governments. We will quote just one more set of scriptures on this Psalm 149:6 9 Let the high praises of God be in their mouths, and a two

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

edged sword in their hand to execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishments upon the people to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgment written this honor. Have all his saints praise you the Lord.

Time does not permit us to consider another very important aspect of God's retributive justice. It is that of the great company's sufferings as a righteous class during the great time of trouble. This is pictured in Leviticus 16, the day of atonement and the sins of the people that the scapegoat bore away. I will recommend one reprint on this. It starts on the bottom of reprint 5873.

5873 and continues onto page 5874. 5874 we leave this aspect of Zephaniah 3:8 with confidence that the Lord God Almighty will have his attribute of justice completely satisfied by his balancing of all accounts. We spent a disproportionate amount of our time with the foregoing consideration of God's justice, because we think it is difficult to explain all the trouble in the world without understanding the nature of God's retributive justice. Brother Russell comments in one reprint it is difficult to understand God's judgment.

Yet he also put it succinctly in the fifth volume, page 3131 that there is equilibrium of divine justice, love, wisdom and power. God's love and justice are exactly equal, end of quote. So now we turn to the more pleasurable consideration of Zephaniah 3. 9. I'll read it for then that is, after the great time of trouble will I turn to the people, to the entire human family, a pure language, the truth of the divine plan of the ages, that they may all call on the name of the Lord, all that are willing and obedient, those walking up the highway of holiness, to serve him with one consent.

Yes, the very essence of this verse is to demonstrate the harmony of understanding, the cooperation and the belief of restored mankind.

How this worldwide harmony will be accomplished is well illustrated in Isaiah 35:8, 10, and a highway shall be there, and a way and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it will be for those the wayfaring men, though fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon it shall not be found there but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransom of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Yes, the pure language truth on every subject Truth corrected History Truth corrected Science Truth corrected Morality Truth corrected Faith Truth corrected social understanding. Gone will be all man made ideologies, theologies and social structures. All of these will be demonstrated to have been flawed and misleading as well as selfish and unjust. With Satan completely bound and the unrepentant fallen angels destroyed, only truth will be taught by the Christ the Mediator, Jesus the Head and his body members his bride. Then it will be passed along through the great company and holy angels, and in the spirit realm they will work through the restored ancient worthies, the holy remnant, rehabilitated Jews, and eventually all those that continue to make rapid progress in their characters with heart and mind, harmony and obedience to God's righteous laws for living and believing.

With the ransom price provided by Jesus having been paid out to God's justice and any and all partially willful sins expiated, there will be nothing standing in the way of the world's progress in AT1mint to the translators, I want to interject a thought that we wanted to emphasize that has been prominent in the news recently.

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

It's the development of AI artificial intelligence chat abilities that are to be used in commercial application via the Internet as part of the ability of users of Google Search, Microsoft's Search and many other social usage applications that can create very realistic messages, if you will.

That will be very difficult for people to discern whether it's truth or fiction, fact or fallacy.

We already have a lot of that now, but many fear it will grow exponentially.

I'm connecting this with the beauty of when the pure language is put forth to emphasize the intermediatorial kingdom, everyone will be able to recognize without any outward difficulty what is the truth on every subject. Thank you translators for that.

It will be after the little season testing is completed that only those faithful and true to the Lord will then be granted life eternal. It is here that we would like to suggest the lovely expression found in Isaiah 14:7 the whole earth is at rest and is quiet. They burst forth into singing.

What a beautifully simple expression of what the entire groaning creation is longing for. It takes us to a time beyond this vale of tears, beyond the Armageddon crash, beyond the process of restitution work, a time beyond the final testing and the everlasting destruction of the great enemy Satan and all that follow him. It will be a time when every knee will bow. Every heart and head will bow to the Lord God Almighty and to his Son, the Lamb that had been slain. They will sing.

Worthy, worthy are they of all Praise, glory and honor. The entirety of God's creation will be quiet in the sense of no turmoil or commotion, no crying, no mourning. All will be content, happy and at peace. They will burst forth into singing. Yes, all of God's intelligent creatures will feel a deep compulsion to express their song together, their gratitude and appreciation.

They will sing in harmony with one another because God had turned to them the pure language, and they will worship him with one consent. There will be no more doubts or arguments over what is right or wrong. All will be agreed. Yet each person will have their own unique personality and experiences that will have gotten them to that point in time. No one will feel inferior to others.

None will try to show themselves better than another. No, it will be a true harmony of relationships. I'll repeat, no one will feel inferior to others. None will try to show themselves better than another. No, it will be a true harmony of relationships.

There will be no embarrassments, inferiorities, nor criticisms. All will feel included in Scripture. We have read of the time past when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation of the earth for human life, and again when Jesus was born, the only perfect human ever. I said that wrong.

The only perfect infant human ever. Perfect infant human ever. We read in Luke 2:13 and 14, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men, and finally, as the psalmist wrote, I will sing of the Lord of the love.

I will sing of the love of the Lord forever.

And if that wasn't enough joy, we are told again back to Zephaniah 3 in verse 17. The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love.

Ric Cunningham - Zephaniah 3:8-9

He will rejoice over you with singing. May the Lord add his blessing over.