

Byron Keith - Zephaniahs Prospect

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No, it chose to start our remarks today by singing the Prospect. Because when I saw my assignment this weekend, which is Zephaniah 3:17, I had the same feeling that Brother Daniel just shared with us what a wonderful promise it is. You know, the word prospect also means expectation, and so we titled our thus day Zephaniah's Prospect. So as the hymn composer just gave us, you know, his prospect, and as we sang it, you might have noticed that there's an exclamation point when you sing the chorus.

Oh, the Prospect. It's so transporting. Exclamation point, and isn't that true? I mean, when we get together to talk about God's plan, really what we're talking about and what really fills us with joy and love and appreciation is the expectation of what God has promised.

There's a delay that we see that's in place. But Zephaniah takes us forward into the future to tell us what it's going to be like.

So we'd like to read to start the theme text again and remind us that in my mind, this is Zephaniah's prospect for mankind's ultimate blessing, and I appreciated that the convention chose the new King James Version for this. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will save. Well, that's a future promise right there, isn't it? He's saving us, us now.

But the prospect is not for just us, but for everyone who's ever lived, and we go through this, we're going to see that Zephaniah, like other Israeli Israelite prophets, they're speaking to the Jews, but they're also speaking to mankind. So when we talk about this wonderful scripture here, this prospect, we're talking about ourselves, we're talking about Israel, we're talking about the world of mankind. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love.

He will rejoice over you with singing. Brother Daniel gave us some beautiful thoughts on that. I thought, well, I could just sit down and enjoy the next hour and we have fellowship after he gave us his thoughts. But when we read this, we recognize that Zephaniah identifies the only source that can deliver this promise. But to understand this love and rejoicing that he's speaking up here, we really need to consider the entire prophecy.

So we want to go back to Zephaniah 1:1, and we read there a message from the Lord came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushy. Cushy was the son of Zedaliah. Or Gedaliah. Gedaliah was the son of Amariah.

Amariah was the son of King Hezekiah, and I apologize to any of those who I misprint in sinning. The Lord spoke to Zephaniah during the rule of Josiah, and I think I got that one right. He was the king of Judah and the son of Ammon.

So that's where we begin. We begin in the reign of King Judah or Josiah, and we know from biblical history that Josiah was the last good people of Judah. If we go back and read the Scriptures and remember that his, his grandfather King Manasseh and his father King Hammond had both abandoned the worship of Jehovah and they had enticed the people into idol worship. So that's the beginning of King Josiah's reign.

Now the account of Josiah's Reign is recorded two places in second Kings 22 and 23 and again in second Chronicles 34 and 35, and the first thing we are struck by is the fact that he took the throne at the age of 8 years old. We're told that in 2nd Kings 22:2 and this is what it said when he took the

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throne about this young boy. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right.

That's the living translation which mostly thoroughly marks today. But isn't it interesting that this eight year old boy, after two reigns before him, his grandfather and father had taken away the worship of Jehovah and replaced it with worship of idols and other gods, and yet this young boy says he did what was pleasing the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. How do you think those thoughts came into Josiah's mind? I often wonder how this boy, this young boy who was made king at the age of eight, would have separated himself from his father's guiding and grandfather's guiding.

But he did, and it's to me it's a great part of the story of Zephaniah's prophecy. Now as Josiah grew older, we're told that he gained more experience and became more authoritative as a king. That Sunday in the 18th year of his reign that he recognized the disrepair of the Jewish temple, the Temple of God, due to the neglect of his father and grandfather, and so he decided to restore it to the prominence it used to have.

And so he instructed the high priest, whose name was Hilkiah, to take monies collected at the temple and do the work, and they went out and they bought stone they bought wood, they hired carpenters and builders, and they began this restoration there. So here's Josiah, this young boy by this time, he says he's his 18th year. So if my math is right, 18 is 26. So he's around his mid 20s when he says, go rebuild the temple.

They want the temple rebuilt, and so Hilkiah is put over the cease, overseeing the repairs. But he discovers something amazing. Second Kings 22, 8, 11. Says Hilkiah, the high priest said to Shaphan, the court secretary, I have found the book of the law in the Lord's temple.

Stop and just digest that. The book of the Lord had been missing. I mean, the two kings before Josiah hadn't cared about the temple, and so not only was the building in disrepair, the worship was in disrepair. They had lost the book of the law.

Then it's continuing on. It says, Zechariah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it, and Chapin went to the king and reported, your officials have turned over the money collected at the temple of the Lord of the workers and the supervisors at the temple. Shaphan also told the king, hilkiah, the priest has given me a scroll. So Shaphan read it to the king.

When the king heard what was written in the book of the law, he tore his clothes in despair.

Imagine the emotions that must have been running through the mind of this young king, this king in his 20s, who had been told when he took office as king that he was pleasing God's sight. Imagine how mesmerized he must have been when Chapin read the responsibilities for the king written in Deuteronomy 17, verses 18 to 20 words that were written for him because he was the king, and this is what Deuteronomy 17, 18, 20 say. When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instructions on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must also keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives.

That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way, and it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel. We read the

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morning resolve every day.

But what a morning resolve this had to be to Josiah. The first time he read it. His grandfather and his father had forsaken their royal instruction. In favor of idol worship. So these words were quite strange and unfamiliar to Josiah.

The king, who did not turn away from doing what was right, had never felt this power of God's instructions to the king, and now he was the king. Imagine the joy that had to fill his heart, but at the same time mingled with. With sorrow. So reading on in verses 12 and 13, you kind of get a feeling of what Josiah is going through his mind.

He says, then gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, and Isaiah, the king's personal advisor. He says, go to the temple and speak to the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah. Inquire about the words written in the scroll that has been found. For the Lord's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of the scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we should do.

So that was his instructions. He wanted to know what the Lord was really thinking about this long gap of not doing what they were supposed to be doing. So Hilkiah is sent off to retrieve a prophetess named Huldah to bring the Lord's instructions back to Josiah, and this is what she brought back with God's response. This is what the Lord says.

I'm going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the words written in the scroll that the King of Judah has read will come true. For my people have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to pagan gods, and I am very angry with them for everything they have done. My anger will burn against this place and it will not be quenched. But go to the King of Judah who sent you to seek the Lord and tell him this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the message you have just heard.

You were sorry and humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what they said against this people and the city, that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance, and I have indeed heard you, says the Lord. So I will not send the promised disaster until after you have died and been buried in peace. You will not see the disaster I'm going to bring on this city.

No. We talk to our friends about the wrath of God.

Usually they like to point to these kind of words, you know, destruction. When they go to Revelation, it's destruction, it's destruction, and the only one who's going to come out the other side are ones who were saved. This in this day. But we've got the prophets of Zephaniah and others that tell a little different story.

So when we read this little book of Zephaniah, we can picture his part as a call for reformation that Josiah was pursuing. If God could spare Josiah, perhaps the people could also be spared. No doubt the prophet and the king teamed up to draw the people back to God. Zephaniah's prophecy follows a similar pattern of other prophets who speak of the time of God's wrath. Chapter one describes God's wrath bringing ruin to the sinful world, with a particular emphasis upon evil.

Zephaniah 1, 2, 4 says, I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will sweep away people and animals alike. I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish in the

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sea, and I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble, and I will wipe humanity from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will crush Judah and Jerusalem with my fist and destroy every last trace of their BAAL worship, and that's important to remember that that's why he was doing it, because he was going to crush Jerusalem either but get rid of the last trace of their pale worship, he says, I will put an end to all the idolatrous priests so that even the memory of them will disappear.

Now, after this warning of a coming judgment, chapter two follows with a call for repentance. I think this is basically in part because of the attitude and the heart condition of Josiah. It's the last call for hope, at least for those who repent, and this appears to be Josiah's influence on Zephaniah to offer hope for the people. In verses one through three of chapter two, it says, gather together.

Yes, gather together, you shameless nation. Gather before judgment begins, before your time's repent is blown away like chaff. Act now before the fierce fury of the Lord falls and the terrible day of the Lord's anger begins. Seek the Lord all who are humble and follow his commands. Seek to do what is right and to live humbly.

Perhaps even yet the Lord will protect you from his anger on that day of destruction. You know, God's wrath against his people was not designed for their destruction, but for their humbling, and that's an important thing to remember now. Like Josiah, Jesus also expressed his desire for Israel through the tent. We remember his words in Matthew 23:37, when Jesus said, o Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones, God's messengers.

How often I have wanted to gather children together as hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me that was the desire that God and he had for that nation. But they wouldn't do it, and this morning Zephaniah also had little offense, because shortly after this declaration, judgment, famous fulfillment when Judah was taken into Babylon captivity. But Judah is not the only kingdom destined for God's judgment. In chapter 2, verses 4 to 15, Zephaniah declared, All the surrounding nations will also be destroyed for their wickedness and their treatment against God's chosen people.

I think verse 10 might summarize all of those when it says, this shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts. All these surrounding nations kind of fell upon Judah as their enemy, and they should have been looking to them for guidance. But that wasn't happening, because not even Judah's kings were doing that, and so we see that God did not forsake his chosen nation, but to prevent the people in Jerusalem from gloating over the judgment of foreign nations. Zephaniah speaks again to them in Zephaniah 3:1:8, with one last indictment against Judah.

In verses 1 and 2, he says, what sorrow awaits rebellious, polluted Jerusalem, the city of violence. Crime. No one can tell it anything. It refuses all correction. It does not trust in the Lord, draw near to its God.

That's how low Judah had fallen, and then the final symbolic description of the day of the Lord, which will be the final punishment of all nations. Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour upon them my indignation. All the heat of my anger was in the fire of my jealous laugh.

All the earth shall be consumed. It's a far cry from verse 17, isn't it? But this is what leads up to it. God will indeed punish sinners and idolaters and bring an end to the evil that's on this earth. But how sad.

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So many focus on God's righteous punishment as the end of the story. Because in the next verse we see an amazing shift showing the day of God's wrath is not for the destruction of the sinful, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, but in the preparation for salvation and blessing both of Israel and all mankind. Verse 9 reveals God's method in accomplishing this goal. He says, then I will purify the speech of all people so that everyone can worship the Lord together.

You know, up until this time, man had never lived in a world with A pure language, and it doesn't today. This is a promise that following God's wrath, the promised kingdom declared throughout the Bible will bring a world with no confusion of doctrines, no contamination of human tradition, no opposition to God. But it will be the pure gospel of the love, justice and mercy of God. There will be a clear declaration of the divine will and plan of salvation.

John 3, 16 and 17 are verses which our Christian friends all know very well, and that's a part of this prophecy that we're talking about. It's through Jesus sacrifice that God gave to the world, not to punish the world, but to punish that the world might be saved. Now listen to Zephaniah now proclaim God's promise to bring all back after his wrath has served its purpose. Remember the prophecy was that God's going to wipe the earth clean.

But now Zephaniah turned to prophecy, to the future. Says my scattered people who live beyond the rivers of Ethiopia will come to present their offerings. On that day, you will no longer need to be ashamed, for you will no longer be rebels against me. I will remove all proud and arrogant people from among you. There will be no more haughtiness on my holy mountain.

Those who are left will be the lonely and humble, for it is they who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong. They will never tell lies or deceive one another. They will eat and sleep in safety, and no one will make them afraid. Sing, O daughter of Zion.

Shout aloud, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. For the Lord will remove his end of the judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy, and the Lord himself, the King of Israel, will live among you. At last your troubles will be over and you will never again fear disaster. On that day, the announcement to Jerusalem will be, cheer up Zion, don't be afraid.

The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will say, he will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah brings us back finally to these words of hope. You know, Christ's newest, newly established kingdom on earth will commit every human who's ever lived the opportunity through the pouring out of a pure language that all can understand, and it's going to take a pure language. The prophet Joel says God will pour out his spirit on all humanity. Through this process, God will reveal his glorious plan to all, to Israel, to mankind, and to the Church.

You know, sadly, many have been led to believe that Israel has been cut out of God's command, and prophecies like this are often referred to. The truth is, the law made it impossible for imperfect Israelites to follow God's command. Now we know this is true from New Testament writings, and the Apostle Paul says of the law, for no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.

The law simply shows us how sinful we are. But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and

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the prophets long ago. That's from Romans 3, verses 20 and 21, and again in Galatians 3, 20, 24. Paul speaks about the law failing Israel by saying, now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement.

But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham. Is there a conflict then between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not. If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying Him. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin.

So we receive God's promises of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ. Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came.

It protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. This is what Zephaniah was pointing forward to. Jesus also spoke of the law that needed to be fulfilled, saying, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am coming to destroy the law, and the prophets.

I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle in no wise pass from the law till it be fulfilled. So the words of the prophets were not condemning the law. It was condemning the fact that the law could not be held by imperfect meaning, and to this all the prophets agreed.

The prophet Jeremiah, describing the making of a new covenant with Israel during the earthly phase of the kingdom in the Messianic page writes that the Lord has promised to put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts. Think of that. He's going to write it in our hearts instead of on stone tablets so we can understand it.

Think when Moses came down those stone tablets and read it to the people. They really couldn't understand words. The spiritual mind could not understand it. Reading on what Jeremiah says, he says, and they shall be my people, for they shall all know me from the least of them under the greatest of them. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31, 33 and 34. You look at scriptures that we're all familiar with. The prophet Micah also agrees with this, declaring, Israel will be the seat of of earthly kingdom when all come to learn God's way. We read this in Micah 4, verses 1 through 4. One of the favorite verses of my dear friend brother Dave Christie.

We want to read it. But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and the people shall flow unto it, and many nations shall come and saying, come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. The house of the God of Jacob.

It's not his way, and he will teach us his way out through this new covenant process, and we will walk in his paths. For the law shall go forth of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and he shall judge among many people and refute strong nations afar off.

And they shall beat their swords and the plowshares and and their spears in the cooling purse. Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But they shall

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sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. This is Micah's prophecy.

It's the same prophecy Jeremiah gave. It's the same prophecy that Zephaniah has given. There's a time coming when, when God's going to, after destroying all the evil on earth, turn the pure language and pour out his spirit on the earth so all will understand it, and so God will rejoice over Israel when they have their pride removed, they have accepted the Messiah. He will quiet them with his love as he uses them as a roadway for mankind's blessings and kingdom.

And he will rejoice over them when Christ turns away ungodliness from Israel forever. Again we turn to the words of the apostle, the Apostle Paul, reading from Romans 11:25, 29, and these are important words that we come to understand. For Paul tells the church us, I want you to understand this mystery, dear Brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the whole number of Gentiles comes to Christ and so all Israel will be saved.

Those last two sentences are so important to us. The whole number of Gentiles have to the church needs to be and then what happens? Israel is saved. That's what Zephaniah is talking about and it's wonderful words. Bethania 3, 17 Paul goes on as the scriptures say, the one who rescued will come from Jerusalem and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.

And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins. God will take away the sins of Israel. Many of the people of Israel are now enemies of the good news and this benefits you Gentiles. Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. So let us not fall into the trap of thinking that Israel is going to be starting God's plan to the world.

Zephaniah says, the Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will save he will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. No God saves the world through the greatest gift of all time. We mentioned John 3, 16, 17 4.

We will read it here. For this is how God loved the world. He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life. God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him, and he rejoices over them as they return to his ways.

Isaiah 35:8, 10 and a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the highway of Holiness. Evil minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's way. Fools will never walk there.

Lions will not lurk along its course, nor any other ferocious beast. There will be no other dangers. Only the redeemed will walk up. Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, bound with everlasting joy.

Sorrow and mourning will disappear and they will be filled with joy and gladness. These are all those who have been passed away who disparaged God's word. We fought against him throughout the ages and only being humble the ransom of that and finally God rejoices over them and quiets them with tender loving words when he returns them to his personal care. Now these are words spoken to the world taken from Revelation 21, verses 3 to 4. We might almost read these without opening our Bibles.

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Says, I saw the holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, look, God's home is now among his people. He will live with them and they will be his people. God Himself will be with him. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.

All these things forever. That's the promise to the world of mankind. Take away all their pain, all their sorrow, all their tears. When this prophecy of Zephaniah 3:17 and finally, brother, let us not forget that these words belong to us today. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will save.

He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. You know, every word of Scripture carries in it something very encouraging to the church class. We have our Lord Savior in our midst to encourage and advocate for us.

In First John 2:1:2, we have familiar words that mean a great deal to us where John says, my dear children, I'm writing this to you that so you will not sin. But if any man does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He Himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.

Christ is in the midst of us because we are his body. First Corinthians 12, 12 and 13 say, the human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

And God prays in the midst of us to the Father on our behalf. In John 14, 15, 17 John 14 words of Jesus, it says, if you love me, obey my commandments and I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate. He will never leave you. He's the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him because it is not looking for it and doesn't recognize it.

But you know him because he lives with you now and later will be in you. Yes, the Holy Spirit lives with us today long before it's going to reach Israel long before it's going to reach the world. We have the words of Jesse to definitely in our hearts today. Jesus rejoices over us with gladness because our names are written in heaven. In Luke 10, 19 and 20 he says, Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, so you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them.

Nothing will injure you. But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you. Rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.

And he quiets us by leaving us. Here's a peace. John 14:27 Beautiful scripture. I'm leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart, and the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give.

So don't be troubled or afraid. What better gift could we ever have in this present evil world than the peace of Jesus Christ? And after the wrath of God is complete, the church will rejoice by singing in God's presence. We'll sing also. Not only will he sing over us, we'll sing over him.

Revelation 15, verses 1 to 4 says, Then I saw in heaven another marvelous event of great significance. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues which bring God's wrath to

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completion. I saw before me what seemed to be a glass sea mixed with fire, and on it stood all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number represented his name. They were all holding harps that God had given them, and they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. This is what they were saying.

Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations, who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name, for you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been can you feel the wonder of Zephaniah's expectation, the awe of God's presence in your life, his rejoicing over you with gladness, the peace and quiet against you with his love? Yes, dear brother, God loves us today. We don't have to wait until the future.

Can you feel the wonder of God rejoicing over you with gladness and singing? Or do you say, I can't because I'm too guilty that God should rejoice over you? No, says zephaniah in verse 15. The Lord's taken away your judgments, so you don't have to have sin.

One final lesson we want to bring in closing Zephaniah is that we should put aside all pride and boasting in ourselves today, realizing that these words have nothing to do with our ability. These words are the gift of God. So take refuge in the name of God. Thank your hope on the righteousness of Christ and not on your own, and let yourself awaken to the wonders that the Lord, the King of Kings, rejoices over you with gladness and exalts you with loud singing. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will say, he will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. May the Lord have His blessing.