

Introduction to Zephaniah
Steven R. Cook

Author:

The author is identified as “Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah” (Zep 1:1a). It could be that Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, who ruled from 715-687 B.C. If so, he would be a cousin to King Josiah, who was reigning during his time of prophetic ministry; and, it would connect Zephaniah with two good kings who ruled in Judah. Also, he could be the priest who was captured and killed in 586 B.C. (2 Ki 25:18-21). However, there is insufficient evidence to determine if either of these extrapolations are true.

Audience:

Zephaniah prophesied to Judah during the reign of King Josiah.

Date of Ministry:

Zephaniah’s ministry was “in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah” (Zep 1:1b). Josiah ruled in Judah from 640-609 B.C. Zephaniah’s message, which addresses some of the idolatry and corruption in Judah, was likely before Josiah began his reforms in 622 B.C., or perhaps, in the early stages. His ministry was definitely before the fall of Assyria in 612 B.C., which he prophesied (Zep 2:13).

Historical Background:

Josiah was a good king who followed the reign of two evil kings, Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh reigned fifty-five years and was an evil king (2 Ki 21:1-18). Amon reigned two years and was an evil king (2 Ki 21:19-26). Josiah became king in 640 B.C. when he was eight years old, and he was a good king who walked in the ways of the Lord (2 Ki 22:1-2). In 622 B.C.—the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign—God’s Word was revealed to him (2 Ki 22:3-20), and he responded positively and instituted religious reforms throughout Judah and destroyed all the false idols and places of worship (2 Ki 23:1-25). These reforms continued until his death in 609 B.C. (2 Ki 23:29). Judah experienced a time of great prosperity and spiritual reform under Josiah’s reign; however, the outward reforms did not lead to regeneration or revival among God’s people, and the following kings reverted back to evil practices and Judah and Jerusalem were eventually destroyed in 586 B.C. This shows that the faith of one generation may not continue to the next.

Zephaniah's Message:

The theme of Zephaniah is the approaching judgment of God upon Judah for their sin. The subject of the *Day of the Lord* is prominent in the book.

The key to the Book of Zephaniah is the phrase “the day of the Lord.” This phrase appears in most of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. As we saw in Joel, “the day of the Lord” can be a past day, a day in the relatively near future, or a day in the far distant, eschatological future. It is any day in which God is dynamically at work in human affairs. Wherever we find the phrase “the day of the Lord,” it always suggests a contrast with the day of man. The day of man is any day when man appears to be in control of human affairs. It is a day of God’s patience. The day of the Lord is any day when God is clearly in control of human affairs. It is a day of God’s judgment. The phrase “the day of the Lord” is by no means unique to Zephaniah, but it is the key to the message of this book. Zephaniah used it more frequently than any other prophet. It was his burden. And he explained the meaning of this phrase more than any other prophet.¹

Zephaniah’s message ends with hope, as God promises a future restoration of His people and a time of blessing (Zep 3:9-20), which is likely a reference to the millennial kingdom.

Outline:

1. God’s judgment against Judah (Zep 1:1-2:3)
2. God’s judgment against the nations (Zep 2:4-15)
3. God’s judgment on Jerusalem (Zep 3:1-8)
4. God’s future restoration of Jerusalem (Zep 3:9-20)

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Hab 3:19.

Zephaniah 1:1—2:3

The word of the LORD [i.e. divine revelation] which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah [revealing this message's historical timeframe]: ² “I will completely remove all *things* from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD [who is sovereign]. 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. ⁴ “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem [the object of His anger]. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *and* the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests [God would accomplish what the leadership and priests had failed to do]. ⁵ “And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven, and those who bow down *and* swear to the LORD and *yet* swear by Milcom [i.e. religious syncretism], ⁶ and those who have turned back from following the LORD, and those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him.” ⁷ Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near [i.e. the day of the Lord's judgment upon His erring people, mentioned 24 times throughout], for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice [Judah], He has consecrated His guests [the Babylonians]. ⁸ “Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice that I will punish the princes [Judah's leadership], the king's sons and all who clothe themselves with foreign garments [perhaps implying Josiah's sons had adopted pagan values]. ⁹ “And I will punish on that day all [violent criminals] who leap on the *temple* threshold, who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit. ¹⁰ “On that day,” declares the LORD, “There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills [when the Babylonians invade]. ¹¹ “Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar, for all the people of Canaan will be silenced; all who weigh out silver will be cut off [i.e. businessmen who exploited others for financial gain]. ¹² “It will come about at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps [looking into dark places], and I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit [i.e. apathetic to God], who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’ [i.e. who thought God was not involved in their lives] ¹³ “Moreover, their wealth will become plunder and their houses desolate; yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*, and plant vineyards but not drink their wine.” ¹⁴ Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly [*Near = the Babylonians would invade Judah within two decades of this prophecy*]. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. ¹⁷ I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD [the reason for God's judgment]; and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their

silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD'S wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth. **2:1** Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation [of Judah] without shame, ² before the decree takes effect—the day passes like the chaff—before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you. ³ Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD'S anger [i.e. spared when He judges Judah].

Summary:

The book opens with a declaration that what follows is the “the word of the LORD” to his messenger, the prophet, Zephaniah (Zep 1:1). Immediately, there is a pronouncement of judgment that God will bring upon the world (Zep 1:2-3), specifically “against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Zep 1:4a). The reason for the judgment is because His covenant-people had followed idolatrous priests and worshiped Baal (Zep 1:4b), the “host of heaven” (Zep 1:5a), and blended the worship of the LORD along with the pagan god Milcom (Zep 1:5b). God’s people had “turned back from following the LORD” and “have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him” (Zep 1:6). According to the blessing and cursing aspect of the Mosaic Law (Deu 28:1-68), God was obligated to render judgment against His people who violated the covenant. Because God is extremely patient and slow to anger (Ex 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Psa 103:8), His judgments came only after He had sent repeated warnings through His prophets over several generations (see 2 Chr 36:14-17; Jer 25:1-12; 26:1-6; 32:26-35; 35:12-15; 44:2-6). God called the nation to be “silent before the LORD” and announces they were being offered as a sacrifice to the invading nation, whom He calls “guests” (Zep 1:7). “Here the prophet announced that the Lord’s day was near; He was about to intervene in human history. The Lord had prepared a sacrifice, namely, Judah (cf. Isa. 34:6; Jer. 46:10), and He had set apart ‘guests’ to eat it, namely, the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 10:25; Hab. 1:6).”² The judgment started with the nation’s leadership (princes), and included the king’s sons and all who adopted pagan values (Zep 1:8). It also included those who practiced robbery and violence (Zep 1:9), businessmen who financially exploited others (Zep 1:10-11), and those who were apathetic to God, who say, “The LORD will not do good or evil!” (Zep 1:12); these would be plundered and lose their wealth, homes, and fields to the invading Babylonian army (Zep 1:13). The day of the LORD was “near” (Zep 1:14a) and would come upon the nation within two decades of

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zep 1:7.

Zephaniah's message. It would be a time when "the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers" (Zep 1:14-16). The judgment would be so severe, "they will walk like the blind" (Zep 1:17a). God's judgment was because "they have sinned against the LORD" (Zep 1:17b). Furthermore, there would be no escape for the nation, as Judahites would not be able to use their gold and silver to buy off their attackers (Zep 1:18). God then calls the nation to "gather," perhaps as a last offer to repent before judgment comes (Zep 2:1-2). A final word is given to the faithful remnant within the nation, saying, "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zep 2:3).

The Day of the Lord
Dr. Steven R. Cook

The phrase “the day of the Lord” appears twenty three times in Scripture.³ It appears eighteen times in the Old Testament (Isa. 13:6, 9; 58:13; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joe 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5)⁴ and five times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:7-14).⁵ In Scripture, the “day of the Lord” is used both in a local and future sense. The phrase was first presented by the prophet Joel (assuming he prophesied during the reign of Uzziah), who stated, “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joe 1:15; cf. 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). The argument that there is a “day of the Lord” relevant to Joel’s audience is rooted in the historical context of the book in which the prophet wrote to the elders, citizens and the priests in Israel (Joel 1:2, 9, 13). To them, Joel describes the “day of the Lord” within the context of local judgments his audience experienced upon their crops (Joel 1:15). However, there are other biblical passages that describe a future “day of the Lord” which is global and filled with wrath. Some Bible scholars see the “day of the Lord” both as a time of wrath and blessing (Constable & Phillips); whereas other scholars see it strictly as a time of wrath pertaining to the seven year Tribulation (Fruchtenbaum & Wiersbe). The following four quotes respectively demonstrate the view of both camps.

The day of the Lord is a term that appears frequently in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets. It refers to a day in which the Lord is working obviously, in contrast to other days, the day of man, in which man works without any apparent divine intervention...The eschatological day of the Lord that the prophets anticipated includes both judgment (in the Tribulation) and blessing (in the Millennium and beyond).⁶

The day of the Lord is a long period that begins right after the rapture, runs through the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon, and continues into the millennium. This day, which embraces both judgment and glory, is the

³ Old Testament writers use the Hebrew phrase יום־יהוה *yom Yahweh*, and New Testament writers use the Greek phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου *hemera kuriou*.

⁴ The day of the Lord appears twice in Amos 5:18 and Zephaniah 1:14.

⁵ Other references include (Isa. 2:11-21; 4:2; 11:10; 13:13; 19:23-24; 24:21; 27:12-13; 30:25; 61:2-4; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:0; 36:33; 38:14-19; Hos. 2:16-21; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 1:8-10, 14-15; 2:2-3; 3:8; Mal. 3:2, 17; 4:1-3; Matt. 10:15; 11:22-24; 26:29; Luke 10:12; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:5; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:4; 2 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 4:17; Rev. 6:19).

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Joe 1:15.

subject of extensive Old Testament prophecy, where it is also called “that day,” “a day of wrath,” “the day of vengeance,” and so on.⁷

In the Old Testament, the most common name for the Great Tribulation is *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the Lord* found in various passages... There are some who use the Day of the Lord to include the Millennium as well as the Tribulation period, based upon 2 Peter 3:10. But as will be shown later in this chapter, this verse is best seen as applying to the Tribulation only, rather than including the events following it. In every passage of the Scriptures that the term *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the Lord* is found, it is always and without exception a reference to the Tribulation period. This is the most common name for this period in the Old Testament, and it is also found in various passages of the New Testament. While the phrase *that day* is used both negatively and positively and therefore many times it does apply to the Millennium, the phrase *Day of Jehovah* or *Day of the Lord* is always used negatively and never included the Millennial Kingdom.⁸

The phrase “the day of the Lord” refers to that future time when God will pour out His wrath on the Gentile nations *because of their sins against the Jews* (see Joel 3:1–8). It will occur after the church has been taken to heaven (see 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9–10, and Rev. 3:10), during that period of seven years known as the Tribulation. It is described most fully in Rev. 6–19. This period will end with the Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9–17; Rev. 19:11–21) and Jesus Christ returning to the earth to establish His kingdom.⁹

I tend to favor the latter view that the future “day of the Lord” refers strictly to the seven year Tribulation. From Scripture we can say with certainty that the future “day of the Lord” follows the first coming of Christ, (Mal. 4:5), will come upon the entire world (Joel 2:1-11; 30-31; 3:12-15; Isa. 13:6-11; Ezek. 30:2-4; Obad. 1:15), will be inescapable (Amos 5:18-20), is a day of wrath and destruction (Zeph. 1:14-18), will come unannounced (1 Thess. 5:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:10), and will follow the coming of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1-4). The church will not experience this time of God’s judgment, for we are waiting for the return of Christ from heaven, “who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10; cf. 5:9).

⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring the Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; 2009), Joe 1:15–20.

⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah : A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 172–173.

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Joe.

Zephaniah 2:4-15

For Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be driven out at noon and Ekron will be uprooted. ⁵ Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you so that there will be no inhabitant [This was accomplished by Pharaoh Neco II between 609-594 BC; see Jer 47:1-7]. ⁶ So the seacoast will be pastures, *with* caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷ And the coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah, they will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they [the remnant] will lie down at evening; for the LORD their God will care for them and restore their fortune [God will give this land and homes to His faithful remnant]. ⁸ “I have heard the taunting of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon [two nations who were the offspring of Lot and his two daughters; Gen 19:30-38], with which they have taunted My people and become arrogant against their territory [Moab and Ammon were known for their arrogance; see Isa 16:6; Jer 48:26, 29; Ezek 25:5-7]. ⁹ “Therefore, as I live,” declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Surely Moab will be like Sodom and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah—a place possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation [God judges the enemies of His people]. The remnant of My people will plunder them and the remainder of My nation will inherit them.” [God restores blessing to His people] ¹⁰ This they will have in return for their pride, because [the reason] they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts. ¹¹ The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his *own* place. ¹² “You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword.” [which occurred by the Babylonians ca. 586 BC] ¹³ And He will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and He will make Nineveh a desolation, parched like the wilderness [which occurred in 612 BC]. ¹⁴ Flocks will lie down in her midst, all beasts which range in herds; both the pelican and the hedgehog will lodge in the tops of her pillars; birds will sing in the window, desolation *will be* on the threshold; for He has laid bare the cedar work. ¹⁵ This is the exultant city which dwells securely, who says in her heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” How she has become a desolation, a resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss *and* wave his hand *in contempt*.

Summary:

Having pronounced His judgment upon Judah for their sins (Zep 1:1-2:3), God now turns His focus upon the surrounding Gentile nations ((Zep 2:4-15). He opens with a pronouncement of judgment upon four Philistine cities which lie west of Judah, saying, “Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon a desolation; Ashdod will be driven out at noon and Ekron will be uprooted” (Zep 2:4). The Philistines had a

longstanding hostility toward Israel (Gen 20-21, 26), and had even taken some Judahites captive and sold them into slavery (Amo 1:6-8). To these people and cities, God declared retributive justice, saying, “The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you so that there will be no inhabitant” (Zep 2:5). But God pronounces remunerative justice toward Israel, saying, “So the seacoast will be pastures, *with* caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. And the coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah, they will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; for the LORD their God will care for them and restore their fortune” (Zep 2:6-7). Next, God addressed the hostility and taunting of Moab and Ammon (Zep 2:8), who were the descendants of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his two daughters (Gen 19:30-38). The Moabites and Ammonites were historically hostile to Israel (Isa 16:6; Jer 48:26, 29; Ezek 25:5-7), and now they would be judged. Because of their longstanding sins, God pronounced retributive justice, saying, “As I live, ‘declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,’ surely Moab will be like Sodom and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah—a place possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation” (Zep 2:9a). Again, God would dispense remunerative justice to His people, saying, “The remnant of My people will plunder them and the remainder of My nation will inherit them” (Zep 2:9b). The Moabites and Ammonites got what they deserved, as God states, “This they will have in return for their pride, because they have taunted and become arrogant against the people of the LORD of hosts. The LORD will be terrifying to them” (Zep 2:10-11a). The Ammonites and Moabites, whose idols customarily received sacrifices, would have nothing to bring them, for the Lord “will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his *own* place” (Zep 2:11b). Very briefly, God speaks to Ethiopians, saying “You also, O Ethiopians, will be slain by My sword” (Zep 2:12). No reason is given for God’s judgment, but it is likely they acted similarly to the other Gentile nations that were being judged. The final judgment came against the Assyrians in the north, in which God “will stretch out His hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and He will make Nineveh a desolation, parched like the wilderness” (Zep 2:13). Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by an alliance between the Babylonians and Medes under the leadership of Nabopolassar and Cyaxeres. The Assyrians were removed and the land became inhabited by wild animals (Zep 2:14). The Assyrians thought they were secure in their fortified cities, and they became proud. But God would destroy them, and they would become “a resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss *and* wave his hand *in contempt*” (Zep 2:15).

Though God gave His written law to Israel alone (Psa 147:19-20), His moral laws are written upon the hearts of all people (Rom 2:14-15), and He holds them accountable for their behavior. God is Judge of all people (Gen 18:25; Psa 22:28; 103:19), and He deals out retribution to those who disobey Him and attack His

people (Deu 32:35; 2 Thess 1:6-8), and rewards those who are faithful (Psa 18:20; 58:11; 1 Sam. 26:23).

God's Sovereignty, Righteousness and Justice
Dr. Steven R. Cook

God is the sovereign Creator of the universe, and He rules supreme over all things. Scripture reveals, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (Psa 103:19), for "our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psa 115:3), "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Psa 135:6), and "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan 4:35). God allows fallen angels and humans to produce sin and evil, but they never act beyond what His sovereign will permits (Job 1:1-21; Psa 105:12-15; 1 Ki 22:19-23; 2 Cor 12:7-10). Though God has many attributes, His sovereignty is foremost.¹⁰

The Bible, which reveals God's sovereignty, also reveals He is righteous and just. He is declared to be righteous by nature (Deu 32:4; Psa 119:137, 142; Isa 45:21; John 17:25), and just in all His ways (Psa 145:17; Rev 15:3). Divine righteousness may be defined as the intrinsic, immutable, moral perfection of God, from which He commands all things, in heaven and earth, and declares as just that which conforms to His righteousness and as sinful that which deviates. One discovers throughout the Bible that righteousness and justice are related words. The former speaks of God's moral character, whereas the latter speaks of the actions that flow out of His character. Whatever God's righteousness requires, His justice executes; either to approve or reject, to bless or condemn. Theologically, the justice of God is observed in several categories as follows:

1. ***Rectoral justice*** recognizes God as the absolute legislative moral ruler who judges all mankind for their thoughts and actions. Abraham recognized God as "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen 18:25; cf. 94:2), and David writes, "the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge" (Psa 50:6), and "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth!" (Psa 58:11). God righteously judges those to whom He has revealed Himself and who know right and wrong, either through written revelation

¹⁰ God is ***sovereign*** (1 Ch 29:11; Dan 4:35; Acts 17:24-25), ***all-knowing*** (Psa 139:1-6; Matt 6:31-33), ***all-present*** (Psa 139:7-12; Heb 13:5), ***all-powerful*** (Job 42:2; Isa 40:28-29), ***righteous*** (Psa 11:7; 119:137), ***just*** (Psa 9:7-8; 19:9; 50:6; 58:11), ***holy*** (Psa 99:9), ***immutable*** (Psa 102:26, 27; Mal 3:6), ***truthful*** (2 Sam 7:28; John 17:17; 1 John 5:20), ***loving*** (Jer 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16), ***faithful*** (Deu 7:9; Lam 3:23; 1 John 1:9), ***merciful*** (Psa 86:15; Luke 6:36; Tit 3:5), ***gracious*** (Psa 111:4; 116:5; 1 Pet 5:10), and ***eternal*** (Deu 33:27; 1 Tim 1:17).

(Rom 2:12), or the intrinsic moral code written on their hearts (Rom 2:14-15; cf. 1:18-20).

2. **Retributive justice** means God will administer just punishment to the wicked for their actions. The Lord told Moses, “Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them” (Deu 32:35). And Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica concerning their suffering, saying, “it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted” (2 Thess 1:6-7a).
3. **Remunerative justice** pertains to the distribution of rewards. Sometimes this is based on righteous behavior, such as when David wrote, “The LORD will repay each man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness” (1 Sam 26:23a; cf. 2 Sam 22:25); and elsewhere, “The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me” (Psa 18:20). In addition, it can refer to the compensation paid by the Egyptians to the Israelites for their four hundred years of slavery (Ex 3:22).
4. **Redemptive justice** refers to God forgiving and justifying helpless sinners because Christ has redeemed them by paying the price for their sin. The price for redemption is the blood of Christ that was shed in our stead (1 Pet 1:18-19). The believer is “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Rom 3:24-25a). God’s redemptive justice saves us from the penalty of sin, guaranteeing “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). At the cross, God judged our sin as His righteousness requires, and saves the sinner as His love desires.
5. **Restorative justice** refers to the familial forgiveness God gives to His children who humble themselves and confess their sin to Him. When we sin, we break fellowship with God, and when we confess our sin to Him, He forgives and restores us. David wrote, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’; and You forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psa 32:5). In the Old Testament, forgiveness was predicated on confession of sin (Lev 5:5; 16:21; Psa 32:5; 38:18) as well as animal sacrifice (Lev 4:20; 5:6; 6:6-7). In the New Testament, God requires confession alone (1 John 1:9), which rests on the once for all atoning sacrifice of Christ at the cross (Heb 10:10-14). Concerning confession of sin, John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Understanding these aspects of God’s character help us know who He is and why He holds people accountable with regard to the laws He has revealed to them through general or special revelation. Furthermore, as Christians, we never retaliate against our attackers, but cast our cares upon the Lord and trust that He sees and acts

righteously, in His time and way (Lev 19:18; Pro 20:22; Rom 12:14, 17-21; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:8-9).

Zephaniah 3:1-8

Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the tyrannical city! [tyrannical = Heb יָנָח *yanah* – *to be violent, oppress, mistreat, wrong*; cf. Ex 22:21-24; Lev 19:33-34] ² She heeded no voice [of the prophets], she accepted no instruction [would not follow God's commands]. She did not trust in the LORD [no faith; cf. Heb 10:38; 11:6], she did not draw near to her God [cf. Jer 5:1-3]. ³ Her princes within her are roaring lions [on the prowl], her judges are wolves at evening [hunting prey]; they leave nothing for the morning [consume all they can from those they exploit]. ⁴ Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men [who spoke their own imaginations and led others astray; cf. Jer 23:9-32]; her priests have profaned the sanctuary [did not perform their ceremonies properly]. They [prince, judge, prophet and priest] have done violence to the law [read Ezek 22:23-31]. ⁵ The LORD [in contrast with the people of Jerusalem] is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail [as the civil and religious leaders were doing]. But the unjust [leader] knows no shame. ⁶ “I have cut off nations [גוֹיִם *goiim* = Gentiles]; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. ⁷ “I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction.’ So her dwelling will not be cut off *according to* all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds [like Israel in the north; cf. Jer 3:6-11]. ⁸ “Therefore wait for Me,” declares the LORD [likely spoken to the faithful remnant], “For the day when I rise up as a witness [against the world]. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations [גוֹיִם *goiim* = Gentiles], to assemble kingdoms [of the world], to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal [future global judgment during the seven year tribulation].

Summary:

God opens with a charge against wicked Israelites who were called “rebellious and defiled.” So corrupt and systemic was their oppressive behavior, the whole of Jerusalem became known as “the tyrannical city.” The word *tyrannical* translates the Hebrew יָנָח *yanah*, which denotes “*to cheat, annoy (with words), oppress, [or] be violent.*”¹¹ The word is used in the Mosaic Law to forbid Israelites from oppressing foreigners (Ex 22:21-24; Lev 19:33), slaves (Deu 23:15-16), or engaging in harmful economic practices (Lev 25:14-17). God spoke through Jeremiah, saying, “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of *his* oppressor. Also do not mistreat [יָנָח *yanah*] *or* do violence to the stranger, the

¹¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 416.

orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer 22:3; cf. Eze 22:7, 29; 46:18). The meaning of Zephaniah 3:1 is the same. It is always possible for God’s people to behave poorly, like the world around them. Zephaniah declared their faults, saying, “She heeded no voice, she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the LORD, she did not draw near to her God” (Zep 3:2). We should remember that Josiah, a good king, was on the throne and leading national reforms across the nation, seeking to lead God’s people back into His will (2 Ki 23:1-25); however, in spite of his efforts, the city’s leadership continued with their corrupt practices. The princes represented the aristocracy, who should have been behaving nobly and seeking God’s will, but instead, had become “roaring lions” who went about on the prowl seeking people to devour for their own personal gain (Zep 3:3a). The judges, who were civil magistrates, should have been upholding God’s Law, but instead, were like “wolves at evening” that devour their prey, from whom the citizens of the city had to protect themselves (Zep 3:3b). Furthermore, the prophets were described as “reckless, treacherous men” who falsely spoke in the name of the Lord and led others astray (Zep 3:4a). And the priests “profaned the sanctuary” by not performing their duties, and by making common that which was sacred (Zep 3:4b). In contrast with the corrupt leadership, “The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail” (Zep 3:5a). God is righteous, and He is just in all His ways; He reveals Himself to His people every day, and He does this without fail (cf. Deu 32:4), but they were suppressing His revelation. Though God leads His people into righteousness, “the unjust knows no shame” as they turn away from Him (Zep 3:5b). God had judged the surrounding nations as a warning to Judah, saying, “I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant” (Zep 3:6). Though this was revealed to His people, yet, they chose their own way. God said, “Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction. So her dwelling will not be cut off according to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds” (Zep 3:7). God then turns from talking to the rebellious Israelites in the city and addresses the faithful remnant, telling them, “Listen to Me,” as He speaks of future events. The Lord states there will come a day “when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal” (Zep 3:8). God had already made it clear He was going to judge the Jews and Gentiles of Zephaniah’s generation, which, in many ways, had become a microcosm of all humanity, all throughout history. The Lord’s judgment would now extend to a global judgment that will come upon “all the earth.”

The world is still waiting for the Lord to pour out His wrath on all nations. He has not done so yet because He is patient and is giving people time to repent (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). Yet that day will surely come (2 Pet. 3:10). In view of its

coming, Christians need to be holy in conduct and godly in character looking for and hastening that day (by our prayers and preaching, 2 Pet. 3:11). The great outpouring of divine wrath on the earth predicted here will take place during the Tribulation, before our Lord returns to set up His kingdom (cf. 2:2; Zech. 14:2; Rev. 16:14, 16).¹²

¹² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zep 3:8.

Zephaniah 3:9-20

“For then [after God’s judgment] I will give to the [Gentile] peoples purified lips [perhaps implying purified hearts; Matt 12:34-35], that all of them may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder [Gentle nations would come to Jerusalem to worship God; see Isa 2:1-4].¹⁰ “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones [Israelites], will bring My offerings.¹¹ “In that day you [Israel] will feel no shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against Me [in the past]; for then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain [holy mountain = Jerusalem; see Dan 9:16].¹² “But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.¹³ “The remnant of Israel [i.e. the faithful believers who obey God] will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble [like the oppressors had done in Zephaniah’s day].”¹⁴ Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all *your* heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!¹⁵ The LORD has taken away *His* judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst [i.e. Jesus Christ ruling on the throne of David; 2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Isa 9:6-7; Luke 1:26-33]; you will fear disaster no more.¹⁶ In that day [of millennial blessings] it will be said to Jerusalem: “Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp [in despair].¹⁷ “The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior [Who defends the nation]. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.¹⁸ “I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts [because Israel has not been celebrating them]—they came from you, *O Zion; the reproach of exile* is a burden on them.¹⁹ “Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors [retributive justice], I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.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 [remunerative justice],” Says the LORD.

Summary:

In the previous section, God had pronounced judgment against His people in Judah (Zep 1:1—2:3), the surrounding Gentile nations (Zep 2:4-15), and Jerusalem (Zep 3:1-8); but now, His final message is one of hope, in which He promises future blessings upon His people as well as the world (Zep 3:9-20). God is the One who will bring all these blessings to pass, eight times declaring “I will” throughout this pericope. The prophecy opens with a promise in which God will give Gentiles purified lips—which pictures purified hearts—to come together, shoulder to

shoulder, to worship the Lord (Zep 3:10). Though Israel had experienced shame because of her rebellion in Zephaniah's day (Zep 3:11a), that negative characteristic will be removed in the millennial kingdom, for God states, "I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain. But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD" (Zep 3:11b-12). The millennial kingdom follows the seven-year tribulation period, in which only the faithful remnant will survive and enter into the Lord's kingdom on earth. God speaks to that remnant, saying, "the remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble" (Zep 3:13). The language here is reminiscent of [Psalm 23](#), which pictures the Lord as their Shepherd. God calls His people to shout for joy and rejoice at that time (Zep 3:14), for "The LORD has taken away *His* judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more" (Zep 3:15). The King of Israel is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who will rule the world from Jerusalem, and will rule in righteousness (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37; Isa 9:6-7; Matt 19:28; 25:31; Luke 1:26-33). In "that day" there will be no fear or despair in Jerusalem (Zep 3:16), for "The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy" (Zep 3:17). Unlike the past and present, Israel will never be attacked by outsiders, for God will stand as a warrior to defend them, and comfort them in His love. Though God's appointed feasts were not being celebrated in Zephaniah's day, they would be restored in the millennial kingdom (Zep 3:18). These feasts would serve as memorials to God's deliverance, goodness and faithfulness. At that time, God will dispense retributive justice to those who oppressed Israel (Zep 3:19a), and will rescue the afflicted, saying, "I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth" (Zep 3:19b). And, we see God's remunerative justice to Israel, as He states, "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" (Zep 3:20). In closing, Zephaniah ardently declares it is the "the Lord" who promises these things.

Zephaniah opened his book with a reference to Hezekiah and Josiah, two good kings in Judah; however, these kings failed to bring about lasting reforms, and the nation slipped back into spiritual and moral decline. But the future King of Israel will not fail, as Jesus Christ will accomplish what no other could, when He brings in the millennial kingdom and establishes everlasting peace and blessing upon the world.

The Lord's Supper
Dr. Steven R. Cook

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." (Luke 22:19-20)

The Lord's Supper is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew (26:26-29), Mark (14:22-25), Luke (22:19-20), and by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor 11:23-34). The Lord's Supper is also called **the Eucharist**, from the Greek word εὐχαριστέω *eucharisteo*, which means *to give thanks*, which is what Christ did when He instituted this church ordinance (Luke 22:19). And, it is called **Communion**, from the Greek word κοινωνία *koinonia*, which means *communion, fellowship, or sharing* (1 Cor 10:15-17), because it took place during a community meal where believers fellowshiped with each other during a time of Bible study and prayer (see Acts 2:42).

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus on the night He and the disciples were celebrating the Passover meal. This was the night before His crucifixion. The Passover meal celebrated God's deliverance from the final plague on Egypt as the Lord passed over the homes of those who had sacrificed an unblemished lamb and placed its blood on the doorpost and lintel (Ex 12:1-51). The flawless lamb foreshadowed the sinless humanity of Jesus who is "a lamb unblemished and spotless" (1 Pet 1:19), "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor 5:7), and His death paid the price for our sins (Mark 10:45; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:22).

Jesus' death instituted the New Covenant which was given to Israel and will find its ultimate fulfillment in the future millennial kingdom. Because Christ inaugurated the New Covenant, some of the spiritual blessings associated with it are available to Christians today; specifically, forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:34; Matt 26:28; Heb 10:17) and the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

The elements of the Lord's Supper include unleavened bread and red juice. The unleavened bread symbolizes the sinless person of Jesus who "gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph 5:2). The red juice symbolizes the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Throughout the church age, there have been four major views concerning the elements of the Lord's Supper: 1) **The Roman Catholic view—*Transubstantiation***—teaches that the bread and red juice, without losing its form or

taste, becomes the literal body and blood of Christ. 2) **The Lutheran view**—*Consubstantiation*—holds that Christ is present *in and with* the bread and red juice in a real sense. 3) **The Reformed view**—*Spiritual*—teaches that Christ is spiritually present in the bread and red juice. 4) **The Evangelical view**—*Symbolic*—sees the bread and red juice as symbols that point to the body and blood of Christ. The first three views see Christ actually present in the bread and juice, whereas the last view sees the elements as symbols that point to Christ. The last view is similar to how one understands the sacrificial lamb in the OT, which sacrifice did not actually contain Christ, but rather pointed to Him and His atoning work on the cross. Likewise, the Lord's Supper does not actually contain Christ, but points the believer to His life and death.

When Christians partake of the unleavened bread and red juice, we are recognizing our relationship with God through the life and death of Christ. Just as we are nourished bodily by physical food, so we are nourished spiritually by the life and shed blood of Jesus who died in our place. Eating the bread and drinking the red juice is a picture of the believer receiving the benefits that have been provided by the life and death of Jesus. There is a vertical and horizontal aspect to the Lord's Supper. The vertical aspect indicates one is in a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus, for the Lord's Supper has meaning only to the one who has trusted Christ as Savior and received forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; 10:28; Eph 1:7). The horizontal aspect of the Lord's Supper indicates one is walking in love and living selflessly towards other Christians (1 Cor 10:15-17; 11:17-34), for it is a picture of the love and selflessness of Christ who gave His life for the benefit of others. It is a sin to partake of the Lord's Supper while behaving selfishly toward other believers, and God will punish those who do so (1 Cor 11:27-30). Paul instructed the Christians at Corinth to partake of the Lord's Supper *retrospectively* by looking back at the sacrificial life and death of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-25), *prospectively* by looking forward to Jesus' return (1 Cor 11:26), and *introspectively* by examining their attitudes and actions (1 Cor 11:27-32). A proper understanding of the Lord's Supper will lead to unselfish love towards others (1 Cor 11:33-34a).

Summary

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus while celebrating the Passover meal on the night before His crucifixion. The unleavened bread symbolizes the perfect humanity of Christ, and the red juice symbolizes the blood of the New Covenant that was shed on the cross. Christians who partake of the Lord's Supper see themselves as the beneficiaries of the spiritual blessings of forgiveness and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Eating the bread and drinking the juice is a picture of receiving Christ and all He did for us through His life and death. The Lord's Supper instructs us to *look back*

to the selfless love of Christ, *forward* to His return, and *inward* to one's values and actions.