

The Consequences of Disobedience

Zeph 3:1-8

SS Lesson for 06/12/2016

Devotional Scripture: Ezek 33:25-29

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Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches that there are always **Consequences of Disobedience**. The **study's aim** is to show that God's standards of sin and righteousness do not change, and sin must be punished. The **study's application** is to understand that we can so order our lives that we are in a place of blessing, not in a place of judgment.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Zeph 3:6

I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Having described God's impending judgment on the countries surrounding Judah, the Prophet Zephaniah again returned to the theme of Jerusalem's doom (cf. 1:4-2:3). He emphasized the need for the wicked Jews to seek repentance. The prophet listed God's grievances against His people (3:1-5), and then pronounced God's inevitable judgment (vv. 6-7).

The prophet made a general statement about Jerusalem's wickedness: she had sunk to the level of the heathen nations (cf. Hab. 1:2-4). Though Jerusalem is not named in Zephaniah 3:1, verse 2 shows that it was meant. **Woe** was a pronouncement of an indictment, an indictment that was here threefold: a **city of oppressors** (cf. Nineveh, which Nahum called "the city of blood," Nahum 3:1), **rebellious and defiled**. This general threefold indictment was then elaborated in Zephaniah 3:2-5: they *oppressed* their own people (v. 3), were *rebellious* against God (v. 2), and were *defiled* religiously (v. 4). The Jerusalemites failed to heed the **correction** provided by the Law and the Prophets. Such rebellion was a failure to **trust in the LORD** and to be **near** Him in fellowship and worship (cf. 1:6). The prophet then indicted both the civil leaders (cf. 1:8) and the religious leaders (cf. 1:4-5). The **officials** were compared to voracious, hungry **lions**; the **rulers** (judges) were insatiable **wolves** who completely devoured an evening prey by **morning** (cf. Ezek. 22:27; Micah 3:1-3). Judah's leaders robbed the citizenry in order to appease their own lust for power and plenty (cf. Micah 3:9-10). Jerusalem's religious leaders were equally debauched! The **prophets** were self-styled, **arrogant** religionists who, with the treachery of the priests, twisted and perverted the Law of God in order to fill their bulging purses (cf. Ezek. 22:28; Micah 3:5, 11). The **priests** (cf. Zeph. 1:4) profaned **the sanctuary** probably by their idolatry and astrology (1:4-5) and by offering blemished animal sacrifices. Since they violated **the Law** by their disobedience (cf. Ezek. 22:26), no wonder their people were not teachable (Zeph. 3:2). **The LORD**—in contrast with the people in general (v. 2), their civil leaders (v. 3), and their religious leaders (v. 4)—**is righteous... does no wrong**, exercises **justice**, and never fails. Certainly, then, He would uphold the oppressed and punish the wicked! The nation evidenced the depth of its debauchery by its callous conscience: **the unrighteous know no shame** (cf. 2:1). The word "unrighteous" (*'awwāl*) is related to the word "wrong" (*'awlāh*) in the first part of 3:5. It means "to distort, to turn aside, to be wicked."

The Lord's words recorded in verses 6-13 point up Judah's dire situation. The Lord rehearsed His past actions against other **nations** (v. 6), and then cited both the reasons for and the actuality of a near-future judgment (v. 7). God had acted in conformity with His righteousness by judging nations for their wickedness, leaving them **demolished... deserted, and destroyed**. A classic example for Judah would be the 10 Northern tribes dispersed by Sargon II of Assyria in 722 B.C. God pleaded with His people to follow in His ways, accepting His **correction** (cf. v. 2) in order to avoid being **cut off** (cf. 1:3-4) and having to

face His **punishments** (cf. 1:9-13; 2:1-3). The word **but** in the last sentence of 3:7 has a sad implication. Instead of responding to the Lord's unceasing mercies, Judah consciously and purposely repudiated Him and was even **eager** to continue in her corrupt ways. Complacency (1:12) and rebellion (3:1) led to an enthusiasm for corruption! (v. 7) What a cameo of human history! The prophet concluded the "judgments" portion of his prophecy by reverting to the universal theme with which he introduced the section. He began with a summary statement of universal judgment (1:2-3); then he delineated God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-2:3) and on other **nations** (2:4-15). Then for emphasis he repeated the judgment on Jerusalem (3:1-7). Now he ended this long section with another general summary of universal judgment. In the Lord's impending universal judgment on the nations, His cup of wrath was about to be poured out; at that time His grace would take second place to His anger! At the end of the yet-future Tribulation, God will cause the nations' armies to assemble toward Jerusalem, and in the Battle of Armageddon (cf. Zech. 14:2; Rev. 16:14, 16) He will **pour out** on them His **wrath** (*za'am*, from "foam"), **all His fierce anger** (cf. comments on Zeph. 2:2), and **the fire of His jealous anger** (lit., "jealousy").

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

What awaits the person who does not acknowledge his or her sins before God? The answer is absolute loss, in every sense of the word. The unrepentant one loses God, salvation, heaven, and glory and instead inherits all the outpouring of God's righteous anger and wrath. Nothing should keep us from repenting and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The consequences of disobedience are incalculable. The background of this text—the declining days of the southern kingdom of Judah—includes severe backsliding, disobedience, and unbelief on the part of many. Every strata of society was represented in this willful departure from God and His law, including the prophets, priests, judges, and princes (Zeph. 3:3-4). God would show no favoritism; His judgment would come upon the whole lot of them and would extend out to all the nations. Perhaps the most frightening word in this text is "wait." The Lord was saying, "Just wait. My judgment is coming." No doubt all of us can identify with the emotional tension produced by such a warning. "Wait until your father gets home." "Wait until the principal sees what you did." "Wait until the police finish their investigation." "Wait until the troops are ready." When you are in the guilty seat, this kind of waiting is not a pleasant experience. The language is designed to make the sinner feel the weight of his sins, disobedience, and unbelief. What happens when the waiting is over? That is when God comes in judgment. There is vivid descriptive language for God's actions in this text. He "[gathers]" the nations. He "[pours] upon them" his anger. This is a picture of systematic and complete judgment. God will make no mistake. No sinner deserving of judgment will be missed. The consequences of godless disobedience will be perfectly just and thorough. The emotional dimension of this judgment on God's part is equally arresting. God's "indignation" will be poured out. This is a term for intense anger. It is the proper way to describe God's response to impenitent sinners. His patience reaches an end. God's "fierce anger" is spoken of later in the verse. This is God's burning offense over godless disobedience. Finally, further in Zephaniah 3:8, it is said that "the fire of [God's] jealousy" will consume the unbelieving nations. This is also a term for strong emotion; it is God's zeal to bring judgment. Thus, several different terms for God's anger are used. Just one term was not enough to convey all that God's judgment means. How foolish we are to dismiss God's holy judgment for sin! The Bible piles up descriptive term after descriptive term in the hope that we will finally understand. God does not look at sin and disobedience the way we do. We tend to dismiss them. We excuse ourselves. But God is deeply offended. Thus, all men must be taught to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Getting ready for the day of the Lord is quite different, mainly because we do not know when that specific day will be. The prophet Zephaniah warned of a day of judgment in his own time, but he also prophesied a sweeping, global administration of divine judgment. Jesus provided an unmistakable warning regarding that final day: "About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). This is not a date that one can circle on a calendar as we would "save the date" for an upcoming wedding. A better word of advice comes from Peter on the Day of Pentecost: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40). In truth, the only way one can prepare for the coming day of the Lord is to

be a devoted, day-by-day servant of Jesus. To be faithful to him, even in the little things, is to be making big plans for that special day. Last week's lesson introduced us to the man and message of Zephaniah. The focus of that study was on his opening warning of judgment on the sinful people of Judah. The prophet followed with a series of similar announcements of judgment on peoples and nations beyond Judah's borders, including the Philistines (Zephaniah 2:4-7), Moab and Ammon (2:8-11), the Cushites or Ethiopians (2:12), and Assyria (2:13-15). Today's lesson text refocuses the theme of judgment back on Judah, specifically the capital city of Jerusalem.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Disobedience (Zeph 3:1-4)

1 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, To the oppressing city!
2 She has not obeyed His voice, She has not received correction; She has not trusted in the Lord, She has not drawn near to her God.
3 Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; Her judges are evening wolves That leave not a bone till morning.
4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, They have done violence to the law.

Rebellion (1)

Rebellion is being stubborn and not listening to God (Zech 7:11-12)

11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.

Rebellion is despising the counsel of God (Ps 107:11-12)

11 for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. 12 So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.

Rebellion is having an unbelieving heart that turns away from God (Heb 3:12)

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Rebellion is trying to carry out plans that are not God's (Isa 30:1)

30 "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the Lord, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;

Rebellion is arrogance and idolatry (1 Sam 15:23)

23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."

Unrepentant (2)

Unrepentant because of stubbornness (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Unrepentant and stiff-necked people will be destroyed (Prov 29:1)

29 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.

Unrepentant, but God can show His mercy (1 Tim 1:16)

16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Unrepentant in spite of God giving time to repent (Rev 2:21)

21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

Wicked leaders (3-4)

Wicked leaders over helpless people (Prov 28:15)

15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people.

Wicked leaders that God will punish (Isa 1:23-24)

23 Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. 24 Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.

Wicked leaders that practices bribery (Mic 3:11)

11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us."

Wicked leaders that try to stand and fight against God (Ps 2:2-5)

2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 3 "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." 4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath,

Wicked leaders that rely on their own earthly wisdom (1 Cor 2:6)

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

The Judgment (Zeph 3:5-6)

5 The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, But the unjust knows no shame.

6 I have cut off nations, Their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, With none passing by. Their cities are destroyed; There is no one, no inhabitant.

Righteous justice (5)

Justice that comes from righteous wisdom (Ps 37:30)

30 The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.

Justice that comes from the plans of the righteous (Prov 12:5)

5 The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.

Justice that comes from doing right (Prov 21:3)

3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Justice that comes from insight (Ps 119:98-100)

98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

Righteous devastation (6)

Devastation because of suppression of truth by wickedness (Rom 1:18)

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

Devastation because not knowing God (2 Thess 1:8-9)

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Devastation to weed out sin and evil (Matt 13:41)

41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Devastation on those who are disobedient (Eph 5:6)

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

Devastation because of following our sinful earthly nature (Col 3:5-6)

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

The Consequences (Zeph 3:7-8)

7 I said, Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction -- So that her dwelling would not be cut off, Despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.

8 Therefore wait for Me, says the Lord, Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All my fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy.

Punishment (7)

A punishment of being shut out from the presence of God (2 Thess 1:9)

9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

A punishment filled with God's wrath (Rev 14:10-11)

10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

A punishment of being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15)

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

A punishment because of rejection of the truth (Rom 2:8)

8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Wrath (8)

Wrath that is a dreadful thing to face (Heb 10:31)

31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Wrath that is poured out by the righteous judge (Ps 7:11)

11 God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

Wrath that makes the recipient an object of horror (Ezek 5:15)

15 You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke. I the Lord have spoken.

Wrath that is poured out in response to detestable conduct (Ezek 7:8)

8 I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Henry Allen Ironside

Here the mass are viewed in utter rejection of the truth, but the remnant are seen in weakness, yet holding fast the Word and the Name, while the Lord Himself is found “in the midst,” as He in the days of His flesh declared He ever would be where two or three were gathered together unto His name (Matthew 18:20).

It is Jerusalem, the most highly privileged of all cities, which is described in verse 1 as filthy and polluted. A fourfold indictment is drawn up in verse 2: “She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God!” Intensely solemn are these statements. Well may we search ourselves before Him who is called “He that is holy, He that is true,” that we may detect in our ways any departure answering to what is here charged against Jerusalem. Have we obeyed the voice? Have we received correction from the Word of God? Do we truly confide in the Lord, and draw near to our God? Serious questions are all these. May we answer in the fear of the Lord!

Verse 2 is collective. In verses 3 and 4 the various classes who should have been the leaders in the things of God are mentioned, and individually indicted. The princes were roaring lions, seeking only for prey; i. e., they sought their own profit, not the blessing of the flocks they should have shepherded. The judges were even worse-evening wolves, secretly devouring all they could obtain, while professing to administer justice. The prophets were triflers with holy things, handling the Word of God deceitfully, traitors to their trust. The priests, who should have been holy and undefiled, had polluted the very sanctuary itself with their uncleanness, and done violence to the law.

Thus, all had failed that God had established in responsibility. What then remained? Only this: “The just Lord is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity.” He remained “the faithful and true witness.” He, the Amen, was still the resource of every faithful heart, and in Him the heart of God could rest.

It is the manifestation of the Man of God's pleasure when all else has been, humanly speaking, a disappointment. In the Millennium this will be seen in its fullness. It is to that time of blessing the passage applies. It is then that the words will be fulfilled: "Morning by morning doth He bring His judgment to light, He faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame" (ver. 5). Never will wickedness have risen to such a height as at the very time when the Lord descends to take the kingdom; but righteousness will then be firmly established, and morning by morning the wicked will be cut off. For centuries men have been warned of this, but then it will be actually carried into effect (vers. 6-8).

Then shall the confusion of Babel be undone, and the Lord will give to all peoples "a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one consent" (ver. 9). From all the lands of their scattering He will bring His redeemed earthly people home to Zion, purging out pride and haughtiness, and making them willing in the day of His power (vers. 10, 11).

The apostate portion of the nation of Judah will be destroyed in the time of Jacob's trouble, and at the appearing of the Son of Man; but He says, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (vers. 12, 13). Thus are the faithful found in weakness and dependence, owned of the Lord, preserved in the midst of all the surrounding corruption, and made the nucleus of the kingdom when Gentile dominion and Jewish and Christian apostasy have alike been overthrown forever. It is the preserved virgin-company of Revelation 14:1-5, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion when the glory is about to be displayed.

In the present time it is part of God's ways to preserve likewise an afflicted and poor people who trust in His name. Such will be characterized by loving devotedness to Christ, by brotherly kindness, by integrity of heart, by the endeavor to maintain a conscience void of offence toward God and man, by holding fast the faithful Word, by not denying the name of the Lord, by consistent testimony to the world and the world-church for the absent One now rejected, by separation from evil, by following "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure (or single) heart." This is the "original ground of gathering." This is Philadelphian position. This alone constitutes a true remnant company. Such a path can only be maintained in the energy of faith. Nature can form a confederacy of assemblies based on mutual acceptance of certain guiding principles, or the bowing to assembly-judgments; but this is not faith, and only results in the formation of a system as rigid and unscriptural as any of the sects of men. It does away with the individual exercise of conscience, and substitutes the voice of the church for the voice of God in His Word.

In the last part of our chapter the book comes to a fitting close (vers. 14-20) by setting forth the day of display, when the hitherto despised remnant will be enjoying the unalloyed favor of the Lord for whose name they had borne reproach in restored Jerusalem, with Himself in their midst. For us, faith appropriates this now, and enters into the enjoyment of it in spirit.

Zion is called upon to sing; Israel, to shout. The day of gladness and rejoicing has arrived for Jerusalem; for the Lord will then have taken away her judgments and cast out her enemy. He Himself, the glorious King of Israel (once crucified outside the gate, on a felon's cross, beneath the title, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"), will then dwell in the midst of the restored city and people, and they shall not see evil any more.

This will be their joy and blessing throughout the Millennium. To Jerusalem it shall be said, "Fear thou not;" and to Zion, "Let not thy hands be slack." Loving service will follow full deliverance from all her foes. Again it is stated, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty." To Him salvation is ascribed. He will rejoice over them with joy and rest in His love, joying over them with singing. It will be "the time of the singing" spoken of in the Canticles (2:12), when all redeemed creation, heavenly and earthly, will resound with songs of praise and exultation.

Once more Israel will keep her solemn assemblies, and her griefs will be changed to gladness. All who have afflicted her will be undone, and she who was driven away in weakness will be re-gathered in power. In every land where the people of the wandering foot had been put to shame, they will become objects of praise and fame when the Lord Himself shall make them "a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord" (ver. 20).

Thus are we brought again to the end of the ways of God with Israel on the earth; who, whatever their failures, are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Their portion is earthly. Ours is heavenly. But both alike are to contribute to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and both alike shall be vessels for the display of the matchless grace of our God throughout all the ages to come.

(Adapted from URL:<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/isn/zephaniah-3.html>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The late comedian George Carlin is quoted as saying, "I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older; then it dawned on me—they're cramming for their final exam." In the process of receiving certain degrees as part of my education, I learned what it's like to have to prepare for a major exam. Prior to receiving my Master of Divinity degree, I had to prepare for an oral examination, during which I was to be questioned about various subjects that were part of my field of study. Some years later, I had to prepare for a series of written examinations as I neared the completion of a doctoral program. Believe me, there were plenty of "butterflies," especially the night before these exams were administered! Even so, things were made easier by the fact that every exam was scheduled for a certain day or a series of days. I knew exactly when each was to occur and could plan my preparation accordingly. I shudder to think what my frame of mind would have been if a test could have happened at any time and I had to live "on pins and needles" knowing that any night I could receive a phone call saying, "Tomorrow's the day of the test. Be here at 8:00 a.m.!" However, we don't know the day or the hour when we will take God's "final exam." Such a day is indeed coming—a Day of Judgment—and no one will be exempt (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). But even though we do not know when that day will be, we do not have to live in a constant state of dread regarding whether or not we will "pass our final." We know that we can stand before the Lord, the righteous judge, on that day, because Jesus took the penalty for our sins upon himself at the cross (1 Peter 2:24). As 1 John 2:1 tells us, we have an "advocate" to speak up on our behalf, "Jesus Christ, the Righteous One," so that we will have nothing to fear when we face the ultimate judge. We can rest assured knowing that the "wages of sin" (Romans 6:23) have been paid in full. As Elvina M. Hall (1822-1899) put it in these oft-sung words: *Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.* Even so, we are cautioned by the fact that Judah, the nation of God's covenant people, is the first nation mentioned by name in Zephaniah's judgment list (Zephaniah 1:4). This calls to mind the truth in 1 Peter 4:17: "For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household." The promise of a coming day of the Lord should never produce a sense of smugness among Christians that all the sinners will get their just deserts in the end. The promise of that day should instead move us to remain continually humble before the Lord and to be more committed than ever to helping others prepare for the day of the Lord.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Obedience. Disobedience. Discipline. Every doctor, psychologist, and therapist has a different opinion and method for obtaining the desired results from children. It is a difficult balance to enable children to have the freedom of their independence as well as the safety and protection that come from obedience. In relation to God, age is not a factor. We strive to meet our own needs and go our own ways only to find that if we had followed the instructions in the Word, we could have avoided a great number of catastrophes.

Someone once said that denial is not just a river in Egypt. While humorous, the statement illuminates our tendency as humans to be stubborn. We refuse to listen to wisdom or reason. We presume that the warnings we receive are nothing more than helium-filled balloons. We see them, but they are just decorations we see only in the corners of our eyes. We trust from ourselves and lean on our own understanding. We seek that which brings us pleasure rather than that which will enrich us. We are so hungry for what we determine to be right in our eyes that we feast on it day and night. Sadly, even some of those in authority over us, who have been assigned to look out for us and give us counsel, are corrupt. Zephaniah was shining a light on the Israelites; but is it true of us as well?

In our humanness, we tend to give up on people who refuse to listen and change. We allow them to go their own way, knowing that at some point they will pay the consequences for their behavior. However, our God is still there. Sometimes His presence brings salvation; other times it brings judgment. Sometimes our sinful hearts have become so consumed with our iniquities that we are oblivious to God's judgment. His first attempts at correction have no effect because our actions bring us no shame. We become numb to our sinfulness, thus we are not persuaded to change. Through the prophet, the Lord was reminding His people of what He had done to other nations— those who had no regard for sin and worshipped other gods. Let it remind us as well.

God had hope for Jerusalem. Even when we know our loved ones will do the wrong thing, we still have an ounce of hope that they will change their minds. God still has hope for His wayward children. In verse 7, it is as though God was saying, "I will give them one more try. I will give them one more opportunity to reverence My name and one more chance to heed My warnings and follow My instructions." As it turned out, we see at the end of the verse that the people chose their own desires. In verse 8, the Lord was telling these same people to wait. Why? Because the day will come when He gathers together all the nations and kingdoms of the earth and annihilates them. It may not happen today or tomorrow, but the day will surely come. Judgment is inevitable. Without the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, the scales of judgment are always found wanting. God's warnings are clear. Repent. Turn from wicked ways. Seek Him. Love Him. In His infinite wisdom and continually new mercy, God will then spare us the tragedy of the consequences of our sin.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. People deceive themselves when they think they are worshipping God when in reality their hearts are moving away from Him (Zeph. 3:1-2)
2. Leaders are responsible for the example they set for others (vs. 3)
3. Selfish leaders offend God with their lies and disobedience (vs. 4)
4. Even when the world ignores God, He is still at work (vs. 5)
5. If we continue in sinful actions, we may lose our desire for Him (vss. 6-7)
6. Christians must be patient; we can trust our just God to destroy evil and punish sin (vs. 8)