

Joy for the Faithful

Zeph 3:9-14, 20

SS Lesson for 06/19/2016

Devotional Scripture: Ps 98

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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 examines the extent and fullness of the **Joy of the Faithful** God gives His people. The **study's aim** is to know that receiving God's grace and restoration will result in the blessing and great joy daily. The **study's application** is to live daily with the mental awareness that God in His grace forgives and restores us.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Zeph 3:14

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The word “then” in verse 9 signifies a major pivot in the prophet’s message both in tone and in content; he shifted from frightful predictions of destruction to prophecies of blessing and peace. After destroying the nations’ armies, God will restore the nations to His favor. Instead of horrifying threats, here are comforting promises of love, mercy, and restoration. These promises look forward to the Millennium when Christ will rule as King on the earth. Zephaniah predicted that the nations will be renewed both morally (v. 9) and spiritually (v. 10). The purifying of **the lips of the peoples** does not mean they will speak a new language (as the KJV seems to imply by its trans. “a pure language”). Instead it means the renewal of once-defiled speech. One’s lips represent what he says (the words spoken by his lips), which in turn reflect his inner life (cf. Isa. 6:5-7). The nations, formerly perverted by the blasphemy of serving idols, will be cleansed by God for true worship. As a result the nations, turning to reverential trust in God, will **call on the name of the LORD and** will evidence their dependence on Him by their united service (**shoulder to shoulder**). As an example of the unanimity of their spiritual service the prophet mentioned those **beyond the rivers of Cush** (the upper Nile region—southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia; cf. 2:12), the most distant land to his knowledge. In their converted state the nations, represented by Cush, **will bring... offerings** to the Lord in Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 66:18, 20). This will be a marvelous reversal of the Gentiles’ policies during Zephaniah’s day! This stream of **worshipers** going to Jerusalem will include Israel—**My scattered people**. Zephaniah then elaborated on this fact (Zeph. 3:11-20). When God restores the nations to Himself, He will also turn from wrath to bless His chosen nation Israel. This grand prophetic theme is both the high point of prophetic promise for the nation and the climax of Zephaniah’s message. Israel’s regathering to Jerusalem was promised by God in words given to Moses (Deut. 30:1-10). Though God must punish sin, He is full of mercies and is always true to His promises. Though national judgment is assured, God will not forsake His people. He is the covenant-keeping Sovereign! This closing section of Zephaniah’s message is comforting to Israel because of the reassurance of God’s faithfulness to His promises.

At the beginning of the Millennium (**that day**) Israel will be cleansed and restored. She will have no **shame** before God because of her sins (**wrongs** renders a Heb. word that means “terrible deeds”) for God will have removed **from the city all those** guilty of **pride** or haughtiness. This will occur in the judgment of Israel (Ezek. 20:34-38; Matt. 25:1-13). Evildoers, full of shame, will be judged, and God’s **holy hill** (Jerusalem; cf. Pss. 2:6; 3:4; 15:1; 24:3; 78:54; Dan. 9:16, 20; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obad. 16) will be inhabited only by a pure people—**the meek and humble** (cf. Zeph. 2:3)—those trusting **in the... LORD**. All iniquity—**wrong** (*‘awlâh*, lit., “injustice”; cf. 3:5, God “does no wrong”), **lies**, and **deceit**—will be purged away, and in that cleansed condition they will find peace and security. The closing line of verse 13 brings to mind the promises of the shepherd psalm, Psalm 23. Israel, so long defiled, turbulent, and ravished, will at last be at rest among the nations and without fear (cf. Zeph. 3:15-16). The tone of this verse is clearly that of exultation and joy: **Sing... shout aloud.... Be glad and rejoice**. Israel will be joyful in that millennial day because she will have been redeemed by God. Though the immediate prospect for the nation was one of sorrow and torment (vv. 1, 5-7), a day will come when the remnant’s fears will give way to shouts of praise. Shouts of joy will arise because Israel’s Redeemer, the Messiah King, will be in her midst (cf. Isa. 9:7; Zech. 14:9). The long-promised Deliverer will protect them. Wrath from God’s hand (Zeph. 3:8) and oppression by her **enemy** (cf. v. 19) will be gone, and **the LORD, the King of Israel**, will be **with** her (cf. v. 17), and she will have no **fear** (cf. v. 13). Verse 16 amplifies the theme of calm from fear in the last line of verse 15. **They** (apparently converted Gentiles) will encourage Israel not to be fearful or in despair. **Hands that hang limp** picture despair through alarm and anxiety (cf. Jer. 47:3). Instead, Israel will lift her

hands, symbolic of triumph, because of the Lord's presence (He will be **with you**; cf. Zeph. 3:15) and power (**He is mighty to save**). In addition to being with His redeemed remnant and delivering them, **He will... delight in them**. The nation will again be the object of God's great **love**, not His wrath. The Millennium will indeed be a time of peace for His troubled people; Israel will rejoice (v. 14). But more than that, **God will rejoice!** (v. 17) In fact He will be **singing** with delight and joy because His Chosen People will be in the land under His blessing. Seven times in these concluding verses, the Lord said, "I will." He wanted to place a strong hope before the believing remnant in Zephaniah's day, since His judgment was imminent and His restoration mercies remote. The prophet, in spite of dark days, wanted the repentant to grasp firmly God's promises for comfort and strength. Many Jews, scattered from their homeland, had **sorrows** because they were unable to take part in **the appointed feasts**. But the Lord **will remove** those sorrows when He regathers His people to Jerusalem where they will enjoy His blessings. No longer will their feasts be **a burden**, something they hate to do, **and a reproach**, a cause for God's displeasure because of their sinful ways. As Zephaniah had already stated (2:4-15; 3:8-15), God will remove Israel's foreign oppressors (cf. Gen. 12:3, "whoever curses you I will curse"), **gather** His people **scattered** in other lands, and give them a favorable reputation (**praise and honor**; cf. Deut. 26:19; Zeph. 3:20) in all places where they are held in disrepute (cf. v. 11). This verse summarizes Israel's yet-future blessings: regathering in the Promised Land (**home**), a favorable reputation (**honor and praise**; cf. v. 19) **among all the nations**, and a restoring of her **fortunes** (or a bringing back of her captives; cf. 2:7). This will all happen **before her very eyes**. In the Millennium, Israel will possess her land as God promised (Gen. 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:7-21; 17:7-8), and the Messiah, Israel's King, will establish His kingdom and will reign (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:27; Zeph. 3:15). To emphasize the divine authority of his message as well as the certainty of God's comfort, Zephaniah ended his book with the words, **says the LORD!**

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Much of the text of Zephaniah's prophecy is gloomy. But here we have an outburst of joy and thanks. Something has changed. Salvation has come. Redemption has drawn near. Hope is alive. This is the dimension of heartfelt glorying that a relationship with God brings. Zephaniah's message in the days of King Josiah largely concerned the fact that God's judgment was coming. It was coming for Judah and would result in exile. It is coming for all nations at the end of time in the great Day of the Lord. Zephaniah's prophecy was a word to all who need to repent and seek the Lord. However, beginning at Zephaniah 3:8, change occurs in the message of Zephaniah. We begin to see a glorious promise that God will redeem His people. The mood of the prophecy changes from a consideration of judgment to an outcry of joy. In fact, several different terms for joy are used. When a sinner comes back to God, there is no way that only one word can describe it all! For those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, joy is the abiding result. What kind of joy? First of all, it is joy that causes us to "sing." This is a term for singing aloud in joy, a spontaneous response to the mercy and grace of God. Also we "shout," which is a term that literally means to make a noise. It is used of the spontaneous shout that went up when the ark of God was brought to the army of Israel (1 Sam. 4:5). It is a happy and spontaneous expression of confidence in the Lord. We also become "glad," which speaks of a heartfelt, inner happiness. A new peace with satisfaction invades the soul of the one who is right with God. Finally, the believer rejoices "with all the heart." This description is foundational, describing a deep emotional joy that leads to all the singing and shouting and praising that follow. It means exulting in God's salvation. What a wonderful thing God does for us when we pass from death to life and escape the terrors of His judgment {cf. John 5:24)! No wonder the Lord said, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). What greater thing can the Lord do for us than save our souls? We will all have our share of trials and tribulations in this world. Perhaps we feel things are not working out for us as we had hoped. Take heart! If you are a believer, your name is written in heaven. The Lord has not and will not forget you. All His great judgments will pass you by. All his holy, eternal promises are yours. You are His child. When this truth gets into our hearts, it brings joy. This is the joy of the faithful. Can we count our blessings today, dear believers? Can we thank the Lord that He lives in our hearts? Can we allow the joy of salvation to rise up within us and overtake us? Truly, "the joy of the Lord is [our] strength" (Neh. 8:10).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Pieces of leftover fabric on bolts of cloth are often called remnants. When I checked the dictionary definition of that word, I found the following: small, fragment, scrap, unsold, unused, trace, and vestige. Some of these words have rather negative connotations or imply that a remnant is something that few people would care to have. Yet those who are skilled in sewing can find such pieces of cloth very useful. My wife used to make puppets with them; the youth in our church then used those puppets to present Bible-themed plays. The existence of a remnant is a very important concept in God's redemptive plan. The remnant is made up of those who remain to carry out his plan after his judgment has been administered.

The prophet Isaiah states the crucial nature of the remnant of God's people: "Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this" (Isaiah 37:31, 32). At the heart of the concept of a remnant lies the grace and mercy of God. He is the one who takes the "leftovers" or "scraps," people who might be considered of little or no value in the eyes of the world, and uses them to fulfill his grand design.

Major Theme Analysis

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

Joy in Prayer and Service (Zeph 3:9-10)

9 "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him with one accord.

10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, The daughter of My dispersed ones, Shall bring My offering.

Prayer using a pure language (9)

Prayer in different languages as enabled by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4-9)

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

Prayer in unity (Rom 15:5-7)

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Prayer done by the Holy Spirit because we don't know how to pray (Rom 8:26-28)

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Prayer in the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:18)

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Prayer in the faith (Jude 1:20)

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Service in one accord (9)

Service in one accord by firmly establishment in the faith (Col 1:23)

23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Service in one accord by consistently doing work God has assigned (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Service in one accord by doing God's will (Heb 10:36)

36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Service in one accord by doing good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Worshipful offerings (10)

A worshipful offering that offers ourselves as a living sacrifices (Rom 12:1)

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

A worshipful offering done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

A worshipful offering that is acceptable to God (Gen 4:2-7)

2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

A worshipful offering given out of love (Eph 5:1-2)

5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

A worshipful offering done sacrificially (Phil 4:16-18)

16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Joy in Restoration (Zeph 3:11-14)

11 In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds In which you transgress against Me; For then I will take away from your midst Those who rejoice in your pride, And you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain.

12 I will leave in your midst A meek and humble people, And they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, And no one shall make them afraid."
14 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Restoration from guilt (11)

Restoration from guilt through Jesus' sacrifice (Heb 10:19-22)

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Restoration from guilt through confession and repentance (2 Chron 7:14)

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Restoration from guilt through Jesus being our guilt offering (Isa 53:10)

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

Restoration from guilt through acknowledging sin (Ps 32:4-5)

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah
5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" — and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

Restoration from unrighteousness (12-13)

A restoration from wandering from the truth (James 5:19-20)

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

A restoration from sin (1 John 5:16)

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.

A restoration from doubting (Jude 22-23)

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

A restoration from grief caused by sin (2 Cor 2:5-8)

5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent — not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.

A restoration from idleness and weakness (1 Thess 5:14)

14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Restoration into a rejoicing people (14)

Rejoicing in worship and service (Ps 2:11)

11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Rejoicing in God's salvation (Ps 13:5)

5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

Rejoicing in the revival by God (Ps 85:6)

6 Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Rejoicing in God's righteousness (Ps 89:15-16)

15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord. 16 They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness.

Rejoicing in the Lord always (Phil 4:4)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Joy in Freedom (Zeph 3:20)

20 At that time I will bring you back, Even at the time I gather you; For I will give you fame and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I return your captives before your eyes," Says the Lord.

Freedom through God's gathering (20)

God's gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31)

31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

God's gathering that will bring all the scattered children of God together (John 11:51-52)

51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

God's gathering so that we may praise and worship God (Ps 106:47)

47 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

God's gathering of the people who are called by His Name (Isa 43:6-9)

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth — 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." 8 Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. 9 All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true."

Freedom of the captive (20)

Freedom of the captive through Jesus (Luke 4:16-19)

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Freedom of the captive through the grace of God (Eph 4:7-8)

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

Freedom of the captive through the truth of God (John 8:31-36)

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Freedom of the captive from sin (Rom 6:22)

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Freedom of the captive from the Law (Gal 5:1)

5 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

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

When I was 4 years old, my family moved to a house in the country that has remained “home” to this day. Although I was too young to remember it, my mother tells me that when she began to tuck me in bed on the first night in the new house, I suddenly sat up and asked, “Hey, when are we going home?” Mom assured me that I was home, that the house we were in was where we would be living. I had to adjust my thinking to that new reality. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she “comes home” to God in a very real sense. Even so, we are not yet fully home with the Lord until Jesus returns. In the meantime, we take care not to get too attached to the present world, which is destined to pass away (2 Peter 3:10-13). If we have not yet adjusted our thinking to this future reality, we must do so! A greater homecoming awaits us, a homecoming that Zephaniah’s concluding words foreshadow.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

In the first part of Zephaniah, we saw that God brought judgment on the people of Israel because of their duplicity, false worship, and neglect of Him. These negative works had consequences. God used foreign people and hard circumstances to bring them to their senses. Now we see that He will bring them into a place of blessing through His grace. They will then glory in Him as they should and do the good works that follow when their hearts have been turned to righteousness. We do not find much about their repentance, confession of sin, and promises to do better. Their restoration to fellowship with God and subsequent praiseworthy deeds are by God's grace and forgiveness. They will not have to earn God's favor. This is a great lesson for us today. God's grace is just as operative in our lives through continual forgiveness and restoration as it is by discipline and correction. This does not lead us to desire sin or to become complacent about spiritual things; rather, it spurs us on to greater devotion and loyalty to Him. We need not experience guilt longer than the time it takes to be restored to Him and His fellowship. Consistent spiritual living should follow.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. God purifies us so that our worship and service please Him (Zeph. 3:9)
2. We honor God as we worship and serve Him in unity with other believers (vss. 9-10)
3. The arrogant and proud depend on their own strength; they have no place in the kingdom of God (vs. 11)
4. God sees the faith of the humble who trust and depend on Him; He rewards them with righteousness and peace in His kingdom (vss. 12-13)
5. God's people honor Him when they worship Him in every area of their lives (vs. 14)
6. We can find hope for total restoration in God alone (vs. 20)