

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ZEPHANIAH 1-3

“Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner” is a film released in 1967. Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn play a white suburban couple who’s adult daughter comes home for dinner with her fiancée. Her groom-to-be is played by Sidney Poitier. The daughter conveniently leaves out the detail that her boyfriend is a black man.

Realize, at the beginning of 1967 interracial marriage was illegal in America - in 17 states. In June of 1967 the Supreme Court struck down the discriminatory law.

This film was released in December of that year.

Needless to say, the romantic comedy hit a nerve. The movie dealt with prejudice and racism in America. And not just among whites, *but blacks as well*. In the film both the girl and guy kept their marriage plans a secret. Their choice was a surprise to both families.

Tonight, we have a surprise for the family of God - *something unexpected*. This is why we should call the book of Zephaniah, *“Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner.”*

Realize, of the 40 or so people inspired by God’s Spirit to author the Bible only one was caucasian - *a Greek named Luke*. **Everyone else was Jewish.**

But I believe one of the authors was an Ethiopian Jew - a black-skinned man - *and that was Zephaniah*.

Of all the Minor Prophets, Zephaniah gives us the most detail about his background and pedigree.

Beginning in verse 1, “The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.”

King Josiah reigned 31 years - from 641-609 BC. He was the last godly king to sit on the throne of Judah.

Recall Josiah was “the boy king.” He took the throne at 8 years old. Imagine, our country ruled by a 3rd grader... “*Hear ye, hear ye, video games for one and all... ice cream throughout the land...*” The major healthcare reform would be free chewable vitamins.

Actually, 2 Chronicles 34:3 says of Josiah, “In the 8th year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David...” Notice the phrase, “*While he was still young...*” Josiah’s eighth year made him 16 years old. When most adolescent males start bucking authority, and sowing their wild oats, Josiah decided to get serious about his relationship with God.

Why waste the best years of your life on sin and reckless living? *Be a Prime Time Christian! Give God the prime of your life!* A lot of teenagers sow their wild oats; then spend their 20s and 30s pulling weeds. They have to live through some pain, and try to straighten out the consequences of their sin and mistakes. It’s better to sow good seed, and enjoy an early harvest.

It’s probable Zephaniah was an influence in the early life of King Josiah. Perhaps he paved the way for the revival Josiah launched to turn the Jews back to God.

Zephaniah's prophecy warns Judah of God's coming judgment. The immediate threat was the Babylonian empire spreading west across the Fertile Crescent.

Judah needed to repent and return to God or face His judgment. Sadly, Josiah's revival didn't last long. After the king died, Judah resumed their wicked ways, and the dire warnings of Zephaniah came to pass.

Notice in verse 1, Zephaniah tracks his genealogy to the fourth generation. This has caused scholars to wonder why. There are different ideas as to his motive.

But I like the theory advanced by Walter Kaiser in his commentary on Zephaniah. Notice, the prophet's father was named "Cushi." Cush is the Hebrew name for the country of Ethiopia. It's possible Zephaniah was a black-skinned man from Ethiopia. To this day, there is a large contingent of black Jews living in Ethiopia.

For centuries these Jews were cut off from the rest of the world. In the 18th century AD explorer James Bruce found a tribe of these Jews living along the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. This tribe called themselves, "Beta-Israel," or "House of Israel." Today, European Israelis call them "Falasha" which means "foreigner." It's a derogatory term. If you meet a black Jew in Jerusalem don't call him "Falasha" - say he's from "Beta-Israel."

It's interesting, upon initial contact with the rest of Jewry, the Ethiopians were surprised all Jews weren't dark-skinned. Actually, their form of Judaism is closer to the Bible than the Judaism of white, European Jews.

The Ethiopians lack the rabbinical traditions of European Judaism. They have no rabbis. Their leaders are priests who claim to be descendants of Aaron.

As to their origins we're not sure... In Acts 8 Philip preached the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch who had visited Jerusalem for the feast - indicating there were African Jews in Ethiopia during in the first century AD.

Solomon married a thousand women, many of them the daughters of neighboring kings. You would think there was probably an Ethiopian princess in his harem.

Maybe her offspring went back home to Africa.

Some Bible scholars suggest the Ethiopian Jews are descendants of Moses and his Cushite, or Ethiopian wife - who was obviously, a dark-skinned woman.

Numbers 12 recounts the story...

Moses' siblings, Miriam and Aaron opposed the marriage between their brother and new sister-in-law.

They were against interracial marriage and tried to fire Moses. Yet it didn't take long for God to settle the disagreement. Numbers 12:9-10 tells us, "So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them... suddenly Miriam became leprous as white as snow." God struck Moses' prejudiced sister, Miriam, with the dreaded flesh-eating disease of the ancient world, leprosy.

Apparently, Miriam had a problem with the color of the woman's skin. Now she's got a problem with her own skin -

and its pigment is the least of her worries. Who cares about the shade of a person's skin now?

What a superficial distinction! Remember what God told Samuel (16:8), “For the LORD does not see as man sees: for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” This is why the Bible says nothing to prohibit interracial marriage.

To the contrary, God works overtime to abolish racial distinctions. Galatians 3 tells us that *in Christ* there is neither Jew nor Greek - *we could add, black or white.*

Today, the only distinction God sees between people is whether they're *in Christ*, or *outside of Christ...* This is why a believer should never marry an unbeliever, but this has nothing to do with the color of anyone's skin.

It's almost humorous, after Miriam was struck with leprosy it didn't take Aaron long to change his opinion.

He figured he would be next. Aaron pleaded with God, “Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned...”

Let me say this clearly, prejudice against another person's *shade of skin is shady* - it's sinful - and if you harbor even a *little of that attitude* you need to repent.

Back to Zephaniah's four generations...

Even in the Law of Moses God demonstrated His desire to bridge racial divides. In Egypt there were interracial marriages between Egyptians and Hebrews.

That's why in Deuteronomy 23:7 Moses instructs his people not to hate the Egyptians - instead, he makes a way to turn

them into Israelis. The Lord commands, “You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.” Notice, third generation offspring became full citizens.

Perhaps the reason Zephaniah lists his genealogy to the fourth generation is to prove his Jewish identity.

Well, regardless of his color he delivers a colorful message. It begins with a bang, “I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,” says the Lord; “I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked (*“the stumbling blocks”* were the idols that caused Israel to fall into sin). I will cut off man from the face of the land,” says the Lord.”

Welcome to destruction! In Genesis 1 God created beasts, birds, fish, man. Now He consumes them. Hey, **If God brings you in; then God can take you out!**

Commentator, J. Vernon McGee writes, “The book of Zephaniah is like a Florida hurricane, a Texas tornado, a Mississippi River flood, a Minnesota snowstorm, and a California earthquake all rolled into one.” Zephaniah served a God who is serious about sin - and who doesn’t mince words. God is not afraid to judge sin.

Verse 4, “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests...”

It's interesting, the word translated "*idolatrous*" is from an Assyrian word which means "to be black."

It could be that these pagan priests wore long black robes, like a satanist would today. Or it could mean that Zephaniah was rebuking the heresy of fellow black Jews who had fallen into idolatry - *Ethiopian priests*.

Either way, God will cut off "*those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops...*" Apparently, some Israelis were into astrology. They consulted the stars.

And "*those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom...*" Or "*Molech*" as he's also called. He's the false god of the Moabites and Ammonites. The Hebrew word "*Molech*" was derived from "*Melek*" which is Hebrew for "*king*."

The name "*Molech*" was formed by taking the three consonants in "*Melek*" - *M-L-K* - and inserting into them the vowels found in the Hebrew word for "*shame*."

Thus, Molech, was king of the Moabites, but was forever stigmatized as a shameful thing. Apparently, the black priests in Zephaniah's day had turned to this false god, rather than call on the true God of Israel.

And its sad that the same mistake is being made today among African-Americans. Today the god of the Ammonites and Moabites is Islam. And many young blacks are turning from the Christianity of their fathers to become muslims. Founder of the Nation of Islam, *Elijah Muhammad*, was once *Elijah Poole*, the son of a Baptist pastor who raised his kids in the Christian faith.

Islam appeals to oppressed minorities because it legitimizes hatred, and sanctions violence. The Islamic principle of *Jihad* encourages the use of force and conquest... whereas Christianity teaches its adherents to love their enemies. **Conversion is always voluntary.**

Martin Luther King Jr., the father of the modern Civil Rights movement, and a Christian pastor, taught that prejudice can only be overcome through love. He advocated peaceful, nonviolent resistance. Both the NT and Dr. King's teachings are the opposite of Islam.

Remember, the word **Molech** is formed by inserting the vowels of the word "**shame**" into the consonants of the word "**King,**" or **M-L-K**. And ironically, this is what's happened to sectors of the black community, black muslim teachings have corrupted the vision of Dr. King.

Sadly, many African-Americans today now serve a false god, Allah, rather than the true God of Israel.

And according to verse 6 God will cut off "**Those who have turned back from following the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him.**" At the time of Zephaniah, Israel had become a pluralistic society. All religions were viewed as equally true and beneficial.

The Judean king, Manasseh, was worshipping Baal and Milcom. He'd also delved into astrology and was worshipping the stars. The people had come to believe that no one religion had a monopoly on the truth.

Sound familiar? That's exactly what's happening in America today. We no longer believe in essential truth.

Secular historian, Edward Gibbon, in his classic work, "[The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire](#)," says that in the final throes of Rome, "all religions were regarded as equally true, the philosophers as equally false, and the magistrates as equally useful."

These are the factors causing the crumbling of American society. Our failure to identify objective truth allows for the proliferation of anything and everything.

Our history is re-written. Past wisdom is nullified. And politicians are used to advance the relativism. America has lost its moral bearings, and is racing to anarchy.

Verse 7, "Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand, for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests."

In Revelation 19:21 John refers to this verse.

We're told after the final Battle of Armageddon, "*all the birds were filled with... flesh.*" Scavengers will be allowed to feast on the corpses of many casualties. God's judgment will produce *a banquet fit for a vulture!*

Seven times in this prophecy, Zephaniah will use the phrase, "*day of the LORD.*" This the prophet's subject.

"*The day of the Lord*" is the future time-period that begins at the rapture of the church, continues through the Great Tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon, the Second Coming of Christ, and His Millennial Kingdom.

It's the time when the Lord intervenes in the affairs of man. Currently, man is having his say. Today is **the day of man**, but coming soon God will have the final say.

And **"the day of the Lord"** will be a tumultuous time. God consumes all things. When His judgment ceases the world is littered with the corpses of man and beast.

Verse 8, **"And it shall be, in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel."** As proof of their compromise the children of Israel even dressed like their idolatrous neighbors.

It's sad when Christians feel like they have to dress themselves in the attitudes and values of the world.

We're called to be **"holy"** - *different not duplicate*.

"In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit." According to 1 Samuel 5:5, **"leaping over the threshold"** was a practice involving in the worship of Dagon, the god of the Philistines.

"And there shall be on that day," says the Lord, **"the sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crashing from the hills. Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh! For all the merchant people are cut down; all those who handle money are cut off."** In the Jerusalem of Zephaniah's day the fish gate opened westward, toward the Sea.

Maktesh was the business district - Jerusalem's Wall Street. Later, it'll be named the **Tyroean Valley**. Josphehus called it, "**the valley of the cheesemakers.**"

The point is, when God judges His people and Jerusalem, the business community will be hit hardest.

Verse 12, "**And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.'**"

The Lord will search Jerusalem with a flashlight.

He'll be on the lookout for complacency! He'll find folks who took God for a paper tiger - who thought He was all bark and no bite, and didn't take Him seriously.

Obviously, the true God is a tiger with teeth! He's on the prowl - and He's ready to spring into action.

But the Jews had grown lazy, and to assuage their conscience they assumed God had grown as passive as they had. This is what happens to Christians today.

We no longer assume God *intervenes in situations, or works miracles, or brings judgment*. He's aloof, and removed. We like to think God has joined the status quo. It's sad, but **complacency has gone to church!**

"Therefore their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine. The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men

shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.”

Commentator Walter Kaiser writes of verse 17, "This simple causal clause summarizes the entire history of the world... *“They have sinned against the LORD.”*

Verse 18, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.” Following Josiah’s reign this sums up Judah’s history. The Jews went back and forth between Babylon and Egypt buying their protection.

As it turns out all their gold couldn’t save them.

It’s interesting, America has also relied on its gold, its money, to try and buy allies all around the world. Yet, everywhere you go abroad America is hated. We too have trusted in our silver and gold, rather than God!

Chapter 2, “Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation...” There’s an intended barbed buried in verse 1. The Hebrew word "*nation*" is a derivative of "*goyim*" or Gentile. God is saying to the Jews they’ve behaved no better than the godless.

He proves His point in the rest of the chapter, as He judges the Gentile nations surrounding Jerusalem...

“Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff, before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you! Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility.

It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.” God is extending to everyone the opportunity to repent, and be spared God’s judgment!

Repentance is a beautiful thing. Realize the “*meek*” are not *weak*. They’re the folks wise enough to become humble. They come to God *broken* - not bucking.

They accept God’s harness and let Him steer their lives. It’s the foolish who arrogantly spit out the bit.

It’s been noted that every morning on the African plain a gazelle wakes up. He or she knows it’ll have to run faster than the fastest lion, or be killed... And every morning the lion wakes up, and knows he or she will have to run faster than the slowest gazelle, or go hungry... It doesn't matter if you're a gazelle, or a lion, when the sun comes up - *you know you’ve got to run!*

And the same is true of us. You’re either running toward God or running from God. **"If you aren’t seeking the Lord; then judgment is nipping at your heels."**

Compare Zephaniah 2:3 with 1:12, either you and I are seeking the Lord and His righteousness, or the Lord is seeking to punish those who sin against him.

What are you seeking this evening?

There's one more important point to be made here.

The name "*Zephaniah*" means "*he whom the Lord hides.*" Here the prophet embeds his own name in this verse. He assures us, "*If you seek the Lord you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.*" What a promise!

The next time you hear someone scoff at the biblical doctrine of the rapture, or say something like "how come the rapture is never spoken of in the OT?"

Ask them, "*have you ever read Zephaniah?*"

The NT teaches that *before God's judgment comes down, the Church will go up.* Prior to God pouring out His anger on this wicked world, He'll first move to protect, or hide His Church, from His coming wrath.

This is the promise in Zephaniah 2:3, "*It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.*"

"*Zephaniah*" means "*whom the Lord hides.*" Hey, at the rapture we'll all be what I call, "*Zephaniah-thized.*"

Verse 4, "*For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted. 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: "I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant."* In the remainder of the chapter Zephaniah announces judgment on nations surrounding the Jews.

To the west he points to the **Philistines**.

To the east the **Moabites** and **Ammonites**.

To the south the **Ethiopians**.

And to the north, the **Assyrians**.

“The seacoast shall be pastures, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed their flocks there; in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them, and return their captives.” When today’s Israelis read this verse it creates conflict in their hearts. *“The coast shall be for the remnant of Judah...”*

Today, the seacoast is the Gaza Strip, and the Jews have relinquished it to the Palestinians. In an attempt at peace they’ve given up what God had given to them.

In God’s time, He’ll restore the Gaza Strip to Israel. The Jews will feed their flocks in the pastures of Gaza.

“I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders.” Notice, the argument - the beef God has against Moab and Ammon - is over *“borders.”*

Today, their descendants are still making *“arrogant threats against their borders.”* The Arabs are still demanding that the Israelis abandon the land that God gave them, and return to their pre-1967 UN borders. The squabble in the Middle East is still over borders.

Verse 9, “Therefore, as I live,” says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah - overrun with weeds and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation.

The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them.”

Eventually Israel will add the lands of both her enemies, Moab and Ammon - or modern-day Jordan.

“This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; people shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations. You Ethiopians also, you shall be slain by My sword.” And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness. The herds shall lie down in her midst, every beast of the nation. Both the pelican and the bittern shall lodge on the capitals of her pillars; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be at the threshold; for He will lay bare the cedar work.” We learned last week that Nahum's prophecy spoke specifically of Nineveh and Assyria's destruction.

Verse 15, “This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, “I am it, and there is none besides me.” How has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down! Everyone who passes by her shall hiss and shake his fist.”

A hissing sound, and the shaking of a fist where oriental insults. A Middle Eastern equivalent of booing the umpire, or giving someone the thumbs down...

Notice, Assyria's pride. She boasted, "*I am it...*" I know people who live as if they think the same. You might think, "*You're all it.*" Well, you're not. **God is it!**

Chapter 3, "*Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city!*" This was the city of Jerusalem. *She's a betrayer, a blasphemer, a bully...*

"*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.*" These are major indictments.

"*Her princes (or politicians) in her midst are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning.*" When the judiciary preys on people all hope for justice is lost. Jerusalem's princes and judges had become corrupt... *as had her clergy...*

The prophets and priests, verse 4, "*Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.*" It's sad when the pastors no longer fear or serve the Lord.

The prophets were treacherous! They had no integrity - no scruples. *The ends justified the means.*

The priests polluted the things of God. They watered down the truth. *This is what's happened today.*

Pastors are more concerned with *getting people back to church*, than *getting them to heaven*. Churches are preaching an easy-believe-ism. Commitment has been stripped of its

teeth. Every Sunday the truth gets sacrificed on the altar of relevance and convenience.

Yet verse 5 declares, “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.” God is *consistently faithful*, whereas certain people are *incurably faithless*.

“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. 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.”

After witnessing God's terrible judgments on Israel's Gentile neighbors, you would think the Jews would learn to fear God. But like the proverbial ostrich, she kept her head buried in the sands of self-deception.

You'd think today's America would also learn from history... At the end of WW2 English historian Herbert Butterfield - *noting the fall of Nazi Germany, as well as events like the horrors of the French Revolution, and collapse of ancient Rome* - made the statement, “There is a judgment embedded in the fabric of history.”

In other words, over the years, even the centuries, *there's a judgment that no evil nation can escape!*

In recent years, the collapse of the Soviet Empire would be an example. God does judge nations. Our Sovereign God holds nations responsible for their sins.

And yet today if one of our national congressmen went public admonishing America to repent of its sin, and said that he feared God's divine punishment upon our nation, he would be ridiculed out of office. Like Israel of old, we've learned nothing from history.

Verse 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.” The book of Revelation gives us the time and place for *this gathering*. **THE TIME:** At the end of Daniel's 70th week, the close of the Great Tribulation.

THE PLACE: The plain of Esdraelon, 55 miles north of Jerusalem, better known as the Valley of Armageddon. It's there and then that God will gather the nations of the world for one final showdown.

Zephaniah is a good example of what's true regarding many of the OT promises... They have both an *immediate* and *future* fulfillment... The **immediate threat** in Zephaniah's day was the Babylonians.

Yet here in verse 8, the prophet speaks of “*nations*” and “*kingdoms*” - plural. In fact, he says, “*all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.*” Obviously, the prophecy's scope fits **future events**.

At the end of the age God will judge the whole earth!

Here's how to read OT prophecy: Imagine, yourself lying flat of your back under a tall oak tree and looking up through its branches? It's difficult to tell which branches are on top of the others, and the exact distance between the various branches. And this is how it prophecy works. The OT prophecies tend to be layered. The immediate and future overlap in the text.

Verse 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.” At the tower of Babel God confused the languages, but apparently when Jesus returns He'll reinstitute a universal language to unite mankind, and enable us to worship God with one voice. *And what is this global language?*

Of course, it's English with a Southern accent.

Just kidding... Actually, some folks see in verse 9 a promise to restore ancient Hebrew, and to make the Jewish language the global voice of all mankind.

Well, if that's so; then this prophecy's fulfillment has already begun. The restoration of the Jewish language in Israel today is nothing short of a modern miracle.

Prior to this century, the Hebrew language had not been spoken since the 6th century BC - around the time of Zephaniah - when the Jews were carried off to Babylon. When they returned to Jerusalem they spoke the Aramaic they picked up in Babel. Only the religious scribes spoke Hebrew. The rabbis believed Hebrew was too sacred to be used in ordinary conversation.

Thus, it didn't take long for Hebrew to become a dead language. No one would speak it for 1900 years.

Then around the turn of the 20th century Jews started returning to their homeland - and they came back to Jerusalem speaking a million languages.

Communication was a challenge. But one Jerusalem journalist, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, noticed the problem, and made it his personal mission to revive ancient Hebrew. He started with a vocabulary of 7704 words he gleaned from the Bible. Today, modern Hebrew has grown to over 80,000 words. Hebrew is the only dead language in history that's been restored to daily use.

In Israel today, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda is a hero. The main drag in Jerusalem is called "[Ben-Yehuda Street](#)."

Go to Israel, listen to the conversation, and you'll see the fulfillment of Zephaniah's 2500 year old prophecy.

And here's another future prophecy, verse 10, "[From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering.](#)" Zephaniah, the Ethiopian Jew, here predicts a future return of Ethiopians to the land of Israel.

And such an exodus has occurred in recent history.

In 1984 Israel launched a covert evacuation called "[Operation Moses](#)." The Israeli military airlifted 8000 African Jews from war-torn Sudan, and relocated them to Israel. A similar relocation occurred again in 1991 - when another 14,000 Ethiopians came home to Israel.

Today there is a sizable population of black-skinned Ethiopian Jews living in Israel - as many as 125,000. It's amazing this future regathering was predicted by none other than the black prophet, Zephaniah.

Verse 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." *Repentance and forgiveness* will come to Israel - what a day that'll be!

"I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

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." When the Lord returns and establishes His Kingdom, a "*remnant of Israel*" will inhabit the land. This will be the Hebrews who will survive the terrible time of Great Tribulation.

The trials they'll endure will purify their hearts. They'll become an example to all the nations of the earth!

Than verse 14, Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more." *Remember, when Jesus came into the world, the name the Angel gave Him? "Immanuel" which means "God with us" or "God in our midst."*

Well, Immanuel will come again to Jerusalem. *“Sing, O daughter of Zion”* for the Lord will *“cast out your enemy.”* *“The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.”*

This earth was honored once, over 1900 years ago, when God incarnate walked its surface. But the earth will be honored a second time, when He returns. The King of Israel, the King of kings, will dwell in our midst.

“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save...” *When will Israel finally be at peace... When she sits at the table with her enemies and negotiates a peace? **No!***

Peace will come to the people of Israel when the Prince of Peace returns, and casts out her enemies.

And, *“He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”* Zephaniah starts out his prophecy cold and calloused. God will consume beasts, birds, fish, men.

This prophecy begins rough and gruff, but it closes with one of the most tender passages in all the Bible.

Once judgment ceases, and sin is punished, and God reveals His love for His people - we're told God *“will rejoice over you with singing.”* He'll sing over His people. There will be music and rejoicing from heaven.

Like a doting dad God will rejoice over you with music. The thought of **you** will cause God to sing!

It reminds me of **the Stanley Cup** - the silver trophy that looks like a wedding cake. It's awarded every year to the winner of the National Hockey League.

And when the trophy is awarded to the winning team all the players take a turn holding it, and skating with it around the rink, while a triumphant song blasts from the PA system... It's obvious the source of their joy isn't the trophy itself - *watch how it gets man-handled...*

They maul it with their taped up hands, and they all have to kiss it, and slobber on it... They're obviously not worried about smudging, or staining, or denting the trophy. Everyone loves the Stanley Cup because it represents the hard work that went into their victory.

And I think God sees us as *His Stanley Cup...* or *His Sandy Cup*, or *Sally Cup*. He's not worried about whether we're smudge-less, and slobber-less, and stain-less, and dent-free. His joy over us doesn't come from our perfections, but from what it took to win us.

You and I are the prize in God's greatest achievement. We are the victorious spoils of the cross.

When I get to heaven I expect Jesus to pick me up in His strong hands, and skate me around the rink a time or two... to the cheers of the angels, and the heavenly host, and the Father who sent Him, and the Spirit Who helped Him... and He'll even sing a song of rejoicing.

Jesus is waiting to hold up *His Sandy Cup*, and rejoice over me! I believe He'll rejoice over you the same way. God is

strong, and just, and righteous, and judges sin - but He doesn't rejoice in His judgment.

That's not what pleases God, or tickles His fancy. God takes joy over people who trust in His Son Jesus.

Verse 18, "I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden." Zephaniah is speaking of the Jews who'd lived in exile and were unable to worship at the Temple. He'll make a point of gathering them up.

"Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame." What a promise, those who suffered emotional affliction and were physically handicapped God will also gather up.

They'll go from *shame* to *fame*!

Verse 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."

After the Jews exile in Babylon and at the end of the age - in both an immediate and future fulfillment - God will return Israel to the land that He promised them. *Israel will be gathered, and God will be glorified.*

As Zephaniah tells us seek righteousness, seek humility, turn to the Lord and He'll hide you from His anger. Seek the Lord, and you'll be **Zephaniah-thized!**