

A Vision of the People of God (Zephaniah 3:9-20)

Intro: This week we read the prophecy of Zephaniah. Zephaniah lived during a time when evil had prevailed in Judah for a whole generation. Consequently his message is one of universal judgment because of Israel's sin as well as that of the nations around Israel.

However Zephaniah prophesied that one day God would have a people who serve Him differently from the way Israel had served Him (Zephaniah 3). Let's consider "A Vision of the People of God."

Seeing the Vision—What did God see?

God expected His people to be: (Some one-word descriptions)

Loyal

For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord... (Zephaniah 3:9)

The lips of God's people had become impure, calling upon the name of many gods; but Zephaniah sees a time when God's people will call on the name of the Lord alone! God expected a people who would be loyal to Him and not worship any other god.

United

... to serve Him shoulder to shoulder. (Zephaniah 3:9)

During this period Israel had been divided and there were many conflicts among the people of God because their departure from His ways. However, the picture of this prophecy is derived from the yoke and suggests people who stand united in their service to God.

Giving

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, will bring My offerings. (Zephaniah 3:10)

God's future people would willingly give Him the sacrifices that He was due and even come from great distance if necessary to do it.

Obedient

In that day you will feel no shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against Me; (Zeph. 3:11)

Of course Zephaniah's message is that God's people had lived in rebellion against Him; but this would not be said about God's future people. They would not be a rebellious people; therefore they would not experience the shame of rebellion.

Humble

For then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain. But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people.... (Zephaniah 3:12)

Of course the underlying motivation of rebellion is pride and arrogance against the Lord. Israel had failed to exalt God and had

grown proud; but the future people of God would walk humbly before Him.

Dependent

...and they will take refuge in the name of the Lord. (Zephaniah 3:12)
Israel had sought deliverance from or refuge in everyone but the Lord. They had made alliances with other nations, trusted in diplomacy, worshipped false gods, all to ensure their safety against enemies. But Zephaniah says that God's future people would depend only on Him for deliverance.

Honest

The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies, nor will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths; for they shall feed and lie down with no one to make them tremble." (Zephaniah 3:13)
This picture suggests a people who walked with integrity because they would not be afraid to tell the truth and to acknowledge the Lord. The reason is because they would feel secure in God's provision. As His sheep they would enjoy a place to feed and lie down where there was safety.

Joyous

Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. (Zeph. 3:14)
We can see then that God's future people would be a joyous people—joyous because God had forgiven them and taken away their enemies, the greatest of which was sin.

Courageous

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid, O Zion; Do not let your hands fall limp. (Zephaniah 3:15-16)
With a God like this in their presence, God's people would not live in fear, but faith. They would not be weak and fearful, but strong and courageous because of God's presence with them.

Understanding the Vision--Who are these people?

These people are the Lord's church! In chapter 3 Zephaniah is giving us a beautiful OT portrait of God's NT church. For each of these qualities we could easily cite a NT verse that teaches the importance of each of these things for God's NT people.

Loyal-- for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

United--Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (Philippians 1:27)

Giving--Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing: for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Obedient--As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; (1 Peter 1:14-15)

Humble--Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. (James 4:10)

Dependent--For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21)

Honest--Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25)

Joyous--Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Courageous & strong--Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. (Ephesians 6:10)

Zephaniah's prophecy is God's vision of us!

Living the Vision—Have we lived up to God's expectations?

Is this the kind of people we are? Is this the kind of person I am? Have I lived up to God's expectations?

Here is some motivation. When we become the people God expected, then we can experience the blessings God planned for His people. God had expectations for Himself as well.

God would give His people victory.

The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. (Zeph. 3:17a)

God would rejoice over them.

He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (Zephaniah 3:17)

God would gather and glorify them.

I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts—they came from you, O Zion; the reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord. (Zephaniah 3:18-20)

Conclusion: It is humbling to know that God had His eye on us before we came into existence. He had planned for our redemption and anticipated with great hope that we would live up to His expectations.

My goal is to cast a vision for your life as one of God's people.

Let each of ask ourselves, "Am I the person God envisioned? What is lacking that needs change?"

Let each of affirm these truths, "God will give me victory! God rejoices over me! God will glorify me!"

If you are not among the people of God, let us assist you in obeying the gospel.