

Renewed in God's Love

I can't get over that we're having a house 're-warming' house party for you," said Elois.

Stefanie smiled at her 60-year-old aunt, who had spoken—like she always did—with a level of toxicity.

It was a little more than six months ago when Stefanie was looking in the face of foreclosure. Her divorce had devastated her.

Stefanie had been less than gracious throughout the whole thing. When the situation got to a possible foreclosure, Stefanie's pastor's wife reminded her of the strong, saving hand of Christ. Stefanie set out on a campaign of prayer, which was fueled by faith.

Then she watched things as they began lining up in her favor. Eventually, she was able to proclaim, "I'm going to be able to keep the house!"

"I was just so sure you would lose this house," continued Elois. "You should have been smarter than to trust Darius."

"You have a lot of cards in the Wishing Well, Stefanie," said Sister Ross, coming up to the two women. "I think most of them have cash in them!"

"I can't believe it," said Stefanie. "I was in a bad situation just six months ago, and look at how God has blessed me."

"The Lord certainly rescued you and your children," said Sister Ross. "He loves you, girl! He'll turn it around for you, and He wants everybody to know it."

1. *In what do people commonly place their trust? Why is this so?*

2. *Other than Christ, in what things do you place your trust? How can they be good for you and how can they be bad for you?*

3. *Why does trusting in Jesus never fail to spiritually aid you?*

A Summons to Rejoice

Zephaniah 3:14-17, KJV

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.

17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Zephaniah 3:14-17, NIV

¹⁴Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
Daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.

The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.

¹⁶On that day
they will say to Jerusalem,
"Do not fear, Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.

¹⁷The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."

The first two chapters of Zephaniah's prophecy contain messages of judgment against the wickedness of earth's human inhabitants. Judah and Jerusalem would not be excluded, so Chapter 3 begins with a proclamation of judgment on Jerusalem and the nations (vss. 1-8). Then in verse 9, Zephaniah ended his "doom and gloom" prophecy of judgment with a promise of restoration and comfort. Since "the word of the LORD" (Zeph. 1:1) came to him during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah from 640–609 B.C.,

the future restoration Zephaniah describes in verses 9-13 comes after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the exile.

Zephaniah exhorts the people of Judah (“Daughter Zion,” vs. 14) to “sing,” “shout aloud,” and “rejoice with all your heart” as though that future day of restoration were a present reality. The prophet did not merely look forward to this day or simply tell the city and the nation about a joy only for future generations. Instead, he encouraged his contemporaries to join in the celebration, knowing that God would one day restore Israel and Judah. Despite the judgment that was coming, they were to revel in the coming era of unparalleled blessing when the Lord would remove the nation’s punishment and turn away its enemies so the nation would enjoy tremendous security.

The long wars and captivities would be over. There would be no more need for letting their “hands hang limp” (vs. 16) in despair. After all, the Lord would be with the people as “the Mighty Warrior who saves” (vs. 17).

The Lord pledged to no longer chastise His people as He did in the past, but instead to “rejoice over [them] with singing” (vs. 17). While God must punish sin, it is equally true that, as a loving Father, He cheers for those who humbly turn from their sins to follow Him.

4. *For what reason were God’s people to rejoice?*

5. *Upon what basis could God’s people discontinue being afraid?*

6. *What attitude would God have toward Israel?*

A Promise to Rescue

Zephaniah 3:18-20, KJV

18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

Zephaniah 3:18-20, NIV

¹⁸“I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and

19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

reproach for you.

¹⁹At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame;

I will gather the exiles.

I will give them praise and honor

in every land where they have suffered shame.

²⁰At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home.

I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth

when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD.

Zephaniah 3:18 seems to say that God, in a display of His compassion for His people, would enable them to celebrate their sacred "festivals" once again. In the years of captivity, the exiles would be sad and yearn to observe their festivals. Yet, a glorious day was coming in which their sadness would be removed.

Furthermore, God said that a time was coming when the upright remnant would be a source of blessing, rather than a disgrace, to the world. According to verse 19, the nations who had oppressed Israel and were hostile to God would instead of despising the former exiles, speak highly of God's people.

A corresponding prophecy can be found in Micah 4:6-8. God characterized His people as "the lame," "the exiles," "those I have brought to grief" (vs. 6), and "those driven away" (vs. 7). Clearly, the people of Judah had been (or would be) suffering. Yet, the Lord promised to make them into "my remnant" and "a strong nation" with the destruction of their enemies.

Both Micah and Zephaniah would say the people would be mighty because they would have an all-powerful Ruler: God. Judah's kings had gotten the nation into a lot of trouble as a result of violating the covenant. Yet, Judah's heavenly King would rule perfectly from Mount Zion. Indeed, after a time of considerable anguish for His people, the Lord would restore dominion and kingship to Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 3:20 further emphasizes God's pledge to gather together His scattered people and return them to the promised land. He wanted them to understand that He would bring to pass what may have seemed impossible. In that future day, "honor" would replace dishonor, and "praise" would supplant ridicule.

When God again made His people prosperous, everyone throughout the world would realize it and bless the name of the Lord. Some think this passage found its initial fulfillment 70 years after the Babylonian exile, when the Israelites returned to Jerusalem. Other interpreters also see a future realization of Zephaniah's prophecy, when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth to establish His kingdom.

In any case, God's faithful people have great present and eternal rewards awaiting them.



This relief of Kushite warriors defending their city from the Assyrians reminds us that God is "the Mighty Warrior who saves" (Zeph. 3:17).

Photo: Anthony Huan

7. What situation would God reverse for His people?

8. In what way did God describe the "rescue" (Zeph. 3:19, NIV) of His people?

9. How is the Lord portrayed in Zephaniah 3:20?

Trusting with All Our Heart

The psalmist says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Ps. 20:7). He distinguishes between those who trust in God and those who do not—specifically their trust is in those things that exude power and worldly authority.

Today, chariots and horses represent a wide range of things—from such concrete things as money and material possessions to such nonmaterial things as news reports and financial predictions. None of these things are necessarily bad in themselves, but when they displace our reliance on what the Lord has taught us through Scripture and His Holy Spirit, then they can trample our relationship with God.

The key to trusting God is prayer. “Prayer is the most tangible expression of trust in God,” said Jerry Bridges, author of *The Pursuit of Holiness* and *Holiness Day by Day*. According to Bridges, as we place our trust in the Lord, He transforms us into His holiness, and we trust Him when we pray sincerely and openly.

“Trust the past to God’s mercy,” said Augustine, “the present to God’s love and the future to God’s providence.” Implicit in his statement is both the power and the compassion of God. As the Mighty Warrior, God’s Son has atoned for our sins in an act of redemption that only He could perform, and He has already secured the ultimate victory for our salvation when we will abide in His heavenly kingdom. At this very moment the Lord is showering us with His love that is expressed in His wondrous mercy.

Therefore we agree with Solomon, who said, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).

10. *How does prayer help you to trust in the Lord?*

11. *How does God help you to trust in Him?*

12. *How is trusting in the Lord transforming your life?*

Trust the Lord

The messages of Zephaniah would provide hope to the exiled Israelites through the promise of their God to deliver them from their captivity and return them to their homeland. They were to rejoice and sing praises to the Lord for His love and mercy for them. In the same way, we are to be full of gladness, trusting that His mighty hand will deliver us from harm and wickedness.

► *Write a prayer letter to Jesus, here or on a separate sheet of paper, asking Him to help you place your trust in Him in every situation and to give you the confidence in His trustworthiness by recognizing how He is actively involved in your life. Praise Him as the Mighty Warrior, particularly in how He has and is currently saving you by defeating evil.*

KEY VERSE

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy. —Zephaniah 3:17ab, KJV

“The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you.” — Zephaniah 3:17ab, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 26 through July 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 7:4-17—The Redeemed from Every Nation.
- Tues.** Isaiah 55—God's Invitation to Peace and Care.
- Wed.** Daniel 7:1-14—Dreams and Visions Revealed.
- Thurs.** Philippians 4:4-9—God's Peace Will Be with You.
- Fri.** Revelation 21:1-14—God Makes All Things New.
- Sat.** Revelation 21:15-27—Glory and Honor of the Nations.
- Sun.** Zechariah 9:9-17—Rejoice! The King Is Coming!