

June 19  
Lesson 3

# A DAY OF JOY

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## FOR THE REMNANT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 11:29-39  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3:9-20

### ZEPHANIAH 3:9-14, 20

<sup>9</sup> “Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,  
that all of them may call on the name of the LORD  
and serve him shoulder to shoulder.  
<sup>10</sup> From beyond the rivers of Cush  
my worshipers, my scattered people,  
will bring me offerings.  
<sup>11</sup> On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to  
shame  
for all the wrongs you have done to me,  
because I will remove from you  
your arrogant boasters.  
Never again will you be haughty  
on my holy hill.  
<sup>12</sup> But I will leave within you  
the meek and humble.  
The remnant of Israel  
will trust in the name of the LORD.  
<sup>13</sup> They will do no wrong;  
they will tell no lies.  
A deceitful tongue  
will not be found in their mouths.  
They will eat and lie down  
and no one will make them afraid.”  
<sup>14</sup> Sing, Daughter Zion;  
shout aloud, Israel!  
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
Daughter Jerusalem!”

<sup>20</sup> “At 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.



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### KEY VERSE

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!  
—Zephaniah 3:14

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List characteristics of “the remnant of Israel.”
2. Describe specific qualities that people who are part of the remnant should demonstrate daily.
3. Suggest a specific way that he or she will demonstrate at least one quality from that list in the coming week.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Saving the Remnant
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Purified People (ZEPHANIAH 3:9-14)

- A. Unified (vv. 9, 10)
- B. Trusting (vv. 11, 12)

*“Have You No Shame?”*

- C. Unafraid (v. 13)

*Looking for an Honest Man*

- D. Glad (v. 14)

### II. Precious Promises (ZEPHANIAH 3:20)

- A. Gathered by God (v. 20a)
- B. Praised by People (v. 20b)

### Conclusion

- A. “When Are We Going Home?”
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Saving the Remnant

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.

### B. Lesson Background

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.

## I. Purified People

(ZEPHANIAH 3:9-14)

Today’s lesson begins immediately after the final verse of last week’s lesson. That study concluded on a note of judgment not only on God’s people but also on all nations. Even so, God promised his favor on “the remnant of the people of Judah” (Zephaniah 2:7). With today’s lesson, the focus shifts to a promise of hope.

### A. Unified (vv. 9, 10)

#### 9a. “Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,

Isaiah, when confronted in a vision with the holiness of the Lord, confessed himself to be “a man of unclean lips” and that he was living “among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). One may consider the unpleasant words James uses in describing the untamable tongue: “It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). How different is the scene presented by Zephaniah: he pictures a people whose lips have been

purified. The reference is not to proper grammar and syntax, but to holiness in what one says.

**9b. “that all of them may call on the name of the LORD  
and serve him shoulder to shoulder.**

To *call on the name of the Lord* suggests turning to him for the help that he alone can provide. Numerous passages of Scripture encourage this (compare [Psalms 86:5](#); [145:18](#); [Jeremiah 29:12](#); [33:3](#); [1 Peter 1:17](#); contrast [Psalms 14:4](#); [53:4](#); [79:6](#)). The prophet Joel links calling on the Lord’s name with deliverance or salvation ([Joel 2:32](#)). To call on a deity other than the one true God is idolatry ([1 Kings 18:25](#)).

By using the word *peoples* in [verse 9a](#), Zephaniah pictures individuals from many nations calling on the Lord’s name in order to *serve him shoulder to shoulder*. The prediction conveys unity—those representing a variety of nations and languages engaged in a single purpose of serving the one God.

We may reflect on how this is a reversal of what transpired at the Tower of Babel. Until that arrogant effort, “the whole world had one language and a common speech.” But God decided to “confuse their language” so they could “not understand each other” ([Genesis 11:1, 7](#)), because those building the tower were united against his purpose.

What Zephaniah pictures here may be compared with the scene that John witnesses in [Revelation 7:9](#): “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” gathered before the heavenly throne. It may be viewed as a prophetic glimpse of the “new Jerusalem” witnessed by John as “coming down out of heaven from God” ([Revelation 21:2](#)). Such a diverse gathering calls to mind God’s intent that his church reach and teach all nations with the gospel of his Son ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

What can you do to promote Christian unity?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding unity of purpose at the local level

Regarding unity of purpose beyond the local level

Regarding unity of practice

Other

**10. “From beyond the rivers of Cush  
my worshipers, my scattered people,  
will bring me offerings.**

Zephaniah’s prophetic vision includes pure-language people *from beyond the rivers of Cush*. This location is also known as *Ethiopia*, as in the *King James Version* of this passage. It refers to the territory of African Sudan on a modern map, not the area that is modern Ethiopia. Any lands beyond this territory are likely unknown to the ancient Israelites. This is therefore another way of saying that even from the most distant and unfamiliar realms, people who have been dispersed will take part in the worship of the Lord by bringing offerings to him.

The reference to those who are *scattered* brings to mind again what occurred at the Tower of Babel. The Lord “scattered” the people from that place after they had determined not to scatter ([Genesis 11:4, 8, 9](#)). In the chapter immediately following that account, God called Abraham and made a covenant with him that included this promise: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” ([12:3](#)). With that statement, notes Paul in [Galatians 3:8](#), God “announced the gospel in advance to Abraham,” declaring his plan to bless “all nations” as he draws the scattered peoples of the earth back to him.

The second line in the verse before us is more literally translated “my worshipers, daughter of my scattered people.” It is unfortunate that the NIV does not include the word *daughter*, since it communicates the fatherly relationship the Lord desires. Compare “Daughter Zion” and “Daughter Jerusalem” in [Zephaniah 3:14](#) (below).

**B. Trusting (vv. 11, 12)**

**11a. “On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame  
for all the wrongs you have done to me,**

The word *Jerusalem* does not appear in the Hebrew text of this verse, but the translators have inserted it appropriately since the Hebrew word behind *put to shame* is feminine singular. (See comments in last week’s lesson on [Zephaniah 3:2](#) concerning the use of the feminine gender to refer to cities.) That city has been the prophet’s primary concern in this chapter since [verse 1](#). Previously he had called attention to those in Jerusalem who knew no shame for their sinful actions ([3:5](#)). But when one experiences a sense of shame or guilt for one’s actions, such a person is then in a position to receive the good news of God’s forgiveness. In Christ the shame can be replaced by the joy that accompanies the awareness of that forgiveness.

**“HAVE YOU NO SHAME?”**

A generation ago, the question above, when voiced, was often successful in changing bad behavior. The same question today would largely fall on deaf ears, as evidenced by all the shameful pictures and videos that people post of themselves on the Internet. Truly “the unrighteous know no shame” ([Zephaniah 3:5](#); last week’s lesson).

But there is another extreme to this issue of shame, as seen in certain countries and communities where an honor/shame culture predominates. From these we hear reports of “honor killings” in which family members murder one of their own for having brought shame on

the family in some way. The murdered family member is often a woman, perhaps killed because she dated or married outside her religion or embraced Western values in some way. Even more shocking, she may be a rape victim who is victimized again (by being killed) to restore “family honor.” How tragic!

The United Nations reports some 5,000 honor killings in the world each year. These occur mostly in Islamic countries, but a small percentage also take place in Western democracies. We have sound biblical reasons for opposing strongly such an extreme view of honor/shame. But when we point fingers, we risk having more fingers—even our own fingers—point right back at our own culture’s seeming inability to feel any shame whatsoever for various behaviors.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem in Zephaniah’s day should have been ashamed of their unfaithfulness, but they were not. They mistakenly assumed God would not judge them in that regard. Western culture should take heed!—C. R. B.

**11b. “because I will remove from you  
your arrogant boasters.**

A separation is to take place, similar to that which will occur on Judgment Day as the sheep, separated from the goats, are welcomed to share in the kingdom prepared for them “since the creation of the world” ([Matthew 25:31-34](#)). One may look back to Zephaniah’s earlier description of those within Jerusalem who stubbornly refuse to obey or trust in the Lord and accept discipline from him ([Zephaniah 3:2](#)). Arrogance is at the root of such behavior. Lack of humility and misplaced priorities always seem to go hand in hand.

**11c. “Never again will you be haughty  
on my holy hill.**

*My holy hill* is another way of referring to Jerusalem (compare [Isaiah 66:20](#); [Daniel 9:16](#); [Joel 3:17](#); [Zechariah 8:3](#)). Those who have taken pride in residing where the temple is situated and who see its presence as a guarantee against any kind of divine judgment ([Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)) are in for quite a shock. Haughtiness and holiness do not mix. This is why the prophet has already pleaded with the people to “seek humility” ([Zephaniah 2:3](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

Where are Christians most in danger of becoming haughty? How do we address this problem?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Concerning church affiliation or membership
- Concerning an area of service to the Lord
- Concerning personal accomplishments
- Other

**12. “But I will leave within you  
the meek and humble.**

**The remnant of Israel  
will trust in the name of the LORD.**

After the haughty are removed, the ones left are *the meek and humble*. Those whom society considers as scraps or rejects will be part of God’s remnant, because they *will trust in the name of the Lord*. Such individuals are highlighted by Jesus in the first of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” ([Matthew 5:3](#)).

James has the cure for pride: “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom” ([James 4:9](#)). Such an attitude is counter to what modern culture promotes as the path to “fulfillment” or “self-actualization.” Indeed, those who live by the principles of the Scriptures may be despised by the world and considered fools according to its standards. But to humble oneself before the Lord is to possess a wealth that the world cannot take away since the world is not its source.

**C. Unafraid (v. 13)**

**13. “They will do no wrong;  
they will tell no lies.  
A deceitful tongue  
will not be found in their mouths.  
They will eat and lie down  
and no one will make them afraid.”**

The first half of this verse is echoed in [Revelation 14:5](#): “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.” God has great plans for his remnant! In the place where they will reside, there will be plenty to eat and absolute safety. This means that the oppression that existed before ([Zephaniah 3:1](#)) will be no more.

How can such a perfect, ideal state exist? It cannot exist in this broken, sin-cursed world; it can come only by God’s initiative in creating “a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” ([2 Peter 3:13](#)). Nothing impure or corrupt will be present in that place, for God will have eliminated the very source of evil: Satan and his cohorts. God will confine them for eternity in “the lake of burning sulfur” ([Revelation 20:10](#)).

## HOW TO SAY IT

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Babylon *Bab-uh-lun.*

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.*

Diogenes *Die-ah-jin-ecz.*

Ezra *Ez-ruh.*

Isaiah *Eye-zay-uh.*

Jeremiah *Jair-uh-my-uh.*

Sinope *Suh-nawp.*

Zephaniah *Zef-uh-nye-uh.*

No threat of any kind will disrupt the harmony of God's new creation. The scene calls to mind the picture of God as the shepherd of his people, caring for their every need and protecting them from danger. Perhaps [Psalm 23:2](#) provides the best description: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters."

Christians possess this assurance because Jesus is "the good shepherd" ([John 10:11](#)). For now, his presence sustains us through the brokenness that we experience in this world. But someday we will be in his home where the brokenness will be gone "for the old order of things has passed away" ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

### *What Do You Think?*

How can we keep from letting fear of the world control our attitudes and actions?

### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding ungodly influences on family members
- Regarding national trends
- Regarding financial security
- Other

### **LOOKING FOR AN HONEST MAN**

Diogenes of Sinope (died 323 BC) was one of the founders of the Cynic school of Greek philosophy. He believed it was more important to live by one's principles than to proclaim them. His ideas made his hometown citizens uncomfortable, so he migrated to Athens.

Diogenes challenged established customs and values with his questioning attitude. He argued that most people accepted established values unthinkingly when they should be questioning the true nature of the various evils in Greek life and culture. Perhaps the most famous anecdote about Diogenes's life concerns his walking through the streets of Athens at midday carrying a lighted lantern. His explanation was that he was looking for an honest man!

Although not a person of the Bible, had Diogenes lived in Jerusalem in the days of Zephaniah, he might well have sided with that prophet! As Zephaniah walked the streets of that city, he saw only a remnant that was true to God. Only a remnant lived by the law that God had ordained. In both Old and New Testaments, the biblical writers challenge us to do more than give lip service to truth. Our Lord still looks for honest people whose godly lives confront the evils of a culture that ignores him. Are you such a one?—C. R. B.

### **D. Glad (v. 14)**

**14. "Sing, Daughter Zion;  
shout aloud, Israel!  
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
Daughter Jerusalem!"**

What is the appropriate response to the promises described thus far? Consider the imperatives in the verse before us: *sing, shout, be glad, and rejoice*. Such reactions result from a situation that stands in stark contrast with the pictures of judgment found at the beginning of this book. There only the sounds of wailing and bitter cries are predicted ([Zephaniah 1:10, 11, 14](#)).

### *What Do You Think?*

Who is an example of the kind of joy of which the Scriptures often speak? How does this individual's example help you discover joy?

### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Biblical examples
- Personal acquaintances

Christians about whom you've read or heard

Other

## II. Precious Promises

(ZEPHANIAH 3:20)

**Verses 15-19** (not in today's text) offer additional encouraging words to the remnant. **Verse 17** describes the Lord as singing, a beautiful way to picture the joy the Lord himself experiences as he blesses the faithful remnant. The coming day of the Lord will be a day of joy, not only for the remnant but for the Lord as well! The Father will take great delight in blessing his beloved daughter, his faithful people.

### A. Gathered by God (v. 20a)

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

Once more we note a contrast between the conclusion and the beginning of this book. The prophet's opening words relay God's promise to "sweep away everything from the face of the earth" in judgment (the verb phrase *sweep away* appears three times in [Zephaniah 1:2, 3](#)). The prophet now closes his book with God's promise to gather his faithful people. The "woe" with which chapter 3 begins is gone.

Certainly the return from captivity in Babylon, described in the early chapters of the book of Ezra, will fulfill this promise in part. God had previously given his people such "homecoming" promises ([Deuteronomy 30:4](#); [Micah 4:6, 7](#)), but there is a wider, global impact in this chapter, as we have already seen. This impact is further highlighted in the second half of [verse 20](#), next.

### B. Praised by People (v. 20b)

**20b. "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's prophetic ministry takes place about 40 years before Jerusalem is destroyed in 586 BC, resulting in the people's being exiled to Babylon. That captivity will end when Cyrus the Great of Persia decrees that any of God's people who desire to return from captivity may do so ([Ezra 1:1-4](#)). But being released from Babylonian captivity will not mean the Jews are free of foreign domination, as history shows (compare [Daniel 2:31-45](#); [7:1-8:25](#)).

Zephaniah's words may thus point to a deliverance more significant than one that is only political or national in nature. Just as the prophet speaks of a global day of judgment to come, so also here he may be viewing the future recognition of God's people on a global scale at the final gathering to take place when Jesus returns. The release from the ultimate captivity of sin will be complete at that time, and God's people will truly be home—not in an earthly sense, but home with the Father forever.

This promise forms another noteworthy contrast with the somber picture of the "day of the Lord" that is found back in [Zephaniah 1:14-16](#), which was part of the text for lesson 1. There that day is characterized by gloom and doom. God also states, "I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the Lord" ([1:17](#)).

Now, however, God declares his intention to fulfill his promises of blessing *before your very eyes*. It will be a sight to behold indeed! Jesus' first coming was also a sight to behold, but not everyone had eyes to see ([Matthew 13:13-15](#); [23:16-19, 24, 26](#)). His second coming, however, will be seen by everyone, even by those who do not want to see it ([Revelation 1:7](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some ways to improve your church's witness among all people(s) of the earth?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Steps individuals can take
- Steps families can take
- Steps the congregation as a whole can take
- Other

The phrase *says the Lord* is a most encouraging way to conclude Zephaniah's picture of the joyful future awaiting God's remnant. We are assured that the prophet's words are not the product of his own creativity. They do not reflect his personal hopes and wishes for things to turn out right in the end. His words are nothing less than the very words of Almighty God. Zephaniah's hearers both then and now can rest assured that the Lord will bring his promises to pass in his time.

## Conclusion

### A. "When Are We Going Home?"

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.



**Visual for Lesson 3.** As you discuss the lesson's Conclusion, point to this visual and ask, “What do you anticipate most about Heaven?”

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.

### B. Prayer

Father, it is at times so frustrating to live in a world in such constant turmoil from the curse of sin. We become impatient to be home with you and free from the brokenness of sin, dwelling in a place where all things are made new. We thank you that through Jesus there is a promise of such a place. Help us, we pray, to live patiently and faithfully until the time for our “homecoming.” We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Homecoming day is not yet, but will be.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

### Into the Lesson

Give each learner a small scrap of fabric and have the letters *AEMNNRT* displayed. Ask learners to unscramble the letters to reveal a word that describes their scraps of fabric. When someone responds *remnant*, make a transition with this statement: “Remnants may look like mere scraps, good for little more than cleaning one’s eyeglasses. But in the hands of a skilled seamstress, such scraps can become something beautiful and functional.” (*Option*: Demonstrate this by displaying a patchwork item created from cloth or leather.)

Continue: “Likewise, God can take a remnant and make something marvelous. Out of the remnant of Old Testament Israel came Christ and his church. Therein lies the importance of the biblical concept of *remnant*, which is a focus of our study.”

## Into the Word

Have the lesson text read aloud. Then say, “I’m going to show you some attributes of God’s remnant. Your task will be to see how each characterizes God’s remnant in today’s text.” Reveal the following words on very large flash cards, one at a time: CONFIDENT / PURE / HONEST / HUMBLE / GLAD / OBEDIENT / TRUSTING / TRUTHFUL / UNITED.

Encourage class members to respond as each is revealed. After responses have been offered and recorded on the board for all nine words, ask, “How do you see these characteristics ‘alive and well’ in the church?” (*Alternative*: instead of asking this question once, ask it after each card is revealed following responses that relate the card’s characterization of Old Testament Israel.) Again, jot responses on the board.

Draw learners’ attention back to the text by distributing handouts on which it is reproduced. Give these directions: “In each verse, circle one or two groups of three words that you consider to be striking. For example, I might circle *shoulder to shoulder* in [verse 9](#) because that phrase depicts the unity that will characterize the redeemed remnant. Work quickly—you have 90 seconds. Go!”

After you call time, go verse by verse as you ask what learners circled and why. Learner choices should be easily relatable to the list of attributes introduced earlier; request clarification for those that are not. Example: from [verse 13](#), *tell no lies* matches the characteristic *truthful*. (*Option*: For larger classes, form learners into pairs or groups of three for discussing this part of the exercise.)

Draw learners’ attention again to [verse 20](#) and ask how many promises they see there. This can lead to in-depth discussion as learners grapple with conflicting answers. (Example: Do the two phrases “At that time I will gather you” and “at that time I will bring you home” constitute two promises or just one promise repeated in different words?) Wrap up by asking learners to summarize the promises in two statements. (Examples: *loved by God* and *praised among people*.)

*Option*. Time permitting, discuss [1 Kings 19:9-18](#) as referred to in [Romans 11:1-5](#).

## Into Life

Distribute handouts listing the nine attributes introduced in the Into the Word segment. Include a line at the top on which learners are to write their names. Say, “Thinking of these as God’s list of characteristics for his remnant, circle one that seems to be a particular challenge for you. Then make a concerted effort this week to demonstrate that attribute daily.” Offer a personal example.

*Options*. Distribute copies of the “Remnant Characteristics” and/or “Feel Like a Remnant?” activities from the reproducible page, which you can download, for learners to complete as indicated. You may also contrast God’s intentions for his remnant with his intentions for the wicked per the “God’s Clear Intentions” exercise of lesson 1.

As learners depart, say to each, “Remember: homecoming day is not yet, but will be.”