

Zephaniah 3

God uses poetic justice. There is no such thing as karma; but we do reap what we sow. The Jews are among the most persecuted people group. Their plight is not because God is unfair. To the contrary. God has a way of getting our attention. It is sad that we force him to go to such extremes to salvage our lives from self-destruction. Like always; this is about ancient Judah, but it is also about human nature. Find yourself in the story.

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3)

⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15)

It is probably best to begin by considering what Habakkuk and Jeremiah recorded; to understand what is happening here. Habakkuk saw that Judah had become evil and treacherous and completely out of control and cruel. They were the antithesis of what God's representatives to the world were supposed to be. He asked God to intervene to clean house. Perhaps we could pray the same thing to clean up American politics and fraudsters.

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received. ² How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?

³ Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. ⁵ "Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. ⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. ⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. ⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; ⁹ they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. ¹⁰ They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen

ramps they capture them. ¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on— guilty people, whose own strength is their god.” (Habakkuk 1:1-11)

Jeremiah had the challenge to confront Judah about where this unrepentant attitude was all heading; to no avail.

And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.” (Jeremiah 23:14)

Read Zephaniah 3:1-5: Think of God as a good father. Judah is like a child who refuses to obey. How long do you use your words? What if you tell them to stop for decades and centuries, and it only gets worse? What if time-outs do not work at all? How long do you wait before you break out the *belt of truth* and apply it to the *seat of knowledge*? God is super patient, but people can become so gradually hardened that they only respond to brute force.

Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of one who has no sense. (Proverbs 1:13)

The Old Testament is largely about God trying to get a handle on a wayward people. Throughout history God had to intervene with people who had become abusive and godless. It is not a matter of letting others live their lives. There are victims of our cold hearts all over the place. Plus, God even loves us when we are unlovable.

It is interesting to see how God’s people are targets of the evil demonic powers. The Devil wants to break up any *honeymoon* between God and man. He meddled with Eve and Cain and acted as a disruptor. Lucifer created a distraction among the angles to recruit the ones who were not rooted in God.

God even provides a good life option after we have sinned grievously. He told the Jews to stop resisting, and just voluntarily go with the Babylonians while God burned the *trash heap* and heaps of idol amulets in every home. They could have lived a very good life as free men in Babylon; and eventually returned. Instead, they starved themselves by resisting the prophets and essentially resorting to self-starvation and cannibalism in the siege of Jerusalem.

The point is that God's people do not always get to pick and choose how things need to play out. Today, we have moral civil war going on in America. The spirit of antichrist is apparent in our anarchists and treasonous politicians. We see Islamism and fraud on the rise; and there are far too many young communist sympathizers. Our colleges and High Schools are essentially a woke gin, producing another generation of virtualists. It is intellectually bankrupt to criticize without ever building anything of lasting value.

The Old Testament is largely about Judah and Israel, and yet it is written for our learning. It is a representation of all human nature captured in the examples before us. If we do not learn from history, we will be sure to repeat it. God saved Judah from bad decisions and rebellion against God over and over. That is why the prophet Hosea was told to write an allegory describing his prostitute-like wife who could not stop betraying the only one who ever loved her. Idolatry is often compared to adultery.

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord."³ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son (Hosea 1)

My people consult a wooden idol, and a diviner's rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.¹³ They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. (Hosea 4)

Read Zephaniah 3:6-8: It is sad that God must use unbelievers to be witnesses to the fact that the one true God needs to discipline and correct his own people to get them back on track. Even the idol nations can read the writing on the wall, as they see what is transpiring between God and his people.

²⁴ All the nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done all this to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' ²⁵ Then people will say, 'It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. ²⁶ And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they have not known and whom He had not assigned to them. (Deuteronomy 29)

Today, some people groups have even been formed to resolve to do nothing other than destroy the Jews. God uses all people on earth to steer his own.

We are all walking billboards and illustrations to the world. I might be the guy who obeyed God 4,822 times and disobeyed him 10,593 times. I represent my *decision tree*. I will be a poster child of someone to emulate or someone whose life is a more like a cautionary tale.

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4)

Even Babylon was satisfied to rule Jerusalem as a vassal state with full freedom; but Jerusalem rebelled. Jerusalem essentially *forced* Babylon to return and return again to put down the rebellions, until it was forced to burn everything to the ground, and take all of the survivors captive.

The role of the false prophets are to advocate man's desires above God's difficult corrections and transformations. God allowed his own people to weave their own judgements; which expanded and hardened as their rebellion continued even further.

Some people will not say "Uncle" to God unless they are facing death and dismemberment. We are all like Thanksgiving turkeys that require varying temperature and pressure to become ready to be useful. Parents of drug addicts call this tough love. Paul described how Satan is useful to torture people who have turned their backs on God, that they may repent and be restored.

⁵ *hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:5)*

You boast, “We have entered into a covenant with death, with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place.”¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. ¹⁸ Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand. (Isaiah 28)

Many Americans have entered into *a covenant with death*, perhaps without knowing it. I am praying that our confused people will drop their desire to follow hurtful lifestyles. Hopefully these societal cancers will be replaced with a new spirit-filled love for God. What we need is a Holy Spirit transformation and revival.

God has engineered a purge of human treachery throughout history. Noah’s Flood was an extreme example of how far God would go to save one precious family. Here we have a nation being captured and taken into captivity to produce a faithful remnant. They were taken to idol-central to become cured of idolatry.

Read Zephaniah 3:9-15: God is angling towards having Israel become a nation of believers who love God. In the end, that is what he will have. Today, there are only 50,000 Messianic Jews, but they are growing faster than before.

- The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), one of the largest Messianic Jewish organizations, reported around 250 affiliated congregations in the United States and internationally as of 2022.
- The Messianic Jewish Bible Institute (MJBI) estimates that there are approximately 1,500 to 2,000 Messianic Jewish congregations worldwide, though not all are formally affiliated with major organizations.

At some point in the Tribulation, the surviving Jews will all be saved. To accomplish that, there will be a lot of antisemitism and hardship. 2/3’s of the Jews will not survive the Great Tribulation (Time of Jacob’s Trouble).

²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶ and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” ²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, (Romans 11)

In the whole land,” declares the Lord, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. ⁹ This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’” (Zechariah 13)

You may ask when will Israel begin to turn back to God in a meaningful way? The scriptures tell us that this will happen when God delivers them from the Magog Invasion.

“Son of man, prophesy against Gog and say: ‘This is what the sovereign Lord says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. ² I will turn you around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north and send you against the mountains of Israel. ³ Then I will strike your bow from your left hand and make your arrows drop from your right hand. ⁴ On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals. ⁵ You will fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord. ⁶ I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the Lord. ⁷ “‘I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel. ⁸ It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign Lord. This is the day I have spoken of. (Ezekiel 39)

⁸ On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord going before them. ⁹ On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. ¹⁰ “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zechariah 12)

Read Zephaniah 3:16-20: During the millennium God will make Israel the controlling country over the whole earth. All of the antisemitism is essentially hatred for God and authority structure. All of the enemies of Israel will kneel and bring gifts to Israel in Jerusalem.

² In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord. (Isaiah 2)

⁹ The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. ¹⁰ The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up high from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses, and will remain in its place. ¹¹ It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure. ¹² This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³ On that day people will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another. ¹⁴ Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. ¹⁵ A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps. ¹⁶ Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. ¹⁸ If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ²⁰ On that day holy to the Lord will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. ²¹ Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to

sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite^l in the house of the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 14)

In the end, God wants all of his people to realize that we are the beneficiaries of massive grace and favor. There is no other explanation for it.