

**I. Restore this advent verse to its context**

**A. Advent: More than just preparation for a holiday**

1. Often preparation for Christmas
2. Why not a reminder of the human condition
  - a. All have sinned
  - b. All are lost and subject to the just wrath of God
  - c. All are unable to provide for their own salvation
  - d. All need a Savior as infinite as our sin and as infinite as our God
3. **Zephaniah fits into the scheme of Advent, not so much because of our joy, as for the glory of God's justice and mercy: the true heart of Advent!**
  - a. Zephaniah is the story of God's grace meeting God's justice for God's glory and our joy!

**B. Zephaniah: The Warnings and the Hope**

1. Opens with a warning of global destruction: The Great Day of the LORD
  - a. **Zephaniah 1:2-3 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup>“I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. <sup>3</sup>“I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.
  - b. God the Creator and the Lawgiver retains the right to Judge the world and do with it as He pleases
  - c. Sin is a big deal with God
    - (1) Sin is the propensity of human beings to think, and act, and feel, and live in opposition to God's will for them
    - (2) Sin is the universal human condition
    - (3) God judges the nations of the world, including His people, for their sin
2. Continues with Prophecy Against Major Nations in Israel's World
  - a. Against Judah
    - (1) **Zephaniah 1:4 (ESV)** “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests,
    - (2) **Zephaniah 1:6 (ESV)** those who have turned back from following the LORD, who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him.”
    - (3) **Zephaniah 1:12 (ESV)** At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’
      - (a) God takes sin seriously!

- (b) Complacency gets judged, even among God's elect and chosen people.
  - (c) Even though they were still going through the motions of faithfulness, God held them personally responsible for the condition of their hearts.
  - (d) Christians must take God's self-revelation as seriously as God!
    - i) The parable of the sheep and the goats is not negated by the cross, but emphasized by the cross
    - ii) **To continue in known and intentional sin while trusting in grace as an excuse defies grace and encounters justice!**
    - iii) The very attitude that God will do nothing about sin because He has already done so much covenant kindness to us is the exact reason Judah is judged.
- (4) **Zephaniah 1:17 (ESV)** I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.
- b. Before the judgment of the nations there is a plea for **repentance** among God's people
- (1) **Zephaniah 2:3 (ESV)** Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.
  - (2) This verse reveals the identity of those who may claim Zeph. 3:17 as their own
    - (a) Advent joy belongs to those who seek the LORD
    - (b) Advent joy belongs to those who obey the LORD
    - (c) Advent joy belongs to those who seek righteousness
    - (d) Advent joy belongs to those who seek humility
  - (3) This is the message of Advent:
    - (a) God has sent His Son in response to your sin.
    - (b) Prepare your heart for His arrival
    - (c) **Seek Him!**
- c. Against the surrounding nations
- (1) Philistia - God fulfills His justice against an enemy despite the disobedience of His people
  - (2) Moab/Ammon - God upholds His reputation on behalf of His people
  - (3) Cush (Egypt)
  - (4) Assyria (Nineveh) - God condemns arrogance, pride, and self-exaltation, especially when it rises to the point of

replacing Him in the hearts of people

- (a) **Zephaniah 2:15 (ESV)** This is the exultant city that lived securely, that said in her heart, "I am, and there is no one else." What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.
- (b) You cannot treat God as if He doesn't exist
- (c) **And because He exists, you cannot treat yourself as if you are Him!**

d. Against Jerusalem - The place where God chooses His name to dwell

(1) Her sin

- (a) **Zephaniah 3:2 (ESV)** She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God.
- (b) **Zephaniah 3:5 (ESV)** The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.
- (c) **Zephaniah 3:7 (ESV)** I said, 'Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.' But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.
- (d) **Zephaniah 3:11 (ESV)** "On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

(2) **Proud self-reliance that functionally rejects God consistently receives God's judgment**

- (a) Whether on the part of nations
- (b) Or persons

### C. **The Hope of Zephaniah 3:17 is for the remnant who keep the faith!**

1. The character of the remnant

- a. **Zephaniah 3:9 (ESV)** "For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.
- b. **Zephaniah 3:12-13 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. **They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD,** <sup>13</sup> those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

2. **The Hope of the remnant**
  - a. **Zephaniah 3:15 (ESV)** The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.
  - b. **Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)** The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
  - c. **Zephaniah 3:18-20 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. <sup>19</sup> Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. <sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD.

**D. The Message of Zephaniah for Advent**

1. **Seek God’s grace now before it is too late, because one day, it will be too late**
  - a. God sent His Son to rescue us from a day too late
  - b. God sent His Son to take upon Himself the sum of all our sin and all our sinning.
  - c. God sent His Son to a manger in order for Him to die on a cross and rise, alive, from a tomb and sit forever on a throne.
    - (1) Into our skin to take away our sin
    - (2) Into our lives to bring us new life
    - (3) Into our pain, our sorrow, our grief to heal, restore, and renew
    - (4) He became one of us in order to make us like Him
  - d. God rejoices over those who put their faith in and entrust their lives—past, present, and future—to His Son.
    - (1) God offers forgiveness and new life to those who confess their sin, repent, and put their faith in Jesus for new life
    - (2) The General cleansed of leprosy at first wanted a more difficult way instead of the simple way God offered
    - (3) God makes faith in Jesus the only path to mercy
2. **Rejoice in the fullness of God’s mercy now, so that others may join in, before it is too late**