

Zephaniah 3:1-13 Prophecy of a purified remnant like the 144,000 during the Tribulation. Incredibly, the OT predicts the existence of this group in the final judgment of the world.

Summary of the background in Zephaniah chapter 1-2:

The book predicts the fall of Jerusalem (1:4), about 40 years before the event. This is in **chapter 1** and stated clearly in 1:4-13. It is called “day of the Lord” (1:7), which means a day when God will judge powerfully and decisively. However, the prophet also speaks of judgement of the world in 1:1-2 and 1:14-18 and calls it the “great day of the Lord” (14). This judgment is extremely intense (see 1:15) and obviously, it is referring to the Great Tribulation. In **chapter 2**, the prophet reveals how one can escape such judgments and it is to seek the Lord (2:3). Note that it is for the humble of the earth and not just the Jews. Thus the advice is also given to the gentiles, for right after this, it speaks of judgment of the surrounding gentile nations (2:4-15), namely Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria, even predicting the fall of the great Assyrian capital, the city of Nineveh (2:13).

Explaining the Passage Zephaniah 3:1-13:

The judgments declared on foreign nations in 2:4-15 is to goad Judah to repentance for instantly in v1-2, it speaks of a tyrannical city, implying that a similar woe will befall them. Then it is apparent in v2, in the phrase “her God” that the city is Jerusalem. Indeed, she is a rebellious city and tyrannical because in v3, the leaders are oppressing the people like lions and wolves, and do their job so well that they leave nothing for the morning. They are also defiled as evident in v4, for the prophets are treacherous while the priests profane the temple and violate the law. Even more disheartening is v5, for the Lord is righteous within her, as the Shekinah Glory abides there and brings justice to light. Yet there is no repentance for the people knows no shame. Even the horrifying judgments on the foreign nations in v6 have no effect for in v7, they eagerly persist in their sins. When sinners refuse to change, only judgment awaits and Judah is doomed. Then comes a switch in v8-10, for it speaks of restoration. In v8 is God’s call to wait but who are these subjects? It cannot be the sinners under judgment in 2:4-3:7 and so it must be a call to the humble of the earth in 2:3. They are to wait for an ultimate day of the Lord, stated in v11 and 3:16 as “that day”, when nations are assembled for an outpour of God’s anger. All earth is devoured and so it must be the battle of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 16:14-16). In v9, contextually the people with purified lips are the humble of the earth but with them in v10 are “my worshippers” and “dispersed ones” from far away and Ethiopia is mentioned as an example. This must be referring to Jews returning from all over the world in Israel today and together the purified ones will serve with one shoulder. It is happening now, as gentile Christians are co-laboring fervently with Messianic Jews in Israel. Note that this restoration cannot be the Millennium, for by then all Jews will be living in Israel, an incongruity with the migration in v10. Finally, v11-13 is an amazing prediction on a group of returnees without the proud and rebellious. They are Jews for v13 calls them remnant of Israel. As the humble in 2:3, they will follow the Lord closely to take refuge in Him, to do no wrong (i.e. blameless) and to tell no lies (13). It really fits the description of the 144,000 in Rev. 14:3-5. The growing Messianic community seems to be heading in that direction. Hence, discipleship is vital for them, as they need to grow to become these predicted holy remnants. Note in v14-15, the Lord will be in their midst to clear their enemies, harmonizing well with His return at the end of the Tribulation.

Some key questions for studies:

1. Those who are asked to wait in v8 – why are these from all the earth and not Jews only?

Ans: Because they cannot be for those sinners in 2:4 – 3:7 and if these are for those in 2:3, it is stated that they are the humble of the earth.

2. Why are the peoples given purified lips are not taken as Jews?

Ans: In the context if we go from v8 to v9, they should be referring to the same group, namely the humble of the earth.

3. Why then are those in v11 considered to be Jews?

Ans: Because they are called my dispersed ones and they are to come to His holy mountain which is Jerusalem and in v13 they are called remnant of Israel. They are also those who rebel against Him.

4. Why are those in v13 considered to be Jews?

Ans: Because they are called remnant of Israel, a term reserve in the OT for faithful Jews.

5. Why is this period not the Millennium?

Ans: The Jews will already dwell in Israel during the Millennium (Eze. 47:13-23) and will not be called the disperse ones. Jews are never called remnant during the Millennium. Finally this present period is seeing God's anger (8) and judgments and is not the Millennium.