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Zephaniah 3:19-20

When you look at the beginning of the book as it starts off, and he says that everything has to go, by the time you get to verse 4, you begin to realize that he now is starting to hit home. He's saying, "Yeah, this is what you're doing at home." When you think about the text, in many respects God is speaking to us in the sense of we're at church, we open up the Bible at church; but God is saying, "Yeah, but what do you do at home?" What do you elevate at home? What's most important to you at home?

So, the way the passage reads, he talks about the remnant of Baal. "I can smell the residue of Baal still in your presence." The names of idolatrous priests, why do you hold onto those names? Why do you pursue those same things? There are certain idols that we have in our homes, and we say, "No, God's number 1." Why do you hang onto it? I still sense the presence of this idol in your house.

If you look in Zephaniah 1:5, he talks about those who bow down on the housetops to the host in heaven. "Housetops" is an interesting way of putting it, but it's an elevated place, and it's really conveying "what is it that you elevate?" What is it that you spend so much time doing? What is it that you really love doing? God begins to point out the fact that "what does it matter that you're coming to worship if it's not real in your life?" In a very real way, He begins to reveal the hidden things. "What do you think? How do you view these things? What's important to you? Where's your reverence for Me? When you're home, is there reverence? When you're with other people, is there reverence for Me?"

When you go on down to Zephaniah 1:7, he begins to talk about the fact that God's in our midst, and there ought to be a reverence. Then it begins to talk about things like the clothes that they wore, remember reading about that?

(Zephaniah 1:8) "I will punish the princes, the king's sons
And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments."

That's an interesting point; once again, just to put it in the realm of just our everyday way of thinking, "what do you wear?" No, that's probably not the best question to ask; "why do you wear what you wear?" That's the question to ask because oftentimes people will wear certain things to accomplish certain things. So, what are you trying to accomplish with the things that you put on? In this passage, it's clear that the "foreign garments" was trying to fit in with the world. It was part of the process. Why do you like that? "Well, you know, I saw everybody else had it, so I bought it. Obviously, it's in style." Really? Is that your motivation? Is that what you're doing?

Why do you do what you do? See, those are the hidden things. It's not just about what you wear, it's about why you wear what you wear; why you pursue the things that you do, what you spend your time on, and the way you treat those around you; as the passage goes on to say; or the pursuits that you so earnestly go after.

If you look in particular in Zephaniah 1:10, he talks about the Second Quarter, the Fish Gate, of course, we're talking about business. Well that's the most important thing you could ever do, right? His ultimate point within the passage is all these things that you're pursuing, the way that you think, and the things that are on your heart; why you think the way you do, why you do the things that you do. The things that you go after is actually another way of saying, "I believe this is that which protects me. This is my security." I mean, otherwise, why would you spend so much time trying to make money, trying to stack it up? Why would you do that if you didn't believe that to be true? "Well, we need to be good stewards." Wait a minute, what does "good stewards" mean? Sometimes people think that good stewardship means that you bank a lot of money. That's not necessarily good stewardship. Good stewardship is investing in God's will, God's plan; that's good stewardship. Using your money wisely. If you give a glass of water in the name of the Lord, you go, "I needed that water." Yeah, but you invested it in something more important than you. How wonderful it is when you begin to think according to God's will. "Well, it's a minor detail, maybe my thinking's a little off." No, that's a big detail, and God is saying all these things have to go. In fact, as you look in Zephaniah 1: 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18, you begin to see God saying, "I'm going to shake everything up, and we're going to move everything out." And you're going to say, "wait, wait, wait." Then, He's going to say, "What are you banking on?" You actually think that your money is going to save you? Is that what you've been thinking all along?

It says in Zephaniah 1:18 that neither your silver nor your gold will be able to deliver you in the day of His wrath. Why? Because He's going to make a complete end of everything. God is examining your motive. He's examining your heart. He's examining what you're doing, what you're thinking, what you're wearing, why you're wearing, the things that you're going after, why you go after, what you feel like it's going to do for you. Why is it so important in your life? Zephaniah is causing you to examine these things.

By the time you come into chapter 2, there is a declaration of God in which He begins to gather the nations to His people. So, the first part really is an examination, or in a way, God saying, "I see what you're doing, and I understand why you're doing it. You think nobody sees, and nobody cares." Obviously, as we were looking at Isaiah 29, "but I saw it, and you think that it didn't matter. It does matter, and it matters to such a degree that I'm going to shake the whole world to get it out." Now, you come to chapter 2, and God says, "Now, this is what I'm going to do, I'm going to parade all the nations in front of you that have influenced you, and I'm going to let you see their demise. My hope is you'll take a hint."

I was walking around the cemetery just the other day, and I was looking at the different places where people were buried. It's amazing how many were fairly young. I was saying to myself,

“They didn’t live very long.” Of course, as Psalm 49 says, our thought is that we’re going to live forever, but all you have to do is walk over there and find out that’s not true. You see some of the things that are said on their headstones, and you begin to realize that the day is coming when everybody’s going to go the way of all the earth, as the Old Testament says, and nobody’s exempt from that. Ecclesiastes will remind us of that over and over again.

In chapter 2, He begins to parade them before His people, and He says, “I want you to watch their demise, and I want you to understand that they’re going to fall because they trusted in the things that you wanted to emulate.” You know all those things that you tried to copy of the world? All those things that you said, “I gotta be just like them”? He said, “Watch what happens.” So, He parades the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, Egyptians, and the Assyrians, and you begin to realize all of the things that the world has pawned off on me and has literally rubbed off on me is just plain destructive. God wants to reveal that to them. When you think about the attitude of the Moabites, in which they would sneer and make fun of and revile the people around them, I suppose their thoughts were that they were getting away with it because at the time nobody was doing anything; but God says, “Nobody’s getting away with anything.” Then the Philistines, who tried to oppress people, tried to bully people. Everybody has bullies in their lives, and their perception is they’re getting away with it; they’re not getting away with it. God saw it, and He begins to reveal those things. Then, you have the Egyptians and the Assyrians who build these great edifices unto themselves, and great cities; which the perception is, “I’m greater than everybody else. I am, and I exist, and nobody else is even close to me.”

(Zephaniah 2:15) “This is the exultant city
Which dwells securely,
Who says in her heart,
‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’
How she has become a desolation...”

I thought you name it, claim it; you just say it and it’s true. If you build something grand enough, powerful enough, you can convince everybody else, but you’re not going to convince God that you’re impregnable.

So, as you look at the passage, you begin to see all of the influences of the world; and that fundamentally is what chapter 2 is about. It’s about the influence of the world that has rubbed off. All you have to do is see what it says, in particular you can see the arrogance of Nineveh. It says in verse 13, “I’m going to destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation.” Of course, that’s the picture of the exultant city; which is also interesting if you were to go to Isaiah 47:8, you have a parallel passage there that almost verbatim quotes the same phrase, “with Babylon.” That’s why Zephaniah 2:15 says it’s the “exultant city.” I guess the point is all the cities that think they’re really great say that. They say, “We’re the greatest and there’s nobody like us.” They’ve been declaring that down through history, but God says, “Where are they?”

The prophecy of Babylon the great was “you’ll never build here again,” and guess what? Nobody has ever built there again; and Nineveh, wow, the greatest city that ever existed. I mean, who could ever say, “we put an atomic bomb in some little place over in Japan,” and it just completely wipes out a city, and they build it back; but God says, “We’re going to wipe out these big cities, and they’re not coming back. I mean, where is Nineveh? They did some digging and they found it, but nobody has ever built again there. So, it begins to reveal the promises of God and it reveals what God is saying; you trust in the wrong things, you pursue the wrong things, you try to copy the wrong things, and this is where you’re heading. There are things that God does in our lives that reveal this to us. Everybody has influences around them that God has obviously done something in such a way that you go, “Whoa, I never thought that was going to happen to that person,” or “I never thought they were going to...” and God does that for a reason. Now, you can say it was just bad luck, but we believe in the sovereignty of God. If you’re living and breathing, God is giving you clues, and He’s revealing things to you. So, in chapter 2, He calls everybody out. If you back up into Zephaniah 1:12, you can see how the arrogance has literally rubbed off on Jerusalem.

(Zephaniah 1:12) “It will come about at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
And I will punish the men
Who are stagnant in spirit,
Who say in their hearts,
‘The LORD will not do good or evil!’”

That’s exactly what the world was saying. It’s already rubbed off on them. So, that’s why you have the parading in chapter 2.

In chapter 3, it’s God’s indictment against His own people, Judah in particular. At the very beginning, He talks about Jerusalem, and He says, “You’re the tyrannical city. I mean, you’ve seen tyranny, you embraced it, and now you’ve become it.” So, He begins to describe them, and what makes them more tyrannical is that they didn’t receive the instruction of God, nor were they ashamed of the things that they did. They knew better. The interesting point in this is that though by their actions it seems as if God does not exist in their presence, God continues to convey to them “but I’m still here, and I’m here with you. We’re going to finish this thing.”

If you look with me in verse 7, as God reveals “I gave you instruction.”

(Zephaniah 3:7) “I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.’
So her dwelling will not be cut off
According to all that I have appointed concerning her.
But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.”

“They didn’t listen, and they didn’t do what I told them to do.”

If you look in verse 5, look at the phrase here, “The LORD is righteous within her...” Now, watch what it goes on to say, “He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail.”

This is a very comforting passage. I’m going to tell you why. Because what we have in our nation today is a nation that is literally going astray. We have thrown God out of the schools; obviously, that’s a given. We’ve thrown Him out of our courts, that’s obvious, and we’re seeing this lawlessness coming in. Of course, 2 Thessalonians 2 says that’s what is going to happen. And Matthew makes reference to this, that lawlessness is going to increase, and because of that, the love of many grow cold; and we’re seeing that happen. With this, the perception is those that are in the midst of this, it almost seems as if your voice is squelched because the majority of the world is going this way. So, it’s almost like a huge deluge occurring that’s impossible for a few drops to go against the current. The text in this passage is God’s not necessarily telling the few to change the world, He’s saying, “Hide.” Pretty interesting. “Perhaps I’ll hide you.” (Zephaniah 2:3) He’s telling them to focus on staying humble because though nobody else sees you, and we’re not talking about hiding your testimony, we’re talking about that God is going to preserve you by virtue of your humility, not by virtue of you going out and attacking people. I know that a lot of times the perception is, “Well, what could I accomplish by humbling myself?” God says, “It’s what I’m going to accomplish because you humbled yourself.”

In Isaiah 26, you’ll see this theme within the passage. Here again, we go to the passage where “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,” as King James will say, “whose mind is stayed on thee.” Then the passage says we have a strong city, it’s God. God’s our strong city.

If you drop on down to verse 8, it’s a great verse.

“Indeed, while following the way of Your judgments, O LORD,
We have waited for You eagerly.”

See that? Now, in Zephaniah 3:8, God will say, “Therefore wait for Me,” right?

So, read on what it says here in Isaiah 26:8, “Your name, even Your memory, is the desire of our souls.”

The difficulties, the things that we’re seeing. The fact of the matter is that in our comfort zones, if we were candid, we would have to admit that we get pretty stagnant about God. Somewhere along the line, what happened to the zeal when you first received the Lord? You were on fire, and you were willing to boldly proclaim the message in places where nobody else would go. Now, what happened? When difficulty comes, and we were talking about this last week with the Psalmist as he begins to talk about captivity; “we were taken into captivity and they told us to sing the songs, but we couldn’t sing the songs. Our hearts were broken.” What God is doing at this time in our lives is He’s breaking our hearts so that He might build a zeal. You have to realize that all of this can be lost in order to embrace it fully. There has to be a sense of, “I hate

this stuff. I hate what it's doing to people. I hate where it's going." Until that happens, we're just sedentary. So, God begins to move. From a distance, it looks like the bad guys are winning, and God says, "No, I have a hidden plan. Stay on target." "Where do I go?" He goes, "Hide."

If you look in the passage, in the waiting process it's clear that "we have waited for You eagerly." "Our heart is for You." (Isaiah 26:8)

(Isaiah 26:12) "LORD, You will establish peace for us,
Since You have also performed for us all our works.

(Isaiah 26:13) O LORD our God, other masters besides You have ruled us;
But through You alone we confess Your name."

It's going to get to the point where we go, "We can't deliver the earth." No matter what we do, we can't rescue the earth, and you'll see this downward slide. That's the wonderful point of verse 18,

"We were pregnant, we writhed in labor,
We gave birth, as it seems, only to wind.
We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth,
Nor were inhabitants of the world born.

(Isaiah 26:19) Your dead will live;
Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits."

Watch verse 20, what does He tell the people to do?

(Isaiah 26:20) "Come, my people, enter into your rooms
And close your doors behind you;
Hide for a little while
Until indignation runs its course."

We're seeing the process of God's wrath and Him revealing the things of the world that have been dormant all along. All these people going, "human beings are basically good people." They obviously have not read Jeremiah 17, but beyond that point you begin to see these things coming out, and you're going, "Where did all this evil come from?" Well, the heart of man is deceitful, desperately sick. That's why everything has to go. When God is in power with great force, it tells us that the wicked will feign obedience. They'll willingly fake it. They have no loyalty. So, they don't mind faking it for a while, but it's not real. So, God says, "Ok, everything has to go. We're going to have to reveal everything." It is that point that God is getting to. In other words, the work that He's producing is going to be a finished work.

Now, in Zephaniah 3, as He calls upon them in verse 8 to wait as He gathers the nations, as He begins to do His work, what is He producing? He's producing those that are humble and those that love Him. So, the picture is that in the midst of all this, The Lord your God is in your midst, and He's doing a work. How's He doing a work? Well, He's clearly purifying me, but more than that, He's causing a zeal in our lives. It's His zeal that starts the fire. If you look in Zephaniah 3:8, "By the fire of My zeal."

"Then, I will give My people," what? "Purified lips."

Could you think of the first thing that would happen if God was in your midst? If in fact, it was God in your midst hidden in your heart, what would be happening? His work. So, when He says in Zephaniah 3:5,

"The LORD is righteous within her;
He will do no injustice.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He does not fail.
But the unjust knows no shame."

If you drop on down to verse 7,

"I said, 'Surely you will revere Me,
Accept instruction.'"

So, one of the ways that we know that God is in our midst is truth is being proclaimed. How do we know that this is where God resides? Well, if truth is being proclaimed, God is in our midst. We also know that God begins to purify the things that we say. If you look in verse 9, "then I will give to the peoples purified lips." That means lips without deceit, without hate, without filth, without insincerity, without division, without strife, without pride, that aren't condescending and critical. As you look in the passage, God begins to unite His people shoulder to shoulder. Why does He use that phrase? We oftentimes think of the term, "don't be unequally yoked;" so, "shoulder to shoulder" means "even." The point is you're thinking of one another, you're complimenting each other, you're not competing against each other; bearing one another's burdens is another way of adding to that.

As He goes on, He says, "From beyond..." No matter where, He begins to pull His own people, and it's through all of this difficulty that God begins to pick out those that are His. It is a strange phenomenon when you think about it, that the trials and difficulties in a believer's life are what make him stronger. Without those, they're not refined. As Peter would say, "this is like making gold pure. This is what we're doing." So, God begins to bring His dispersed ones, those who bring His offerings. Clearly, it's making reference to the fact that there's a willing desire to serve the Lord; but if you look in verse 11, who is He removing from us? The proud ones, exultant ones. "Those that I call are not going to be proud or haughty anymore."

Zephaniah 3:12, "The people I'm going to leave is," what? "Humble and lowly, they'll take refuge in My name." They'll tell no lies; they're not going to be deceitful with their tongue. (Zephaniah 3:13) There's going to be a lot of joy. If you look in verse 14, you're going to shout for joy and rejoice with all your heart." The Lord has taken away all the judgements against you; there's not going to be anymore guilt. (Zephaniah 3:15) One of the ways that you know God is in your midst is you feel forgiven. It's a wonderful picture.

(Zephaniah 3:16) "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem:
'Do not be afraid, O Zion;
Do not let your hands fall limp.

(Zephaniah 3:17) The LORD your God is in your midst..."

How do I know? You're not afraid. You're not counting your marbles to see if you have enough for that rainy day. You actually believe that "if God is for me who could be against me?"

"... A victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love..."

There's going to be calm confidence. A quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

So, verse 18, those that grieve over the fact that the feast in some ways have ceased. It's actually saying, "you care about gathering together; you care." It was a bizarre thing with the whole covid thing, to watch people go, "Oh, we're not having church, but that's ok." I'm going, "Really? That's ok?" So, there wasn't really any grief over it, but those who did grieve, God says, "I see that. I'm bringing you together, those that want to have fellowship with me." Some people don't grieve, "Well, You know... guess we won't pray. So what;" But some people would actually grieve over that. God sees that, and He says, "They came from you, O Zion." We go, "Who are the guys that are from Zion?" God's people, and He says, "The ones who grieve when they don't have those feasts." God brings these things in our lives to see how bad you want something, and if it begins to stir in your heart, a phrase something like, "Even so Lord Jesus come quickly." If it begins to stir in your heart, that kind of heart; because everyone who has that hope in Him purifies himself. These are the ones that are from Zion.

Now, if you look in verse 19, I was talking to Connie about this verse just the other day. I said, "You know, what's interesting is the way that it's listed. It lists the oppressors, the lame and the outcasts, and it identifies them as seemingly a people; but what's interesting is that every one of these words are verbs, which means it's more an action. So, if I could read it this way,

"Behold, I am going to deal at that time..." or "accomplish at this time" would be another way of putting it.

"With all your afflictions."

The Lord is telling you that He's in our midst. What's going to happen if the Lord is in your midst? If in fact, you long for Him? If in fact, all of this mayhem is causing you to grieve for His name's sake? What's going to happen? Well, God says, "I'm going to be with you," and that means that your afflictions are going to be gone.

The passage then goes on, and says, not only your afflictions, but "I will save the lame..."

The word for that is "yāšā'." What do you mean "save the lame"? "The lame" doesn't just refer to somebody that has a bad leg, it refers to somebody that's stumbling because of weakness. You kind of see it again, if you look with me in the book of Micah. In Micah 4, surprise, it's like He's talking about the same thing. It's like these prophetic books seem to be alike. Are these guys talking to each other? Because it starts off in Micah 4:1,

"And it will come about in the last days
That the mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief..."

(Micah 4:6) "In that day," declares the LORD,
"I will assemble the lame
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.

(Micah 4:7) I will make the lame a remnant
And the outcasts a strong nation,
And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion..."

They're going to be like a flock. That's the perfect book to refer to that because if you remember, it's in the book of Micah that talks about where Jesus is going to be born and it was where shepherds are.

In Zephaniah, "Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your afflictions, I save you from weariness, from falling, from stumbling." (Zephaniah 3:19)

"Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"...and will gather the outcast." Have you ever felt pushed aside, nobody cares for you? He's saying, "I'm going to turn everything around. The pain that you felt is all going to go to glory, and your shame, your disappointments are going to turn into praise." We have a lot to look forward to when you think about it. "...and I'm going to make your name great." That's the word "renown." You know how the world looks down on you, and they go, "eh, those idiot Christians." The passage is saying, "I'm going to make your name great, and the world's going to come; and at that time, I'll bring you in." I like how many times the personal pronoun is being used in this reference, "you." If something great was happening, I could just picture God going, "Uh, could you come here?" I'm going, "Me?" He goes, "You, you." "Umm... Me?"

(Zephaniah 3:20) "At that time I will bring you in,
Even at the time when I gather you together;
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,
When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,"
Says the LORD."

Now, what we're talking about here in the finality of the book is at this juncture, who can see their fortunes? There's nothing there, everything has been lost, and the thought is, "I've just become collateral damage." We oftentimes worry about people, we go, "Something catastrophic happened. What about the innocent?" What, do you think God's not sovereign? He sees that. He's working on behalf of them. Whether or not He chooses to elevate them in the hereafter in such a great way that nobody would ever trade that off. As Paul would say, the glories that are yet to be are not to be compared with the sufferings today. He actually probably saw some of those things being caught up in the third heaven. But how amazing it is to know that God sees the heart that is humble, that is lowly, and He's saying, "I'm in your midst. I know you don't feel like it, I'm in your midst, and I'm doing something great. I know you don't understand it, just wait, hide in the room, you're going to see great surprise."

There's the promise of Ephesians 3, where it says that God has an administration that's a mystery, that's hidden. A great phrase, "a hidden mystery," that God has for us, and He has great plans for us. "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard all of the wonderful things God has planned for us." (1 Corinthians 2:9) No wonder Paul would say, "I pray that the eyes of their heart would be enlightened that they might see these things." In this passage, what we have is a promise, and I want to make this distinction, it's a promise directly to God's people the Jews. The fundamental principle is ours; this exact promise is to His people. The reason I want to make this distinction is because I want to show you what they get, and what we get because a lot of times there's a lot of confusion in it. The promise is "I have great things in store for you if you'll humble yourself." James will say in the New Testament, "If you'll humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, He'll exalt you." Now, the Jews have an advantage at this point in this book. They actually have what's going to happen spelled out for them. That passage is, "I'm going to bring you back and I'm going to make you the renowned of the earth. You're going to be the great ones of the earth." That fundamentally is the promise to the Jews. Now, the question is, have you ever seen this happen? The answer is, no, you've never seen this happen. Jews have been many things, of course, it's obvious that they're very bright people, and in many cases extremely wealthy, but they've also been a people hated and despised by the world, as God clearly has told them. In fact, they've been spread out throughout the world as Scripture says; but the promise is "I'm going to bring you home, and I'm going to lift you up."

All the way through the Old Testament in these prophetic books, there is distinct prophecy telling the Jews they're going home and what's going to happen when they do go home. Let me just show you a couple of these passages, and I don't want to spend too much time in this, but I

do what to show you the distinction that was given in this. So, if you look with me in Isaiah 48. I'm not trying to bad mouth anybody, but it's what Scripture says. God is saying that these people who like to declare "we have the holy city" are an obstinate people. So, in the passage, He says in Isaiah 48:1,

"Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel
And who came forth from the loins of Judah,
Who swear by the name of the LORD
And invoke the God of Israel,
But not in truth nor in righteousness.

(Isaiah 48:2) For they call themselves after the holy city
And lean on the God of Israel;
The LORD of hosts is His name.

(Isaiah 48:3) I declared the former things long ago
And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them.
Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.

(Isaiah 48:4) Because I know that you are obstinate,
And your neck is an iron sinew
And your forehead bronze."

I could just see Him knocking on their head, "nothing in there, is there?"

He goes on, and says in verse 10,

"Behold, I have refined you..." but we just keep burning. You've got to be pretty stubborn if you're going through really intense fire, and you go, "Ok, I'm not leaving."

(Isaiah 48:12) "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called;
I am He, I am the first, I am also the last."

(Isaiah 48:14) "Assemble, all of you, and listen..."

(Isaiah 48:18) "If only you had paid attention to My commandments!
Then your well-being would have been like a river,
And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

(Isaiah 48:19) Your descendants would have been like the sand,
And your offspring like its grains;
Their name would never be cut off or destroyed from My presence."

Did they listen? No, they didn't listen. So, they went into captivity, and they've been spread out throughout all of the earth. Yet, the Lord says, "I just want to let you know Jacob, I haven't forgotten you, and I'm bringing you back.

(Isaiah 49:5) "And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength)"

So, if you drop on down, the promise is at the end of verse 7,

"To the Servant of rulers,
'Kings will see and arise,
Princes will also bow down,
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.'"

In other words, kings of the earth are going to bow down because they realize that God has been faithful to you. Once again, has that ever happened? That has yet to happen.

In verse 10, the day is coming "They will not hunger or thirst,
Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down;
For He who has compassion on them."

The clear cry is as Zion says, "But God has forsaken me, He's forgotten me." You know the passage, "can a woman forget her child? She may forget her child, but I'm not going to forget you. I've inscribed you in the palms of My hand." So, then He turns, and He says, "This is what's going to happen, you know all your children that you were bereaved of, that died? In some cases, children were ripped out of your stomach before they were born because of the enemy and some that you offered to the god Molech; but the day is coming when the nations will bring those kids back." That's the promise if you look in verse 20,

"The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears,
'The place is too cramped for me;
Make room for me that I may live here.'

(Isaiah 49:21) Then you will say in your heart,
'Who has begotten these for me,
Since I have been bereaved of my children
And am barren, an exile and a wanderer?
And who has reared these?
Behold, I was left alone;
From where did these come?'

(Isaiah 49:22) Thus says the Lord GOD,
'Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations
And set up My standard to the peoples;
And they will bring your sons in their bosom,
And your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.'"

Has this ever happened?

(Isaiah 49:23) “Kings will be your guardians,
And their princesses your nurses.
They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth
And lick the dust of your feet;
And you will know that I am the LORD;
Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame.”

That’s pretty intense, isn’t it? Just to clarify for you, what we’re reading here are the promises of God to His people. Does God ever fail in His promises? Does He ever lie? So, you come to Isaiah 60, and the promise is “Arise, shine; for your light has come.” (Isaiah 60:1) “Darkness will cover the earth,” (Isaiah 60:2) but God’s going to send a Redeemer that will rescue you.

(Isaiah 60:18) “Violence will not be heard again in your land,
Nor devastation or destruction within your borders...”

We’re still hearing wars and rumors of war, right?

“But you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise.”

(Isaiah 60:19) “No longer will you have the sun for light by day,
Nor for brightness will the moon give you light;
But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light,
And your God for your glory.”

Isaiah 61 goes into one of the great texts that Jesus Himself proclaimed, that He came in the Spirit of God, but here’s the promise if you look in verse 4, “Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins.” When you come to the end of Zephaniah, what does He say? “We’re going to restore everything.” That word “restoration,” if you were to take the root word, it’s dealing with coming out of captivity; but it’s a very interesting word to me. Probably one of the reasons why it’s interesting to me is because I’m a car buff. So, I like restoration. Nowadays, they have this new thing called resto-mod, and it’s where you restore an old car, but you put all the new stuff in it to where it doesn’t drive like an old car. It drives like a brand-new car, but it looks like the old car. Well, what you have in that setting is stuff called, well, sentiment. There is a sense of sentimentality that you have for something that is near and dear to you; and restoration has that feel. God is saying, “You know all that stuff?” This to me is what’s so wild about this. God has allowed us to experience certain things for a reason.

I hope I don’t embarrass anybody, that’s my wife, but you never forget that first kiss. You will never forget it. There’s nothing like it. It’s just like etched in your mind. Now, try what you will, you can’t get that back; but God says, “I’ll restore it.” The greatest moment that you’ve ever had, the greatest feeling that you’ve ever had, the greatest everything that you’ve ever had, God wanted you to experience it. Then He turns to you, and He goes, “We’ll pull that back, but better.”

One of the problems with drug addiction, especially with crack, is that they try to get back that same original feeling that they got with the first hit, and they never can; but they keep trying because that hit was so glorious that they keep going. Why is it that man keeps saying, “the good old days”? I’m going to tell you what, you think about those moments, and as Scripture tells us, most of what happens is punctiliar, like moments of time. My memory, your memory thinks that way. We think in aorist tense, we think of an event. You don’t think in linear; you don’t remember in the linear. I mean, you don’t remember everything that you did 5 weeks ago; but if something that is significant happens, you just can’t forget it, and you cling onto that. Well, because it was such a great moment, and because it’s etched in our mind, we almost blow it out of proportion to the degree that nothing could ever be that good, right? So, we call them “the good old days,” and probably if we were to go back to “the good old days,” we’d find out that it wasn’t really that good; but by this time, in your mind it’s like walking on water stuff.

In Ecclesiastes 7, we’re dealing with better within the passage, and it says this in verse 10,

“Do not say, ‘Why is it that the former days were better than these?’
For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.”

Now, he’s dealing with the desire for those moments, and that’s what the term ‘restoration’ conjures up. It also is God’s way of saying, “From day one you meant something to Me.” Once again, this is why to me the whole restoration thing is such a great point. I mean, God could just leave dust and make better dust than that, but He raises us, this dust because He loves us. I’ve often said, “I don’t want to see somebody else; I want to see my brother in heaven.” I want to see him new, resto-mod, running well, whatever, but that whole restoration you have to come back to. Why restoration? Why rebuild the city? So, what God is saying is “We’re going to do it right this time.” All the way through, you have this desire for that past that’s coming back. God stirred their heart, He put them in captivity, and they said, “We want to go home. We want things the way they were.” God says, “We’re going to bring them back the way they were, but better.” That’s what restoration is.

By the way, what’s interesting in Ecclesiastes, if you look in verse 2, “It is better to go to a house of mourning.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:3) “Sorrow is better than laughter...”

(Ecclesiastes 7:5) “It is better to listen to the rebuke...”

By the way, all those difficult times in your life that you thought you needed to dodge, God’s going to bring restoration out of that, and He’s going to show you why that was so important; and you’re going to rejoice in it because it was actually better that you go through that.

There’s an interesting passage in Ecclesiastes 3:12, it says,

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime;

(Ecclesiastes 3:13) moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.

(Ecclesiastes 3:14) I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

(Ecclesiastes 3:15) That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.”

It will go on and talk about that He’s going to bring all into judgement. Which I don’t know if you understand, but judgement is God bringing up the past.

(Ecclesiastes 3:17) “I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,’ for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.”

What we understand is that the writer here is saying, “It doesn’t matter what happens, it’s the same order, same standards, nothing is discarded by God.” It all has a purpose, and God’s going to reveal that.

In Isaiah 60, there is the promise that “Arise, shine; for your light has come,” and Isaiah 61, “I’m going to greatly rejoice in the salvation.” Then, Isaiah 62:1,

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet,
Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness,
And her salvation like a torch that is burning.

(Isaiah 62:2) The nations will see your righteousness,
And all kings your glory;
And you will be called by a new name
Which the mouth of the LORD will designate.

(Isaiah 62:3) You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD...”

(Isaiah 62:6) “On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen...”

(Isaiah 62:7) “And give Him no rest until He establishes
And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”

All the way through, he’s conveying that there are great things in store. Isaiah 65 is going to emphasize this as well.

(Isaiah 65:17) “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”

There’s a very interesting phrase here that I want you to note, verse 20,

“No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,
Or an old man who does not live out his days;
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred
Will be thought accursed.

(Isaiah 65:21) They will build houses...”

Does that sound like heaven? That doesn't sound like heaven, it sounds like fulfillment of a promise to God's people that we're going back and we're going to fix things to the way they should have been.

“They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

(Isaiah 65:22) They will not build and another inhabit...”

Then, there's another great phrase in verse 25, “The wolf and the lamb will graze together.” I've never seen a wolf graze, except for the fact that a lot of the dog food today is made with vegetables. I'm not sure why they do that, it's carnivorous but that's another story. When you look at all the prophetic books as they end, the emphasis continually is on this, Ezekiel especially. In Ezekiel 37, he talks about the bones coming back together and Israel coming back together. In fact, if you look with me in Ezekiel 37:21, this is what's going to happen,

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

(Ezekiel 37:22) and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

(Ezekiel 37:23) They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned...

(Ezekiel 37:24) My servant David will be king over them.”

When this is written, David is long dead. The question is, when is this going to happen? If you look at the end of verse 25, “David My servant will be their prince forever.” That's a very interesting passage.

When you get to Ezekiel 40, and you go to the end, it's the building of the temple. It's very clear at this juncture that he's not talking about any temple that was built by Herod or anybody else. This is a future temple that's going to be built on the earth, and the measurements are very exact. What are we talking about? We're talking about the Millennium. When you see in Revelation, and it's talking about this, what is God doing in the Millennium? People have the

confusion, “What in the world is the Millennium?” I can tell you exactly what it is, it’s not confusing. It’s God fulfilling His promises to His people. All these things have to happen. When are they going to happen? In the Millennium kingdom. Who’s going to be reigning? He just said. So, all the way through, you see these promises.

Now, what Romans will tell you in Romans 15, you see that God has a distinct difference. Now, let me say this, we read that passage in Ecclesiastes, “God seeks that which is past,” and what has been will be. In other words, the second verse is the same as the first. So, what is Ecclesiastes saying? The fundamentals never change, but a lot of the things that happen in people’s lives are very strangely unique; but it’s the same thing that happens over and over again. For instance, if you’re betrayed, you get hurt. If there’s unity, there’s joy. All these things are the same, but they’re played out in different settings; and God purposely has taken every conceivable setting that there could possibly ever be so that man would never say, “I got a bum deal,” or “God was not fair.” It’s the same thing that He seeks, and that is the righteousness of man; that he would love God; that he would follow Him. God seeks for the same thing over and over again, but man continually fails in every setting that there is. “Well, if I just had money,” “if I just had the right parents...” God just takes you through every one of those scenarios. Have you ever seen someone that just had perfect parents, and you go, “Why are they so wicked? Their parents are so great.” Then, you have somebody that has really lousy parents, and they go, “Where did this guy come from? Why is he so nice? He must have not been born in the same family.” God says, “We had to play it out.” This is one of the reasons why you and I can’t go around boasting, God’s playing out a scenario to reveal that it’s all Him.

In Romans 15, it says that you need to accept one another. Now, in chapter 14 he talks about the fact that one person regards one day higher than another, and what we’re talking about in the context is that the Jews think differently. They should, unless they’re a completed Jew and receive Christ. The Jews are called for a distinct purpose. Now, what’s interesting about Romans is Paul is going to say, “We all come back to the same place, but God deals with us differently.” That’s what He’s doing with the Jews.

(Romans 15:7) “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

(Romans 15:8) For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers.”

Why has God called the Jews? To confirm promises. How do I know God keeps His promise? Look at the Jews. So, you have physical evidence of God keeping His promise with the Jews. They’re very pragmatic and tangible.

(Romans 15:9) “and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy...”

A different calling. Now, he’ll go on to say that God is going to shut up everything, all disobedience in mercy. In other words, He’s going to end up giving mercy to the Jews because

in spite of His promises they still failed Him and needed mercy. So, we're all coming back to the same place, but we're coming from different perspectives. Just like your life is very different from somebody else's, but you got saved. "How did you get saved? You didn't take the same path that I did." God was using your path to bring you because of your uniqueness; the same thing is true with that. So, the promise of God in the Old Testament to the believers is basically Ephesians 3, "I tell you a mystery. I'm the agent by God to go to you Gentiles to tell you about mercy." Wow, we did not see this one on the flight plan.

Closing prayer:

Father, thank You for Your word, and thank You for drawing us to You and for gathering us together in the unique way that You do; for bringing things into our lives that we might be drawn to You as individuals. Lord, thank You for the work that you're doing in our lives even tonight. We pray that if we hear Your voice, that we will not harden our hearts, but embrace You because how wonderful it is to the humble. How wonderful it is for those that would wait for You and long for You, and feel misery over the evil that's being done, and the loss of fellowship with You. Oh, we're not going to lack. You have great things for us. We give You thanks in Jesus' name, Amen.