

# Zephaniah

## 1

**Summary:** *Zephaniah 1 is a relentless proclamation of cosmic and local judgment. The prophet — a descendant of King Hezekiah — announces God's intention to sweep away everything from the face of the earth in language that echoes the creation account in reverse. From universal judgment the focus narrows to Judah and Jerusalem: God will punish those who worship Baal, those who bow to the host of heaven, those who have turned away, and the complacent who say 'The LORD will do nothing.' The chapter climaxes with the most sustained description of the 'Day of the LORD' in the prophets — the passage that would later inspire the medieval hymn Dies Irae.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Zephaniah's genealogy (v. 1) is the longest of any prophetic superscription — traced back four generations to Hezekiah (Chizkiyahu), almost certainly the king. This makes Zephaniah a member of the royal family and gives his condemnation of Jerusalem's leadership an insider's authority. The de-creation language (vv. 2-3) reverses Genesis 1: instead of creating fish, birds, animals, and humans, God will 'sweep away' (asoph aseph) everything in reverse order — humans, animals, birds, fish. The Day of the LORD passage (vv. 14-18) provided the basis for the medieval Latin sequence Dies Irae ('Day of Wrath'), one of the most famous hymns in Christian liturgy.*

**Translation Friction:** *The word asoph aseph in verses 2-3 ('I will utterly sweep away') is debated — some connect it to asaph ('to gather, to remove') and others hear an echo of suph ('to come to an end'). We render it 'sweep away' to capture the totality. The phrase 'those who swear by Milcom' (v. 5) — Milcom being the Ammonite deity — appears in some texts as malkam ('their king'), and we follow the reading 'Milcom' with a note. The sequence of judgments in verses 4-13 moves through different social groups, and identifying each precisely requires attention to the Hebrew titles and descriptions.*

**Connections:** *The de-creation theme connects to Genesis 1 (in reverse), Genesis 6-9 (the flood), and Jeremiah 4:23-26 (Jeremiah's vision of de-creation). The Day of the LORD concept runs through Joel 1-2, Amos 5:18-20, Isaiah 2:12-22, and Malachi 4:1-5. The Dies Irae tradition directly quotes Zephaniah 1:15-16. Zephaniah's dating to Josiah's reign places him alongside Jeremiah and possibly Nahum. The phrase 'Be silent before the Lord GOD' (v. 7) echoes Habakkuk 2:20.*

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. <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 humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off humankind from the face of the earth, declares the LORD. <sup>4</sup>I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal — the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests. <sup>5</sup>those who bow down on the rooftops to the host of heaven, and those who bow down and swear by the LORD yet also swear by Milcom, <sup>6</sup>and those who have turned back from following the LORD, and those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of him. <sup>7</sup>Be silent before the Lord GOD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated his guests. <sup>8</sup>On the day of the LORD's sacrifice, I will punish the officials and the king's sons, and all who dress in foreign clothing. <sup>9</sup>On that day I will punish all who leap over the threshold, who fill their masters' houses with violence and fraud. <sup>10</sup>On that day, declares the LORD, a cry will go up from the Fish Gate, wailing from the Second Quarter, and a great crash from the hills. <sup>11</sup>Wail, you inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are destroyed; all who weigh out silver are cut off. <sup>12</sup>At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish the people who are thickening on their dregs — those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.' <sup>13</sup>Their wealth will become plunder and their houses desolation. They will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink their wine. <sup>14</sup>The great day of the LORD is near — near, and rushing fast! The sound of the day of the LORD — there the warrior cries out bitterly. <sup>15</sup>That day is a day of wrath, a day of anguish and distress, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and dense fog, <sup>16</sup>a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner towers. <sup>17</sup>I will bring such distress on people that they will stumble about like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. <sup>18</sup>N either their silver nor their gold will be able to rescue them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden and complete end of all the inhabitants of the earth.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the longest genealogy in any prophetic superscription. Tracing the lineage four generations to Hezekiah (Chizkiyahu) almost certainly identifies this as King Hezekiah, making Zephaniah a member of the royal house and a distant cousin of King Josiah. This insider status gives his critique of the ruling class particular force. Josiah reigned 640-609 BCE; Zephaniah likely prophesied before Josiah's reforms of 621 BCE, given the prevalence of idolatry he describes.
2. The emphatic infinitive absolute *asoph aseph* ('I will utterly sweep away') opens with maximum intensity. 'From the face of the earth' (*me'al penei ha'adamah*) echoes Genesis 6:7 ('I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth') — God is speaking in flood-judgment language. The scope is total: *kol* ('everything'). This is not targeted judgment but cosmic un-creation.
3. The order — humans, animals, birds, fish — reverses the creation sequence of Genesis 1 (fish, birds, animals, humans). This is deliberate de-creation: God dismantling what he built. *Hammakhshelot et hareshaim* ('the stumbling blocks with the wicked') is difficult — it may mean the idols that caused the people to stumble or the ruin-heaps that remain after judgment. *Hikhratti* ('I will cut off') is covenant-curse language, the ultimate penalty for covenant violation.
4. 'Stretch out my hand' (*natiti yadi*) is an execution gesture — the divine hand extended in judgment (cf. Exodus 3:20). The 'remnant of Baal' (*she'ar habba'al*) implies that some Baal worship has already been removed (perhaps by Josiah's early reforms) but not all. *Kemarim* ('idolatrous priests') is a distinct term from *kohanim* ('legitimate priests') — the *kemarim* were priests of foreign cults. That both are mentioned suggests some legitimate priests had also been corrupted.
5. Three groups are targeted: (1) rooftop astral worshipers — flat rooftops were used as open-air shrines to worship the stars, moon, and sun (the 'host of heaven'); (2) syncretists who swear loyalty to both the LORD and Milcom — trying to serve two masters; and (3) the name *malkam* could be read as 'their king' (a human ruler) or 'Milcom' (the Ammonite deity, also known as Molek). We follow the reading 'Milcom' because the context is religious syncretism. The rooftop worship is specifically condemned in Jeremiah 19:13 and 32:29.
6. Two more categories: (1) *hannesogim me'acharei YHWH* ('those turned back from following the LORD') — active apostates who once followed but have retreated; and (2) those who never sought God at all — passive indifference. The distinction matters: judgment falls on both active rejection and passive neglect. 'Sought' (*biqshu*) and 'inquired' (*derashuhu*) are near-synonyms emphasizing the totality of their disengagement.
7. Has ('Be silent!') echoes Habakkuk 2:20 — the same interjection demanding awed stillness before God. The 'Day of the LORD' (*yom YHWH*) is now explicitly introduced — the central concept of the book. The metaphor is stunning: God has prepared a *zevach* ('sacrifice, slaughter') and has 'consecrated his guests' (*hiqdish qeru'av*). In sacrificial ritual, the worshipers had to be consecrated (ritually purified) before participating. God's 'guests' at this sacrifice may be the invading armies he is summoning — they are consecrated for the task of executing judgment. Judah is the sacrifice.

8. Paqadti ('I will punish, I will attend to, I will reckon with') is a visitation verb — God personally arrives to settle accounts. The officials (sarim) and king's sons (benei hammelekh) are the political elite. 'Foreign clothing' (malbush nokhri) likely refers to the adoption of foreign fashions as a symbol of cultural and religious assimilation — wearing the clothes of the nations whose gods you worship. Zephaniah's royal lineage gives this critique of the court particular authority.
9. 'Those who leap over the threshold' (haddoleg al hammiphtan) is a puzzling phrase. It may refer to a pagan superstition about thresholds (cf. 1 Samuel 5:5, the Dagon threshold tradition), or it may describe aggressive servants who burst into houses to steal — leaping over the threshold in their haste to plunder. 'Violence and fraud' (chamas umirmah) are the twin crimes of social injustice: physical force and deception.
10. Zephaniah maps the judgment onto specific Jerusalem geography. The Fish Gate (sha'ar haddagim) was in the northern wall, where merchants sold fish brought from the coast or the Sea of Galilee — it would be the first point of enemy entry from the north. The Second Quarter (mishneh) was the newer, western expansion of the city. The hills (geva'ot) may refer to the surrounding hills of Jerusalem or the elevated areas within the city. The judgment sweeps from north to west to the heights.
11. The Makhtesh ('Mortar,' literally a bowl-shaped depression) is likely a market district in Jerusalem, possibly the Tyropoeon Valley. The merchants are called 'people of Canaan' (am kena'an) — 'Canaanite' had become a synonym for 'merchant/trader' (cf. Hosea 12:8, Proverbs 31:24). Netilei khasef ('those loaded with silver' or 'those who weigh silver') are the wealthy commercial class. The commercial heart of Jerusalem will be gutted.
12. One of the most vivid images in the book: God personally searching Jerusalem's dark corners with lamps (neirot), like a householder hunting for something hidden. No one escapes. The target: people 'thickening on their dregs' (haqqoph'im al shimreihem). The metaphor is from winemaking — wine left on its sediment too long becomes thick and syrupy, losing its character. These are people who have settled into comfortable spiritual complacency. Their theology is practical atheism: 'The LORD will do nothing' — not formal denial of God's existence but functional denial of his relevance.
13. This is covenant-curse language drawn directly from Deuteronomy 28:30, 39 — the blessings of settlement (houses, vineyards) are reversed into futility. Building without inhabiting and planting without harvesting are the classic curse-formulas for a society that has broken its covenant with God. The same reversal appears in Amos 5:11 and Micah 6:15.
14. The Day of the LORD passage begins. Qarov ('near') is repeated twice for urgency; maher me'od ('rushing very fast') intensifies the imminence. The sound (qol) of that day is not silence but a warrior's bitter shriek — even the gibbor ('mighty man, warrior, hero') screams in anguish. The strongest man in the army is reduced to bitter crying. This verse begins the section (vv. 14-18) that inspired the medieval Dies Irae.
15. Five pairs of near-synonyms hammer the character of the Day: (1) evrah ('wrath, fury'), (2) tsarah umtsuqah ('anguish and distress'), (3) sho'ah umesho'ah ('ruin and devastation' — a wordplay pair), (4) choshekh va'aphelah ('darkness and gloom'), (5) anan va'araphel ('clouds and dense fog'). The Latin translation of this verse — 'Dies irae, dies illa' — became the opening line of the Dies Irae hymn, composed in the 13th century and used in Requiem masses for centuries. The piling of synonyms creates an overwhelming, suffocating portrait of judgment.
16. The litany continues with military sounds: shophar ('trumpet, ram's horn') used for alarm and battle signals, and teruah ('war cry, blast'). These are directed against the strongest defenses — 'fortified cities' (arim habetsurot) and 'high corner towers' (pinnot hagevohot). The corner towers were the most heavily fortified points in any ancient city wall. If even these cannot withstand the attack, nothing can.
17. The blindness (ka'ivrim, 'like blind men') is both physical (disorientation in battle) and spiritual (they walked blind to God's will, now they walk blind in judgment). The similes are deliberately degrading: blood poured out 'like dust' (ke'aphar) — as worthless and common as dirt; flesh discarded 'like dung' (kagelalim) — like animal excrement. These are people who thought they were beyond God's reach (v. 12); now they are reduced to waste.
18. The chapter closes with the ultimate futility: wealth cannot buy escape from divine judgment. The word qin'ato ('his jealousy, his zeal') echoes Nahum 1:2 — the same covenantal jealousy that destroys Israel's enemies now turns on Israel itself when they break covenant. Kalah akh-nivhalah ('a complete end, indeed a terrifying one') combines totality with terror. The scope returns to universal ('all the inhabitants of the earth,' kol yoshevei ha'arets), echoing the cosmic sweep of verse 2. The chapter that began with de-creation ends with total consumption.

## 2

*Summary: Zephaniah 2 opens with a call to repentance — 'Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land' — before the Day of the LORD arrives. The rest of the chapter is a series of oracles against foreign nations, sweeping in all four compass directions: Philistia to the west (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron), Moab and Ammon to the east, Cush (Ethiopia) to the south, and Assyria to the north. Each oracle carries the same message: the nations that oppressed or mocked God's people will be devastated, and their territories will be reclaimed.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The opening call to seek the LORD (vv. 1-3) introduces a rare note of conditional hope in an otherwise unrelenting judgment oracle. The word 'perhaps' (ulay, v. 3) is extraordinary — even the prophet cannot guarantee that repentance will avert judgment, only that it is worth trying. The Philistine oracle plays on city names (Gaza/azuvah, Ekron/te'aqer) in a series of devastating*

*wordplays that would have landed with particular force in Hebrew. The Assyria oracle (vv. 13-15) concludes with Nineveh becoming a ruin where animals nest — the same city that Nahum prophesied against.*

**Translation Friction:** *The call to the 'nation without shame' (goy lo nikhsaph, v. 1) is difficult — it could mean 'nation not longing/yearning' (for God), 'nation without shame,' or 'nation not desired.' We follow 'without shame' as it fits the context of a people who should be ashamed but are not. The word sequence in verses 1-3 required careful attention to preserve the urgency of the conditional hope. The Cush oracle (v. 12) is remarkably brief — a single verse — compared to the extended treatments of the other nations.*

**Connections:** *The oracles against nations parallel those in Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-32, and Amos 1-2. The four-directional sweep (west, east, south, north) symbolically represents universal judgment. The Nineveh oracle connects directly to the book of Nahum. The remnant concept (she'erit, vv. 7, 9) links to the broader prophetic hope found in Isaiah 10:20-22 and Micah 2:12. The call to seek the LORD (v. 3) anticipates the restoration promises of chapter 3.*

<sup>1</sup>Gather yourselves together — yes, gather, O nation without shame! <sup>2</sup>Before the decree takes effect, before the day passes like chaff, before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you — <sup>3</sup>Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land who carry out his justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility — perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger. <sup>4</sup>For Gaza will be deserted, and Ashkelon a wasteland. Ashdod will be driven out at noon, and Ekron will be uprooted. <sup>5</sup>Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the LORD is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines — I will destroy you until no inhabitant remains. <sup>6</sup>The seacoast will become pastureland with shepherds' huts and sheep pens. <sup>7</sup>The coast will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; they will graze their flocks there. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down in the evening, for the LORD their God will attend to them and restore their fortunes. <sup>8</sup>I have heard the taunts of Moab and the insults of the Ammonites, how they mocked my people and boasted against their territory. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, as I live — declares the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel — Moab will be like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah: a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them, and the survivors of my nation will inherit them. <sup>10</sup>This is what they get for their arrogance, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of Hosts. <sup>11</sup>The LORD will be terrifying against them, for he will starve all the gods of the earth. Then all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to him, each from their own place. <sup>12</sup>You also, O Cushites — you will be slain by my sword. <sup>13</sup>He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, making Nineveh a desolation, dry as the desert. <sup>14</sup>Herds will lie down in her midst — every kind of wild animal. Both the desert owl and the hedgehog will lodge in her column capitals. A voice will hoot in the window; rubble on the threshold — for the cedar paneling is stripped bare. <sup>15</sup>This is the exultant city that lived in security, that said in her heart, 'I am, and there is no one else.' What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild animals! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb hitqosheshu is intensive and emphatic — 'gather yourselves, pull yourselves together.' The nation addressed is Judah, not a foreign people. Lo nikhsaph is difficult: the root k-s-ph can mean 'to long for, to desire' or 'to be ashamed.' The nation is either 'without longing' (for God) or 'without shame' (incapable of blushing at their sins). We render 'without shame' because the context calls for a stinging accusation that might jolt them to repentance.
2. Three urgent 'before' (beterem) clauses pile up the time pressure: act before the decree is born, before the day blows past like chaff, before God's anger arrives. The chaff simile (kemots avar yom, 'the day passes like chaff') suggests how quickly the window of opportunity will vanish — chaff caught in the wind is gone in an instant. The repetition of charon aph YHWH ('burning anger of the LORD') in two slightly different forms drives the urgency to a peak.
3. Three imperatives: 'Seek the LORD,' 'seek righteousness' (tsedeq), 'seek humility' (anavah). The audience is narrowed to the anvei ha'arets ('humble of the land') — those who already practice God's justice but need to intensify their devotion. The word ulay ('perhaps') is remarkable in a prophetic oracle — it introduces genuine uncertainty. Zephaniah does not promise escape, only the possibility. Tissateru ('you will be sheltered, hidden') echoes the prophet's own name: tsephan-yah means 'the LORD hides/treasures.'

4. The Philistine oracle contains brilliant wordplays on city names: Azzah ('Gaza') becomes azuvah ('deserted') — a near-homophone; Ekron ('Ekron') becomes te'aqer ('uprooted') — from the same root. Ashdod expelled 'at noon' (batsahorayim) is striking because noon is the hottest, most vulnerable time of day — they will be driven out when resistance is weakest. Four of the five Philistine cities are named; Gath is notably absent, possibly already destroyed by Zephaniah's time.
5. Chevel hayyam ('the seacoast region') is the Mediterranean coastal plain. The Cherethites (keretim) are identified with the Philistines and possibly connected to Crete — the Philistines are believed to have migrated from the Aegean region. Calling Philistia 'Canaan' (kena'an) may be a deliberate slur, associating them with the cursed inhabitants of the land, or it may reflect the broader use of 'Canaan' for the entire coastal region.
6. The once-urbanized Philistine coast will revert to pastoral land. Nevot kerot ro'im ('pastures, shelters for shepherds') and giderot tson ('sheep pens') depict a dramatic reversal from the bustling city-states of Philistia to quiet grazing country. This is de-urbanization as judgment — the cities are so thoroughly destroyed that only herdsman remain.
7. The judgment on Philistia becomes a blessing for Judah — the emptied coastland will be inherited by God's people. She'erit bet Yehudah ('the remnant of the house of Judah') is the surviving faithful community, a key concept in prophetic eschatology. Shav shevutam ('restore their fortunes/captivity') is a standard prophetic formula for reversal of exile and restoration (cf. Jeremiah 29:14, 30:3). The pastoral imagery — grazing, lying down in the evening — echoes Psalm 23.
8. God speaks in the first person — he has personally heard (shamati) the ridicule. Cherpat Mo'av ('the taunts of Moab') and giddufei benei Ammon ('the insults of the Ammonites') describe the neighboring nations' verbal abuse of Judah during its weakness. The phrase vayyagdilu al gevulam ('they boasted against their territory') suggests Moab and Ammon took advantage of Judah's distress to encroach on its borders — a combination of mockery and land-grabbing.
9. God swears by his own life (chai-ani) — the strongest possible oath, since there is no one greater to swear by (cf. Hebrews 6:13). The Sodom and Gomorrah comparison is particularly apt because Moab and Ammon were traditionally descended from Lot, who survived Sodom's destruction (Genesis 19:30-38). The descendants of Sodom's survivor will suffer Sodom's fate. Mimshaq charul ('a possession of weeds/nettles') and mikhre-melach ('salt pits') describe agricultural devastation — the land becomes uninhabitable.
10. The verdict summary. Ge'onam ('their arrogance, their pride') is identified as the root sin — the same overweening pride that characterizes Babylon in Habakkuk and Assyria in Nahum. The crime is not merely political aggression but spiritual presumption: they boasted 'against the people of the LORD of Hosts' (al am YHWH tseva'ot). To mock God's people is to mock God himself.
11. Razah et kol elohei ha'arets ('he will starve all the gods of the earth') is a vivid metaphor: pagan deities are 'fed' by sacrifices and offerings (cf. Daniel 14 in the Apocrypha, the story of Bel), and God will cut off their food supply, leaving them to waste away. The vision then expands to universal worship: all the iyei haggoyim ('coastlands/islands of the nations') — representing the most distant peoples — will worship the LORD, each from their own place. This is a vision of decentralized, worldwide worship.
12. The briefest oracle in the chapter — a single verse for Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia). Challelei charbi ('slain by my sword') — God claims the sword as his own instrument. Cush represented the farthest south in the ancient Israelite worldview; its inclusion completes the directional sweep (west: Philistia; east: Moab/Ammon; south: Cush; north: Assyria, vv. 13-15). The brevity may reflect Cush's distance from Judah — less elaboration is needed for a more remote threat.
13. The northward sweep reaches Assyria, completing the compass. 'Stretch out his hand' (yet yado) echoes 1:4 and the exodus tradition. Nineveh will become shimamah ('desolation') and tsiyyah ('dry, arid') — the great city on the Tigris will become desert. This oracle parallels and reinforces the book of Nahum's extended treatment of Nineveh's fall.
14. The desolation of Nineveh is described through animal habitation: where humans once lived, wild animals now rest. Qa'at ('desert owl' or 'pelican') and qippod ('hedgehog' or 'bittern') are creatures of ruins and wasteland. They nest in the kaphtorim ('capitals, column-tops') of Nineveh's grand buildings — the ornamental architecture now serves as bird perches. The singing/hooting (yeshorer) in the window and the exposed cedar work (arzah erah) depict a once-magnificent palace reduced to a haunted ruin.
15. Nineveh's boast — ani ve'aphsi od ('I am, and there is no one else') — is a blasphemous echo of God's own self-declaration in Isaiah 45:5-6 ('I am the LORD, and there is no other'). The city claimed divine uniqueness for itself. The punishment is proportional: the city that boasted of absolute supremacy becomes an absolute ruin. Yishroq ('hisses, whistles') and yania yado ('shakes his hand/fist') are gestures of contempt and horror — passersby cannot believe what they see.

## 3

**Summary:** *Zephaniah 3 moves from condemnation to restoration in one of the most dramatic tonal shifts in the prophets. The chapter opens with a woe oracle against Jerusalem — the oppressive, rebellious, polluted city whose officials are roaring lions, whose judges are evening wolves, whose prophets are treacherous, whose priests profane what is holy. God has destroyed nations as a warning, but Jerusalem refused to learn. Then the pivot: God announces he will purify the nations, remove the proud from Jerusalem, and leave a humble remnant. The chapter climaxes with one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture: 'The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who saves; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you with his love, he will exult over you with singing.'*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 17 is one of the most stunning theological reversals in the Hebrew Bible. Throughout the prophets, the people sing to God. Here, God sings over his people. The verb *yagil* ('he will exult') and the phrase *yarim alayikh berinah* ('he will cry out/sing over you with a ringing shout') depict a God overcome with joy — not stoic approval but exuberant, vocal, demonstrative delight. The image of God 'quieting' his people with his love (*yacharish be'ahavato*) suggests a parent holding a frightened child in silence, letting the embrace itself communicate safety. This is the emotional and theological climax of the entire Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets).*

**Translation Friction:** *The woe oracle in verses 1-7 requires maintaining the harsh tone while the restoration oracle in verses 8-20 requires a complete shift to tenderness — the transition at verse 8 ('Therefore wait for me') is abrupt and powerful. Verse 17's *yacharish be'ahavato* is debated: does it mean 'he will be silent in his love' (i.e., so overwhelmed he cannot speak), 'he will quiet you with his love,' or 'he will renew you in his love' (reading *yechadesh* for *yacharish*)? We follow 'he will quiet you with his love' as the most natural rendering of the MT. The final promises of restoration (vv. 18-20) shift between first person (God speaking) and third person, requiring careful attribution.*

**Connections:** *The woe against Jerusalem's leaders (vv. 1-4) parallels Ezekiel 22:23-31 and Micah 3:1-12. The purification of speech (v. 9, 'pure lips') reverses the confusion of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). The singing God of verse 17 connects to Isaiah 62:5 ('as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you'). The promise of gathering the scattered and restoring the remnant (vv. 19-20) parallels Micah 4:6-7, Isaiah 11:11-12, and Ezekiel 37:21-22. The book that began with cosmic de-creation (1:2-3) ends with cosmic restoration.*

<sup>1</sup>Woe to the rebellious and defiled city, the oppressor! <sup>2</sup>She does not listen to any voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God. <sup>3</sup>Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are wolves of the evening — they leave nothing for the morning. <sup>4</sup>Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men. Her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law. <sup>5</sup>The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he brings his justice to light — he does not fail. But the unjust know no shame. <sup>6</sup>I have cut off nations; their corner towers are desolate. I have laid waste their streets so that no one passes through. Their cities are destroyed — without a person, without an inhabitant. <sup>7</sup>I said, 'Surely you will fear me; surely you will accept correction.' Then her dwelling would not be cut off — nothing I decreed against her would have happened. But they rose early to corrupt all their deeds. <sup>8</sup>Therefore wait for me, declares the LORD, for the day when I rise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation — all my burning anger. For in the fire of my jealousy all the earth will be consumed. <sup>9</sup>For then I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, so 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 — the daughter of my scattered ones — will bring my offering. <sup>11</sup>On that day you will not be put to shame for all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me, for then I will remove from your midst those who exult in their pride, and you will never again be haughty on my holy mountain. <sup>12</sup>I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and speak no lies; no deceitful tongue will be found in their mouths. They will graze and lie down, and no one will make them afraid. <sup>14</sup>Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup>The LORD has removed the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The King of

Israel, the LORD, is in your midst — you will never again fear disaster. <sup>16</sup>On that day it will be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. <sup>17</sup>The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you with his love; he will exult over you with singing. <sup>18</sup>I will gather those among you who grieve over the appointed feasts — those for whom the reproach against her was a burden. <sup>19</sup>At that time I will deal with all your oppressors. I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown throughout all the earth. <sup>20</sup>At that time I will bring you home; 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 very eyes, says the LORD.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Three accusations in four words: mor'ah ('rebellious,' from the root m-r-h, 'to rebel'), nig'alah ('defiled, polluted'), and hayyonah ('the oppressor,' from the root y-n-h, 'to oppress'). The city is Jerusalem — after judging all the surrounding nations (chapter 2), God now turns to his own city. The woe cry (ho) that was directed outward now strikes home.
2. Four refusals define Jerusalem: (1) lo shame'ah beqol ('does not listen to the voice' — i.e., to God or his prophets), (2) lo laqechah musar ('does not accept correction/discipline'), (3) ba-YHWH lo vatechah ('does not trust in the LORD'), (4) el eloheiha lo qarevah ('does not draw near to her God'). The fourfold negative creates a portrait of total spiritual shutdown — every channel of relationship is closed. The possessive 'her God' makes the estrangement more painful: he is still her God; she has simply stopped relating to him.
3. The city's leaders are described as predators. Sarim ('officials, princes') are arayot sho'agim ('roaring lions') — terrifying, aggressive, consuming. Shophtim ('judges') are ze'evei erev ('evening wolves') — wolves hunt most aggressively at dusk. Lo garem labboqer ('they leave no bone for morning' or 'they do not gnaw until morning') means they consume everything immediately, leaving no scraps. The officials who should protect the people instead devour them.
4. The religious leaders are as corrupt as the civil ones. Nevieiha ('her prophets') are pochazim ('reckless, light, irresponsible') and anshei bogdot ('men of treachery'). Kohaneiha ('her priests') commit two cardinal offenses: (1) chilelu qodesh ('they profane what is holy') — the exact opposite of the priestly function, which is to guard holiness; and (2) chamesu torah ('they do violence to the law/instruction') — they twist, distort, and violate the very torah they are charged with teaching and preserving.
5. The contrast is devastating: in the midst of a city whose every institution is corrupt, the LORD remains tsaddiq ('righteous'). Every morning (baboqer baboqer — the repetition emphasizes daily faithfulness) he provides justice — but the unjust take no notice. Lo ne'dar ('he does not fail, he is not absent') — God's faithfulness is constant. Lo yode'a avval boshet ('the unjust knows no shame') — the wicked are incapable of embarrassment. This echoes 2:1's 'nation without shame.'
6. God points to the fate of other nations as an object lesson. The destruction of foreign nations (chapter 2's oracles) should have been a warning to Jerusalem. Pinnotam ('their corner towers') — the strongest points of their defenses — are desolate. The triple absence (mibli over, mibli ish, me'ein yoshev — 'no passerby, no person, no inhabitant') emphasizes total depopulation.
7. God's pathos is palpable: 'I said' (amarti) — God expected (hoped?) that Jerusalem would learn from the nations' destruction. The conditional is heartbreaking: if she had feared God and accepted correction, her dwelling would have been spared. Instead, hishkimu hishchitu ('they rose early to corrupt') — the same verb hashkem ('rising early') used of God's persistent warnings in Jeremiah (7:13, 25:3) is now applied to the people's eagerness to sin. God rises early to warn; they rise early to corrupt.
8. The pivotal verse. Chakku li ('wait for me') shifts from judgment to hope — the people are told to wait, implying there is something worth waiting for. Le'ad ('as a witness' or 'for prey' — the consonants allow both) could mean God rises to testify or to seize prey. The gathering of nations could refer to judgment or to the universal worship of verse 9. Qin'ati ('my jealousy') is the same covenantal jealousy from 1:18 — the fire that judges also purifies, as the following verses will reveal.
9. This verse reverses the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). At Babel, God confused human speech to scatter the nations; here, God purifies speech to unite them in worship. Saphah berurah ('pure speech/lip') means a language cleansed of idolatrous invocations — speech consecrated to calling on the LORD's name. Shekhem echad ('one shoulder' — rendered 'shoulder to shoulder') is an idiom meaning united, working together, pulling in the same direction like oxen yoked side by side.
10. 'Beyond the rivers of Cush' represents the most remote imaginable location — the ends of the earth. Ataray ('my worshipers, my suplicants') and bat-putsay ('the daughter of my scattered ones') likely refer to dispersed Israelites or to new worshipers from among the nations. The minchah ('offering, tribute') being brought from the farthest reaches fulfills the vision of universal worship.
11. The shame that was Jerusalem's defining feature (2:1, 3:5) will be removed — not by ignoring the sin but by removing the sinners. Alizei ga'avatekh ('those who exult in pride') — the arrogant revelers who turned religion into self-congratulation — will be purged. What remains after the purging is described in verse 12. The holy mountain (har qodshi) is Zion, which will be purified of the pride that desecrated it.
12. The remnant that survives the purging is characterized not by wealth, power, or status but by humility. Am ani vadal ('a humble and lowly people') — the same anav ('humble') that was commanded in 2:3. The proud are removed (v. 11); the humble remain. Chasu beshem YHWH ('they take refuge in the name of the LORD') — their security is not in walls, armies, or treasuries but in God's name (character, reputation, covenant identity).

- 13.** The purified remnant is described in three negatives (no wrong, no lies, no deceit) and two positives (grazing, lying down in safety). The pastoral imagery (yir'u veravtsu, 'they will graze and lie down') echoes Micah 4:4 and the shepherd imagery of Psalm 23. 'No one will make them afraid' (ein macharid) is the covenantal peace promise from Leviticus 26:6 — the ultimate state of shalom where threats have been eliminated.
- 14.** The tone shifts dramatically to pure joy. Four imperatives of celebration: ronni ('sing aloud!'), hari'u ('shout!'), simchi ('rejoice!'), ve'olzi ('exult!'). 'Daughter of Zion' (bat-Tsiyon) and 'daughter of Jerusalem' (bat Yerushalaim) are poetic personifications of the city and its people. Bekhol lev ('with all the heart') — the full heart, not the divided heart of the syncretists condemned in chapter 1. The reasons for this joy are given in the following verses.
- 15.** Three reasons to rejoice: (1) God has removed the judgments (hessir mishpatayikh — the covenant curses are lifted); (2) he has turned away the enemies (pinnah oyevekh — the hostile nations are dealt with); and (3) the LORD himself is present as King (melekh Yisra'el YHWH beqirbekh — 'the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst'). This last declaration prepares for the climax in verse 17. 'You will never again fear disaster' (lo tir'i raod) is the ultimate reversal of chapter 1's terrors.
- 16.** The fear that dominated chapter 1 is now directly addressed: al tira'i ('do not fear'). Al yirpu yadayikh ('do not let your hands grow weak/slack') — hands that drop in despair or exhaustion are to be raised again in strength and worship. The passive 'it will be said' (ye'amer) suggests this message will be delivered universally — everyone will tell Jerusalem not to fear.
- 17.** Gibbor yoshia ('a mighty one who saves') echoes the gibbor ('warrior, mighty man') of 1:14 who cried bitterly on the Day of the LORD — the same God who devastates also saves. Yacharish be'ahavato is debated: (1) 'he will be silent in his love' — so overwhelmed with love he cannot speak; (2) 'he will quiet you with his love' — calming the people's fears; or (3) 'he will renew you in his love' (reading yechadesh, 'renew,' which differs by one letter). We follow option 2, which fits the parent-child imagery. Yagil berinah ('exult with ringing song') — yagil is the most intense word for joy in Hebrew, and rinah is a piercing, triumphant shout or song.
- 18.** This verse is textually difficult. Nugei mimo'ed ('those who grieve over the appointed festival/assembly') may refer to exiles who mourn because they can no longer attend the temple festivals, or to faithful worshipers grieved by the corruption of worship. Mas'et ('burden, lifting up') combined with cherpah ('reproach, disgrace') indicates people who bore the weight of Jerusalem's shame as their personal burden — they cared about the city's honor.
- 19.** God promises to act against the me'annayikh ('your oppressors, those who afflict you'). The saved community is described in terms of vulnerability: hattsole'ah ('the lame, the limping') and hanniddachah ('the driven away, the outcast') — the weakest, most marginalized members. God specializes in rescuing those the world discards. The reversal is total: boshem ('their shame') becomes tehillah uleshem ('praise and renown') — the very thing that caused humiliation becomes the basis for honor.
- 20.** The book ends with a promise of homecoming: avi etkhem ('I will bring you') and qabbetsi etkhem ('I will gather you'). The dispersed will be reassembled. Leshem velithillah ('for a name and for praise') reverses the shame of exile — the scattered, humiliated people will become a source of wonder among the nations. Beshuvi et shevuteikhem le'eneikhem ('when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes') makes it personal and visible — not a distant, abstract promise but something they will see with their own eyes. The book that opened with cosmic destruction closes with intimate restoration. Amar YHWH ('says the LORD') — the final word is God's authority guaranteeing the promise.