

# The Hottest Book in the Old Testament?

*by Bryan Gibson*

The Book of Zephaniah may very well fit that description, because you can almost feel the heat of God's wrath when you read it. In this particular prophecy, the "fire of His jealousy" (1:18; 3:8), His "indignation" (3:8) and "fierce anger" (2:2; 3:8) is directed against all nations (1:2-3; 2:4-15), and in particular the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem (1:4-6).

To those in sin (1:17), to those who refused to receive correction (3:2, 7), to those who refused to repent (2:1-3)—here's what God says He will do. "I will...consume (1:3); utterly consume (1:2); stretch out my hand (1:4); cut off (1:4); punish (1:8-9); search...and punish (1:12); bring distress (1:17); make speedy riddance (1:18); destroy (2:5); reduce to nothing (2:11); lay bare" (2:14). And if that's not graphic enough, here's His description of their approaching judgment: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (1:15).

God's wrath is real, and He does not make idle threats, but He did offer this word of hope: "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD" (2:3). The righteous may not have always been spared from the physical destruction that came upon these nations, but thanks be to God, their eternal salvation would be secure.

So that's the bulk of this book—a very somber warning about the wrath of God. There is, however, a noticeable change in tone toward the end of the book, when the prophet begins to speak of the spiritual remnant that will one day be gathered in Christ (3:9-20). "I will...restore (3:9); rejoice over you with gladness...quiet you with love...rejoice over you with singing (3:17); gather (3:18); save (3:19); appoint you for praise and fame (3:19-20); bring you back" (3:20). See the difference? These promises sound a whole lot better than the ones cited above.

But who is it exactly that will receive these blessings from God? He's speaking of the remnant gathered in Christ, so one must first be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27) to receive these blessings (see also Ephesians 1:3). But notice what else is said about this remnant. Anyone can be a part of it, because it's composed of people from many different nations (3:9-10). The people who compose this remnant will be

devoted to the one true God—they will all bring their offering (worship) to Him, and all will speak a “pure language...call on the name of the LORD” (3:9-10). Furthermore, they will “serve Him with one accord” (3:9), indicating the unity that would characterize them. Their character is such that they “shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (3:13). These people won’t be the arrogant sinners described earlier in the book (2:8, 10; 3:4); they will be “meek and humble” (3:12). Sin won’t get the best of them, because even when they do sin, they will humbly receive correction, and they will humbly repent.

So that’s the picture of the people God will bless today, and ultimately save eternally. Everyone else? “But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish...” (Romans 2:8-9). God’s wrath is real, and He does not make idle threats.