



**“The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame” (Zephaniah 3:5).**

### **The Lord Is Just**

**Central Truth:** The prophet extolled divine justice.

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**Topic:** God: Attributes of.

Meet Zephaniah, prophet of God. Though his name is not well known among the people of God today, he was a man whom God used to speak an important message to Judah. His ministry began about 626 B.C., approximately the same time as Jeremiah began his ministry. A prophet of God was needed then.

The nation was rampant with social injustice and moral corruption when Zephaniah began. Luxury and extravagance based on fortunes gained by oppressing the poor were quite common.

The religious condition was even worse. The Baalim were still worshiped, and the high places were flourishing (Zephaniah 1:4); the hosts of heaven were adored upon the housetops (Zephaniah 1:5); a half-hearted Jehovah worship, which in reality was idolatry, was widespread (Zephaniah 1:5); great multitudes turned entirely away from following Jehovah (Zephaniah 1:6). Skepticism had seized the hearts of many who said, “*The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil*” (Zephaniah 1:12).

Into such a situation God sent Zephaniah to speak on divine justice. He warned of the day of the Lord which would come on all the earth. That day of judgment on sin is a time of terror for those who are wicked. A remnant will escape, but the majority will fall before God's justice.

Here is a warning against sin and an appeal to holiness before God today. Let us hear and heed.

## I. THE NEED FOR JUSTICE (Zephaniah 3:1-4)

The original Hebrew and Greek words for justice are the same as those rendered righteousness. Justice has to do primarily with conduct in relation to others. It is required in business, where just weights and measures are used. It is demanded in courts, where rich and poor, citizen and foreigner, receive the same treatment. God requires, *“That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee”* (Deuteronomy 16:20).

**A. Social justice is a part of biblical religion.** God is as concerned with equity in the marketplace as with spirituality in the church. He will judge impurity wherever He finds it.

Unquestionably, that justice was needed in ancient Judah. She was *“filthy and polluted,”* an *“oppressing city”* (Zephaniah 3: 1). That was the way the people were whom Israel had driven out in their conquest of Palestine. *‘The land . . . is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations’* (Ezra 9:11). The Hebrews had not improved it! Those who love evil more than good and unfaithfulness more than righteousness (Psalm 52:3) can do nothing but pollute their land. Justice will come on such a people, whoever they may be.

**B. Various sins mark an apostate nation.** (1) There is rejection of divine revelation. *“She obeyed not the voice”* (verse 2). That may not mean people deny that the Bible is the Word of God; it may mean that they acknowledge it with their minds and ignore it in their conduct. But judgment comes on such a people.

(2) There is refusal to change wrong ways. *“She received not correction”* (verse 2). When the conduct of people violates the command of God, trouble is ahead. A person must change his ways or face judgment. An apostate people refuses to change.

(3) There is failure to trust God. *“She trusted not in the LORD”* (verse 2). It is easy for a nation to place her confidence in her military strength or economic powers. It is easy for a person to place his confidence in his skills, wisdom, or resources. But failure to trust God is an evidence of apostasy, and such a nation is headed for divine retribution.

(4) There is a rejection of fellowship with God. *“She drew not near to her God”* (verse 2). *“Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?”* (Jeremiah 23:23). That truth can terrify the sinner and console the saint. He is near to all who call upon Him in truth (Psalm 145:18); but to those who love evil, there is no sense of His presence.

How do you and your nation measure up to that fourfold standard?

Seek the Lord if you are falling short.

**C. There are dread consequences of turning from God.** When people reject God, they are open to all sorts of evil. The person suffers and the nation suffers when sin is allowed to rule.

(1) Political corruption follows apostasy. *“Her princes within her are roaring lions”* (verse 3). God commanded the rulers of Israel to rule in the fear of the Lord since Israel was the special people of God. But a rejection of God resulted in the rulers being lions rather than shepherds. Jeremiah lamented over those sins and spoke this question from God, *“Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?”* (Jeremiah 5:9).

(2) Judicial corruption follows apostasy. *“Her judges are evening wolves”* (verse 3). That condition can develop in any nation or in any generation. The sons of the great prophet Samuel *“walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment”* (I Samuel 8:3). That was one reason that the elders of Israel asked for a king to govern them. One evil leads to another.

(3) Spiritual corruption follows apostasy. *“Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law”* (verse 4). That was the foundation problem of ancient Judah. The religious apostasy resulted in the corruption of the whole national life. *“The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handled the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit”* (Jeremiah 2:8). No wonder the nation lost her moorings! There is a need to let *“judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream”* (Amos 5:24).

## II. THE GOD OF JUSTICE

*“The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not”* (verse 5).

**A. God is present, “in the midst thereof.”** His presence fills the whole heaven and earth. But there is a special way He shows His presence among His dear children.

He is not merely present; He is present as *“the just LORD.”* Notice the word *“just.”* God is present as one who is right, does right, and demands right from each person.

What a shock that would be to a person or nation that was sold out to do evil. God is present, beholding and evaluating all according to just (righteous) standards. Be aware!

**B. God is pure.** *“He will not do iniquity.”* He is so *“glorious in holiness”* that there is none like Him (Exodus 15:11). The place where He dwells is a *“holy hill”* (Psalm 99:9). *“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy”* (Revelation 15:4). He is so pure that only those who are made pure by the blood of Jesus can find acceptance with Him. That is why forgiveness is so essential.

**C. God is faithful.** *“Every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not.”* Jeremiah wrote of the mercies of God, *“They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:23). We worship before Him with the words, *“Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds”* (Psalm 36:5).

Think about those three attributes of God in view of the message of Zechariah. He warned a sinful and rebellious nation that God was in the midst of her — that a just God was personally present with her. He was so pure that He would never do wrong or permit wrong to go unrequited. He is faithful (dependable) to keep His promises and execute His warnings.

*“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them. . . . Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them”* (Deuteronomy 7:9-11).

### III. THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

**A. God himself executes justice.** Zephaniah 3:6 repeatedly uses the pronoun I, saying, *“I have cut off . . . ; I made their streets waste.”* God does not leave His execution of justice to man or angel. He is at work in our world to execute judgment in righteousness. He slays the wicked (Genesis 18:25). *“He cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth”* (Psalm 96:13). His judgment goes forth daily (Zephaniah 3:5). *“We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth”* (Romans 2:2).

**B. Punishment for sin does not convert sinners.** *“I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings”* (Zephaniah 3:7). *“The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts”* (Isaiah 9:13). Convicted sinners often go deeper into sin. *“Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return”* (Jeremiah 5:3).

Behold the hardening effects of sin.

**C. All the world will account before God's just judgment.** He will *“assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them (His) indignation. . . : for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of (His) jealousy”* (verse 8). As sovereign governor over all, God is judge over all.

#### IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTICE

**A. Justice produces faithful service to God.** God will *“turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the “name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent”* (verse 9).

God requires you *“to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deuteronomy 10:12). That is why it is such a joy to serve God from the heart (Ephesians 6:7). It is your privilege to *“serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”* (Hebrews 12:28).

Learn to walk in justice and you will walk with God.

**B. Justice produces faithfulness in worship.** *“My suppliants . . . shall bring mine offering”* (verse 10).

The just discipline of God upon sin will bring people to an awareness of the good and right way. They will take words of confession and come to God for cleansing (Hosea 14:1-4), saying, *“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up”* (Hosea 6:1). Such response to God will open the windows of heaven from which God will pour a blessing (Malachi 3:10).

**C. Justice produces the vindication of righteousness** (verse 11). God will show that His ways are best and His people will have no embarrassment in walking in His path (Isaiah 50:7). *“Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed”* (Joel 2:26). Glory!

Be honest because God requires it, not just because you might get caught otherwise. Be open to learn what God has to say about sin in society, in the government, in the courts, in the church, or in your personal life. Be just in your dealings with God and others. And you will please your God.

#### Questions

1. What do you know about the prophet Zephaniah?
2. What does the word *just* mean?

3. What is *social justice*?
4. Why is God concerned about social justice?
5. How can you identify an apostate nation?
6. How is spiritual corruption basic to all other sins in a society?
7. What does it mean to you that God is present at all times?
8. Why does suffering not turn people from their sins?
9. What happens when justice prevails?
10. How can you make your nation just in your generation?