

Zephaniah - Daughter of Zion

Matthew Vander Els · 2026-04-26 · foundedintruth.com

All right, children are released. All right, what's your name, everybody? Good to be back together this week, and if you didn't guess, we're going to dive into Zephaniah today.

Zephaniah, like every other book of the Bible, is unique in how it's structured. Super short—three chapters—and it packs a huge power punch, just an explosion of so many things as soon as you open it up. It starts—well, instead of starting at the beginning, let's start at the end. Let's see how it concludes because there's a thread that I want to dive into that I think you may really enjoy.

So Zephaniah chapter 3, and I'm going to focus on verses 14 through 17:

"Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O Israel. Rejoice and exalt with all of your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away the judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst among you. You shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, fear not, O Zion. Let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, the mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing."

The Ending and the Beginning

So that's how the prophet Zephaniah ends. Three chapters—two and a half—of some of the most intense rage-level judgment language from God in the Old Testament, and then that. This sweet thing. It caught my attention.

What catches your attention is meant to. Sometimes we don't notice little things that the authors do in the Bible because we're taught to navigate our faith in a systematic way. We read the Bible just for the sake of reading it because it's part of being a good Christian. It's not studying it; you just read it. And sometimes when we just read the Bible out of obligation, we don't read it with the same curiosity we would an epic novel. And so we don't pick up on the nuances of how the structure changed, how the tone changed—we're just reading. And if you have—Lord help me—if you have a King James, you're just reading this old document.

But at some point, when you realize that the Bible was crafted intentionally by faithful people, you realize that the things placed at certain places in the Bible are meant to connect on a different level, to tell a bigger part of the story than what's on the surface. And that's where the wisdom lies, if you will. We'll dive into some of that today—that's where you actually get to understanding. When you're looking beyond the text and start seeing the patterns and how things are linked, that's when you engage the authors of the Bible and what they're trying to say as they were being led through their faith by the Holy Spirit. If the Bible's really cool, it's a long-winded way of saying that.

The Daughter of Zion

And so we're going to get into that, and then we're going to reset to the beginning and dive into Zephaniah and specifically that phrase "the daughter of Zion." Because Zephaniah starts out with a rageful judgment from God that he's laying on Israel, and I want you to see how this "daughter of Zion" language is used not only in Zephaniah but also in other prophets like Micah, Lamentations, and Zechariah—and it even shows up and echoes later in the New Testament, in the gospel of Luke. We start to see the same types of language being used when an angel is meeting with a girl in Nazareth. And so I'm hoping to demonstrate this thread that I think the biblical authors understood—they knew what they were doing to show us something really neat as believers.

Okay. And so we're diving in. Zephaniah writes around 650 BC—around 630 years before Yeshua. And the king at the time of Zephaniah is Josiah. We hear a lot of kings in the Bible, a lot of names. Josiah is definitely one we remember because he was actually one of the very few good kings, if you will, in Judah.

Josiah's Early Reign

The thing about Josiah is he was crowned at about 8 years old—which is amazing if you think about it. Because as capable as I think my 8-year-old daughter is to rule over ancient Israel and Judah, it's still a bit head-turning to think about, right? But by his early twenties, he had a zeal about him. He had a faithfulness about him. And by his early twenties, he was going around Judah cleaning up. He tore down all the pagan altars that had been set up and running rampant in the nation.

The pagan altars had really gotten out of hand. We understand that there's a temple in Jerusalem—the main temple, right? Well, during the time leading up to Josiah, things had

gotten out of hand—there were lots of temples. We found lots of temples, even one just a few miles away from the one in Jerusalem that existed during this time. And not only did we find lots of temples, but we found that the Judahites—the inhabitants during this time—had given God a bride, Asherah, and brought symbolism and altars to Asherah into the temples, even into the Holy of Holies, because that's where we put the bride for our God, right? This is what Josiah looked at and said, "We've got to get some baseball bats and knock these down."

Manasseh's Sixty Years of Corruption

And so it wasn't just that he was walking around knocking down altars—he was destroying temples and redirecting everybody in Judah to come to the one house of God in Jerusalem. Everybody comes here now, kind of regulating the holiness of the country. The altars he was tearing down were the ones his grandfather had pretty much put up. This was his family line. His grandfather was Manasseh, and he spent almost 60 years on the throne—one of the longest reigns in Judah. And he was also the worst of the worst.

He put altars to Baal in the temple courtyards, inside the house of Yahweh—Asherah worship was running rampant. One of the worst things it talks about him doing is actively taking his sons down to a valley called the Valley of Hinnom—it's south of Jerusalem—and passing them through the fires, which we assume is sacrificial child sacrifice to the altar, right? Offered to pagan gods and such. Not a good guy. Pretty bad guy.

The Geography of Hell

And this Valley of Hinnom has a reputation throughout Scripture—whenever you read across it, it's this bad place. In Hebrew, it's Gehenna, and then it becomes the Greek word Gehenna, and that's a word that's typically translated as "hell" in your Bible. So if you wanted to nerd out—Jeopardy moment—this is where the word "hell" comes from. Not always—in the New Testament, "hell" is translated from different words—but this is one of them.

I say that to emphasize the place that becomes the image of hell when Yeshua talks in the New Testament—it's where the king of Judah burned his own sons alive. Bad place. And that is the very place and soil that the prophet Zephaniah grew up in.

Paint the environment here. Fifty-five years of Manasseh ruling. Nobody alive at the time of Zephaniah had ever seen what faithful covenant life in a community looked like. In other words, their entire nation, the cultivation, the civilization, the culture of their religion had shifted. There was no baseline. This had been how it was managed for generations now.

Rules Without Hearts

And so Josiah is trying to get things revamped, trying to make a lot of rules, trying to put logistics in play to get Judah to stop their backsliding and stop their casualness about the holiness of God and their loyalty to God. And so he's doing all these things. No one can worship outside of Jerusalem. No more pagan altars. Everybody comes here. This is how we're doing it. And it was working pretty well, except that's when Zephaniah shows up and has to basically break it to him: "You're doing great. All these rules you're putting down, but people are using the rules to figure out how they can still justify feeling holy while their hearts go unchanged. In other words, the rules aren't working. They're not changing hearts. They're just creating another level of fundamentalism for people who have already decided their faithfulness doesn't adequately orient them to Yahweh."

So that's what Zephaniah is saying, and he steps in to come alongside Josiah and George—this is the issue. And Zephaniah spends two more chapters describing what's coming. And he calls it the day of Yahweh. Judgment on Jerusalem in chapter 1. And it's just thick. "I'm going to wipe you out." And then in chapter 2, God extends the day of Yahweh—his wrath and judgment coming down on all of Israel's neighbors and their enemies. Assyria, Philistia, so on and so forth. All their neighbors in all four directions. And it's heavy—it's dark, it's gloomy, it's thick.

And here's what God says. In [Zephaniah 1:2–3](#), He says, "I will utterly sweep away." This is how the letter starts, by the way—or the prophecy starts.

I Will Sweep Away Everything

Open up, bam. "I will utterly sweep everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will sweep away man, beast. I will sweep away the birds of heavens and the fish of the sea and the rubble of the wicked. I will cut off mankind in the face of the earth," declares the Lord. So I want you to see something. I had the wrong reference here, but notice the highlighted words there. Look how he starts off. He's starting off with man, beast, birds, fish. Where else do we see that sequence of order in the Bible? [snorts] Actually, there's not that pattern. There's one that's inverted, and that's back in [Genesis 1](#). It's the order of creation. Yeah, it's the order of creation.

And so what's happening here is God is not describing creation, he's describing a decreation. We're going to start undoing now. This is what sin does to my creation. Undoes it. [Jeremiah 4](#) has the same type of thing. [Genesis 8](#), the uncreation of the flood. That's when the waters are coming back together. We're going to reset due to sin and transgression against God. And so

God just comes straight out, and he's going to undo it. And so you have this declaration that God is going to wipe out everything. Chapter 2 looks over at the neighbors. I'm going to wipe you all out too. And then chapter 3 opens, and the first section of chapter 3, he's kind of recouping the judgment towards Judah. And he's, of course, indicting the city itself, but also the officials, the judges, the prophets, and the priests—the ruling class. You should know better because you're the one that's driving the thing. Everyone in leadership is corrupt, period.

A Pivot Toward Restoration

And then in verse 8, it sounds like the final word. It says, "Wait for me," declares the Lord, "for the day when I rise up to seize prey." Do I have that on here? He says, "I'm going to wipe everything out." That's how he ends the first half of chapter 3. And then verse 9 happens. That's pure rage up until this point for two chapters. And then verse 9 happens, and that's when—not a subtle, but a huge pivot—takes place in the tone and emotional tone and layering of God. "For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord." Everybody still with me? We have a prophet that starts out with God screaming, "I'm going to wipe you all out." And it's during the reign of probably debatably the best king Judah had ever had, who's trying to clean things up, but it's not working because the heart needs to be changed and the people aren't going to do it. And we have this vicious language of judgment coming upon Israel and the world. And then the brakes slam on, and the prophet starts talking about pure speech and everyone being in one accord.

A second ago we were total judgment, and now God's talking about purifying the speech of his people. And we read pure speech, and of course we instantly think, well, I got to stop cussing. Yes, but that's not what this is speaking to. God is talking about purifying the speech of all people so that they can all serve him united in one accord. Right? You see the echo? This is an echo of another story that happened earlier in the Bible, also in Genesis, where the people were in one accord but not to serve the Lord, and so their speech was affected. It was diversified. It was muddled, if you will, so they could not communicate with each other. This is the reversal of Babel.

New Creation After Judgment

So Zephaniah is speaking about new creation, of course, after judgment. And what that looks like to the hearts of people after they come from the birthing pains of new creation. Reversal of [Genesis 11](#). And [Zephaniah 3:9](#) says God is going to undo it. Pure speech, everyone together, all

nations gathered back together. Pentecost, right? And it's from verse 9 through the end of the chapter that the whole tone shifts again. It goes from judgment to joy so fast that you can't help but notice. And the joy is not generic. It goes back to where we started.

Daughter of Zion: A Relational Term

"Sing aloud O daughter of Zion." It's addressed to a specific person: the daughter of Zion. Right? And the phrase daughter of Zion is bat-zion in Hebrew. And this is a phrase that you've probably heard a lot because it's one of those Bible terms, right? Bible language that we like to use—amen, amen. We can use it in several different ways, like "blessed." These are Bible terms, right? Daughter of Zion is one that we hear a lot because it's scattered across the entire storyline.

It shows up in Isaiah. This personification shows up in Jeremiah. The prophets write and use this phrase. Micah uses it. Lamentations uses it. Zechariah uses it. And it's doing something very specific every single time it appears, even across multiple books of the Bible. It's personifying Jerusalem as a woman. That's what daughter of Zion is. As a daughter, as someone who has a relationship to God, a relationship to Yahweh. And it matters because it's not just some whimsical poetic metaphor. When the prophets talk about Jerusalem as a political entity, they call it Jerusalem, or sometimes it'll be Judah, or even Israel—the collective, right?

When the prophets want to address people as a covenant community in relationship with God, the intimate label is this term that we see. It's a relational term. It's daughter of Zion. It's the difference between your boss calling you into the office and your parents calling you in to have a talk with you, right?

Weeping, Then Singing

And so what's neat is that when she shows up in the Bible, it's typically within one or two contexts. She's either doing one of two things when we see her. She's either weeping or she's singing and rejoicing, and the order is typically always the same. And in [Isaiah 1:8](#), we see the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in the vineyard, like a hut in the cucumber field, alone, surrounded by desolation. Just a shack standing in the middle of the harvested field with no one.

The daughter of Zion is in desolation and loneliness. In Lamentations: "What can I say for you? To what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? And what can I liken to you that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea. Who can heal you? Writhe and

groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor." This is the first context. The daughter of Zion, when used in the Bible, is like a woman in labor. Labor pain—the kind of pain that might be going somewhere, but at the moment, all you can feel is the contractions, right? That's the first context that we see this phrase used: the daughter of Zion, in grief and exile, if you will. A city as a woman who has lost everything and been destroyed.

But then you see her after judgment, in a time that is seen as after the exile, after the pain. And we see the daughter of Zion in Zephaniah: "Shout, O Israel. Rejoice, exalt, daughter of Zion with all of your heart." Or [Zechariah 9](#): "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem. Why? Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous, and having salvation, is he, humble and mounted on a donkey." The same woman who was weeping is now commanded to sing. The same daughter who was wracked with labor pain is now told that her king is coming. And that's the order. You cannot get the singing without going through the suffering first. That's the prophetic pattern. And it typically runs in that direction.

God Sings Over His People

[Zephaniah 3:17](#) takes it further than any other prophet when it says, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will..." Something special is happening in this verse that you don't really see anywhere else in the Bible, not very often. We are introduced to a God that sings. A God that sings. He will rejoice over you. He will exalt over you with loud singing. In the rest of the Bible, the normal direction is that the people sing to God, right? That's the normal direction. In the Psalms, it's people singing to God. In [Exodus 15](#), after the Red Sea, they sing to God. In every single worship service that we have every week, we sing to God. Humans sing to God, but in [Zephaniah 3:17](#), it's God that sings to his people.

The God of the universe—the one who just spent two chapters announcing the unmaking of creation, the one who said, "I will sweep away man, beast, birds, and fish"—that God is now singing over his people, out loud and with joy. Now, the word for rejoice is *yasis*. And that's the word for dancing, right? It's physical. It's not meant to represent some dignified hymn that's sung, right? It's the kind of joy that gets you grooving. God is grooving with joy over the daughter of Zion here, right? Same God, but this is on the other side of new creation, on the other side of judgment, and he's dancing.

Silent Love

And then there's a word for quiet: yakarish. He will be silent in his love, like a parent holding their child. The other night my daughter was sick, and she needed to be held upright because she had so much congestion, because she couldn't sleep otherwise. And so I walked upstairs, and you know that feeling when you're awake but you're not, and you think you slept but you tracked every minute of that clock, right? I did that. I held her upright so she could sleep. And I was happy to do it because she's my daughter. And even though I was a little tired, I was happy that I could take care of her and love her. And that's the image here.

The Annunciation and the Daughter of Zion

Very intimate. Just present. God is going to be here. And then we come to Luke chapter 1 verses 28 through 33, the annunciation. Gabriel shows up to this very young girl named Mary in this village. And he came to her and said, "Rejoice, O favored one, the Lord is with you." Now, this is where I like to think Luke does the thing that Luke tends to always do. So Luke is not Matthew. I think Matthew has a little bit more creative talent, the way he crafted his gospel. He just seemed to explain things better. But I may be biased. Luke liked to give hints of things and create patterns, especially when he breaks in Acts. Luke and Acts both. And so he'll sneak little echoes in there assuming that you're going to be able to follow them. Whereas Matthew just, "Hey, here is a prophet and this is what he says." It's very helpful, right? And Luke never really quotes the Old Testament the way that Matthew does. Very in your face. Matthew will stop the story and just break the fourth wall and say, "Hey, by the way, this happened and this is a prophecy that happened in the middle of the story." Luke just writes his scenes with the language.

Luke's Patterns and Echoes

And so, when Gabriel greets Mary and he says rejoice. The Greek word there in the New Testament is charae. Charae, like hooray. Hooray. Charae. And it gets the attention of a couple of New Testament scholars because it's also the word that shows up in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Jeremiah, [Zephaniah 3:14](#). I think we have that in there. Yeah. And so it's the same word that ends up showing up there. Which doesn't mean a whole lot in and of itself, but it's kind of neat. And then you start realizing that the same type of language is being spoken. So when Gabriel spoke to Mary, what's he say? He says, "The Lord is with you." But in [Zephaniah 3:15](#), it says the Lord is in your midst. Gabriel says to Mary, "Do not be afraid." [Zephaniah 3:16](#), "Fear not." It's the same language. "You will conceive and bear a son," he says to Mary. And of course, in verse 14, verse 14 commands the daughter of Zion to sing because new

life is coming into this world after judgment. It seems that the pattern of Gabriel's greeting follows the pattern of [Zephaniah 3](#). Rejoice, the Lord is with you. Do not fear, new life is coming.

Luke is doing this kind of thing throughout the gospel, and it can't help but to echo the same motif that we see. Because if Mary is being addressed in the language, and this is why it's significant. If Mary is being addressed in the language and pattern of the daughter of Zion throughout the prophets, then Luke is casting Mary as a type of embodiment of faithful Israel. She is the daughter. She is the one who survived the judgment in exile. She is the remnant who stayed faithful through the long silence between the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the king who is coming to her is not coming on a big war horse. He's coming as a child through her. That's the whole daughter of Zion tradition, the weeping woman of Lamentations, the laboring woman of Micah, the singing woman of Zephaniah. The woman whose king is coming on a donkey in Zechariah. All of that seems to be focused on this one event with Mary and this coming king. And Mary seems to know it because of her response. She starts singing. It's the Magnificat. It's a section of Mary's song and it carries language from the prophets but also of the song of Deborah [snorts] and the song of Hannah. She starts to sing. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

The King Comes to Daughter Zion

And then you have Zechariah of course 9:9. Behold, your king is coming mounted on a donkey. Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. [Matthew 21](#) Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your king is coming to you humble and mounted on a donkey." Matthew picks it up. He wants to make sure you know it. This is [Zechariah 9:9](#) in real time. The king is coming to daughter Zion humble on a donkey. On a borrowed donkey with people waving palm branches and throwing their coats on the ground. And the crowd shouts, which is exactly what [Zephaniah 3:14](#) commanded. You will shout. Shout, oh Israel. And less than a week after the king who came to daughter Zion, he's hanging on a cross outside of her walls. And the singing stops. And the silence falls. And the longest Saturday in history comes. The day between the death and the resurrection where nothing happens, nobody knows what's going on, and you're kind of holding your breath through the story.

The Garden: A New Beginning

And then Sunday morning. John chapter 20. There's a garden before the light is fully up on the first day of the week, before the sun is up—[Genesis 1](#). New creation. And in this scene that

John gives us, the first day of the week in the morning, there's a woman that's weeping at the tomb. She's been weeping since the crucifixion. And she turns around and she sees a man she does not recognize but she thinks he is a gardener. And then the man says one word. He says, "Mary." Her name. And she knows. The daughter who wept in Lamentations is the daughter that's commanded to sing in Zephaniah. Is the daughter that said yes to an angel in Luke. And it's the daughter who shouted at the triumphal entry in Matthew. And it's also the same daughter that watched her king die on a cross. And she starts singing again.

The Motif We Must See

And so I wanted to take this prophet and kind of divert from how I've structured previous messages to show you a little bit more of the structure and how you can see some of the neat footnotes that are hidden beneath the text or the echoes throughout the scriptures because I want you guys to see these things and get excited about books like Zephaniah. Right? I want you guys to go home and dive into it. And see what the word says to you and speaks to you and see if you see something differently now as you read it—not as something you're obligated to read but as something that actually has a lot of emotion in it, a lot of function and purpose. Sometimes it has things in there that are intentionally meant to be funny even in the darkest spots. Lots of dark humor is in the Bible. It's amazing when you see it. People are all the same, right?

So go home and dive into the prophets. Dive into Zephaniah because I think that the daughter of Zion, that motive throughout scripture, that thread is one of the coolest threads that are there. It's small but it's neat. It's another link of what the biblical authors were trying to point to especially in the New Testament when they were so sure who our king is that they wanted to show you in every which way they could from the Old Testament including ways that are through the patterns and motives in the literature and metaphorical characters. The daughter of Zion. It's a character. It's a woman who shows up across every section of the prophets. And she's always either weeping or singing. And the order's the same. Weeping first, singing later.

Weeping Always Leads to Singing

And so if we wanted to make it applicable, we simply ask: Are you at a part of your life where you're in a weeping season? It's a truthful thing to ask because we see the rhythm. We know the rhythm. We know these things are true especially when we go through times where we are grieving and weeping. Times that are dark. The reason why we recognize them as dark and hard is because we know what it looks like when they pass because they have passed before. They do

pass. We overcome. We find strength. We have guidance. And the prophets want you to know that the singing always comes. The daughter of Zion never stays in the weeping. When the weeping's done, the singing starts. Because God will be singing too. God will be singing over her with joy, with dancing, with a love that's so full that it goes quiet. Like a parent holding their child.

A Father's Love

That's where the book of Zephaniah ends. It doesn't end with the same level of judgment, fear, and wrath as it begins. It's meant to ramp you up really high at the beginning of the book and then bring you down hard to the character of God. How God works through creation and new. And so yeah, the book doesn't end with judgment. It ends with a father holding his daughter, loving his daughter, singing and dancing with his daughter forevermore. And so that's what I want to leave you guys with today. If you're in Messiah today, you're kind of a daughter in the metaphor. That's you. The weeping and the singing and the garden and the name, that's it—it's all of our story if we're one in Messiah. And Paul says it in [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), "If anyone is in Messiah, new creation." All of this is symbolic or personification of what new creation looks like. And I hope it gives you hope today. The Lord your God is in your midst, he will quiet you with his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing. And may that be a reality no matter where we are today.

So if you please stand, we'll conclude services. And during this time we have some music and we should worship together and you can spend this time meditating, praying, worshipping. If you need prayer today for any reason, we have a prayer team on the other side of the stage. If you've brought something in today that you're tired of carrying, we have a symbolic altar here.

Closing Prayer

It's made specifically for the act of kneeling down, placing something that you're not going to pick up again down, and walking away. So that's available as well.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Father, our King. Father, we thank you for this opportunity where we've been able to dive into your word once again, to the prophet Zephaniah. Father, that we would be restored in our hope, but not only that, strengthened to know what new creation looks like, to know that when there's weeping, there's always singing and rejoicing, and to turn the corner. But also, Father, that you would give us the wisdom and discernment to stay in those moments,

to lean on you in those moments as we are refined. We thank you, Father, for your love and your grace, in Yeshua's name we pray. Amen.

Closing Song

Who am I that the highest King would bow to? I was lost but he brought me in. Or his love for me. Or his love for me. Who the Son sets free is free indeed. I'm a child of God. Yes, I am.

Realized he has ransomed me. His grace grants me. While I was slave to sin, Jesus died for me. Yes, he died. Hallelujah. Who the Son sets free, oh, it's free indeed. I'm a child. Yes, I am. In my father's house there's a place. I'm a child of God. Yes, I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me. I am who you say I am. I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me. I am who you say I am. Oh, I am who you say I am.

Who the Son sets free, oh, it's free indeed. I'm a child. In my father's house there's a place for me. Yes, I am chosen. You are for me, not against me. I am who you say I am. I am chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me. I am who you say I am. I am chosen. I am who you say I am. I am who you say I am. You're for me, not against me. I am who you say I am. Oh, I am who you say I am. Yeah, I am who you say I am.

Who the Son sets free, oh, it's free. I'm a child of God. Yes, I am. Amen.

Shema and Benediction

Sing the Shema with me. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one, and blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity.

And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Sar Shalom, our prince of peace, we pray. Yeshua Hamashiach. Shabbat shalom, family.

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