

ZEPHANIAH 1:17 - 2:3 IN CHRIST, GOD HIDES HIS ANGER

¹⁷ I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men,
Because they have sinned against the LORD.
Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.

¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath;
But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

¹ Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,
² Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff,
Before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you!
³ Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice;
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
It may be that you will be **hidden** in the day of the LORD's anger.

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There are perhaps four ways to celebrate Christmas:

- 1) Skip Christmas altogether (in other words, Christmas means nothing).
- 2) Join with the outward festivities which stress earthly love, joy, and peace (anybody—Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, atheist, can celebrate such a Christmas—no Christ!).
- 3) Observe Christmas in a 100% spiritual way—the precious Savior from sin and death has come! Give attention to Bible, hymns, prayers, worship, all focusing on the Savior. Keep it at that. Omit lights, tree, decorations, gifts, special food, gatherings (which certainly would eliminate a lot of scurrying.)
- 4) Celebrate the precious spiritual Truths—Christ has come to be your brother and Savior; you are safe. And intermingle various external trappings. (Likely everyone who is at this church service does it this way.)

#4 sounds like a perfect solution. Is it? Is it foolproof? It's not foolproof. It's an approach that takes careful discipline. The devil knows that the line between spiritual and external can easily be shifted. In fact everything added to the schedule means something else has to give—time, effort, desire, cost. The more the devil can blur, distort, and move the line to the external, the happier he is. Attention shifts away from the Savior. Who wants to give up traditions, or say No to a great new one, even if it detracts from the Savior?

The text for today is a harsh and realistic reminder of what it takes for a merry and blessed Christmas. Like last week's text from Isaiah, Zephaniah foretells Judah and Jerusalem's defeat and exile to Babylon. He warns the people that it is coming. The name "Zephaniah" means "the Lord hides." In the coming events, it would seem like the Lord was hiding from His people and from His city. Zephaniah says that the Lord will send enemies to consume and cut off the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The people were the blessed descendants of King David's realm. He had reigned 350 years earlier (our nation isn't even that old!). He had made Jerusalem his capitol. The people were descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. God had promised David that the Savior would be born from His family. David wanted to build the Lord a temple, but the Lord said No and continued : *The LORD tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever* (2 Samuel 7:11-13, 16). They were a special people!

However, many of the people after David did not follow the Lord and His promise of salvation in the Savior to come. They willfully followed idols. Zephaniah says they would face the consequences—God's wrath. Trouble, distress, devastation, desolation would come. *I will bring distress upon men, and they*

shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land (1:17-18). They would be helpless before God, groping and aimlessly walking like blind men. Worthless. Their blood would be cast out, like dust from a dust pan or a shovel. Their flesh, their bodies, would be discarded like garbage and waste. No respect there. God could not be bought-off with silver or gold, like enemy nations on the attack. No amount of silver or gold would deter the Lord. The land would be devoured and God would *make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land*. Good Riddance! Toss them on the “stagecoach.”

God would act in His “jealousy.” Jealousy? Does that sound right for God? There are two kinds of jealousy. 1) Self-serving jealousy that brings harm to another. “I want your toy, I want your dog, I want your girl” and causes no end of disturbance to get it! Such jealousy is wrong and is reprimanded by parents. 2) However, when the mean bully lures Steve’s beloved dog away from him, and Steve knows he will only mistreat the dog, Steve is jealous for the welfare of his dog. God is jealous for the eternal welfare of the souls of His people. God strikes out against the inroads of Satan to harm them. Like a parent who disciplines a child, God’s correction may cause pain—for our own good.

In your case, how deep does God have to dig to display your poor record? So, beware! He is coming with justice! What will you do?? Zephaniah says, *Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff; before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice; seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger (2:1-3).*

The Lord is coming to deal with this earth and the wayward people of it. When He arrives at the End with justice, what will you do? You have not been the perfect specimen that He expects. God knows all—all about your shameful and rebellious ways. What now? As Zephaniah says, *Gather yourselves together . . . before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you. Seek the Lord with all meekness and plead His forgiveness for the sake of Jesus' payment for you on the cross. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger! You will be hidden!* In Jesus you will be kept safe and unharmed; you will be returned to the glory of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, returned to precious peace before the Father. Be ready for the Savior’s return at the End, the day of God’s wrath (it could come on Tuesday!). Plead His mercy and cling to Jesus by faith. Do not despise His will and salvation, lest the Day of the Lord’s Return not be a joyous day!

It is the same at Christmas. Celebrate Christmas as if preparing for the End! Realize the disappointment you are to God, realize the fix you are, realize His coming wrath. But Jesus is your pardon! Do not be complacent. In the verses prior to our text, Zephaniah criticized the complacency of the people. It was as if “No big deal regarding God’s promise of forgiveness and rescue.” *[The Lord will] punish the men who are settled in complacency who say in their heart, “The LORD will not do good, Nor will He do evil”* (Zephaniah 1:13). Complacency. It sounds a lot like Revelation 3:15-16, where Jesus says, *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* Do not be complacent. Cling to Jesus by faith. He coming to earth to save you from our sin!

“Christmas” is not commanded in the Bible. We don’t even know the correct date. If you are going to “skip” the outward Christmas this year, and you may; do not despise the Savior. If you are going to celebrate Christmas, and I assume you are, do not be complacent about its spiritual aspect. Do not get drowned in the trappings. Jesus came to save you! Just as you dare not be complacent about His final return (it could be Tuesday!), likewise do not be complacent about His birth at Bethlehem. Your desolation, distress, destruction, and death are removed in Jesus! Hold on dearly to the Savior. Rejoice in His arrival to take you home, in peace and love. In Jesus, God **HIDES** you from His anger.