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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
ZEPHANIAH

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

Chronological Notes relative to this Book, upon the supposition that it was written in the twelfth year of the reign of Josiah, king of Judah

- Year from the Creation, according to Archbishop Usher, 3374.
- Year of the Julian Period, 4084.
- Year since the Flood, 1718.
- Year from the vocation of Abram, 1291.
- Year from the foundation of Solomon's temple, 382.
- Year since the division of Solomon's monarchy into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 346.
- Year since the conquest of Corcebus at Olympia, usually called the first Olympiad, 147.
- Third year of the *thirty-seventh* Olympiad.
- Year from the building of Rome, according to the Varronian computation, 124.
- Year of the era of Nabonassar, 118.
- Year since the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, 92.
- Year before the birth of Christ, 626.
- Year before the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 630.
- Cycle of the Sun, 24.
- Cycle of the Moon, 18.
- Eighteenth year of Phraortes, king of Media. This monarch is supposed by some to have been the same with the Arphaxad of the Apocrypha.
- Eleventh year of Philip I., king of Macedon.
- Twenty-second year of Archidamus, king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Proclidæ.
- Fifteenth year of Eurycrates II., king of Lacedæmon, of the family of the Eurysthenidæ.
- Twenty-ninth year of Cypselus, who had seized upon the government of Corinth.
- Forty-second year of Psammitichus, king of Egypt, according to Helvicus.

- Tenth year of Kiniladachus, king of Babylon, according to the same chronologer. This monarch was the immediate predecessor of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar.
- Second year of Sadyattes, king of Lydia.
- Eleventh year of Ancus Martius, the fifth king of the Romans.
- Twelfth year of Josiah, king of Judah.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter begins with denouncing God's judgments against Judah and Jerusalem, 1-3. Idolaters, and sinners of several other denominations, are then particularly threatened; and their approaching visitation enlarged on, by the enumeration of several circumstances which tend greatly to heighten its terrors, 4-18.

NOTES ON CHAP. 1

Verse 1. The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah] Though this prophet has given us so large a list of his ancestors, yet little concerning him is known, because we know nothing certain relative to the persons of the family whose names are here introduced. We have one *chronological note* which is of more value for the correct understanding of his prophecy than the other could have been, how circumstantially soever it had been delivered; viz., that he prophesied *in the days of Josiah, son of Amon, king of Judah*; and from the description which he gives of the *disorders* which prevailed in Judea in his time, it is evident that he must have prophesied *before* the reformation made by Josiah, which was in the *eighteenth* year of his reign. And as he predicts the *destruction of Nineveh*, ~~<small>Zephaniah 2:13~~ **Zephaniah 2:13**, which, as *Calmet* remarks, could not have taken place before the *sixteenth* of Josiah, allowing with *Berosus* *twenty-one* years for the reign of Nabopolassar over the Chaldeans; we must, therefore, place this prophecy about the beginning of the reign of Josiah, or from B.C. 640 to B.C. 609. But see the chronological notes.

Verse 2. I will utterly consume all things] All being now ripe for destruction, I will shortly bring a universal scourge upon the land. He speaks particularly of the idolaters.

Verse 3. I will consume man and beast] By *war*, and by *pestilence*. Even the *waters* shall he infected, and the *fish* destroyed; the *air* become contaminated, and the *fowls* die.

Verse 4. I will cut off the remnant of Baal] I think he refers here, partly at least, to the reformation which Josiah was to bring about. See the account, ^{<1223B>}**2 Kings 23:5**.

The Chemarims] The *black-robed* priests of different idols. See Clarke's note on "^{<1223B>}**2 Kings 23:5**". These were put down by Josiah.

Verse 5. The host of heaven] Sun, moon, planets, and stars. This worship was one of the most ancient and the most common of all species of idolatry; and it had a greater semblance of reason to recommend it. See ^{<1223B>}**2 Kings 23:5, 12;** ^{<241913>}**Jeremiah 19:13; 32:29**.

That swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham] Associating the name of an *idol* with that of the Most High. For *Malcham*, see on ^{<28045>}**Hosea 4:15**, and ^{<31636>}**Amos 5:26**.

Verse 6. Them that are turned back] Who have forsaken the true God, and become idolaters.

Nor inquired for him] Have not desired to know his will.

Verse 7. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lords God] *sh has*, the same as *hush*, *hist*, among us. Remonstrances are *now* useless. You had time to acquaint yourselves with God; you would not: you cry now in vain; destruction is at the door.

The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice] A slaughter of the people.

He hath bid his guests] The Babylonians, to whom he has given a commission to destroy you. In all festivals sacrifices, 1. The victims were offered to God, and their blood poured out before the altar. 2. The people who were invited feasted upon the sacrifice. See on ^{<23306>}**Isaiah 34:6**.

Verse 8. I will punish the princes, and the king's children] After the death of Josiah the kingdom of Judah saw no prosperity, and every reign terminated miserably; until at last King Zedekiah and the *king's children* were cruelly massacred at Riblah, when Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jerusalem.

Strange apparel] I really think this refers more to their embracing idolatrous customs and heathen usages, than to their *changing their dress*. They acquired *new habits*, as we would say; *customs*, that they used as they did their *clothing*—at all times, and in every thing.

Verse 9. That leap on the threshold] Or, *that leap over the threshold*. It is most probable that the *Philistines* are here meant. After the time that Dagon fell before the ark, and his hands were broken off on the threshold of his temple, his worshippers would no more set a foot upon the threshold, but stepped or leaped over it, when they entered into his temple. The *Chaldee* understands this of the Philistines, without giving this reason for it. Some understand it of haughtiness and pride: others think that *leaping on the threshold* refers to the customs of the Arabs, who used to ride into people's houses and take away whatever they could carry; and that this is the reason why, in several parts of the East, they have their doors made very low, to prevent those depredators from entering. In this manner, we learn the *Persians* have frequently oppressed the poor *Armenians*, going on horseback into their houses, and taking whatever they thought proper. Mr. *Harmer* understands it in this way.

Verse 10. A cry from the fish-gate] This gate, which is mentioned ^{<1618>}**Nehemiah 3:3**, was opposite to Joppa; and perhaps the way in which the news came of the irruption of the Chaldean army, the *great crashing from the hills*.

The second] Or *second city*, may here mean a part of Jerusalem, mentioned ^{<12214>}**2 Kings 22:14**; ^{<14342>}**2 Chronicles 34:22**.

Verse 11. Maktesh] *Calmet* says this signifies a *mortar*, or a *rock in form of a mortar*, and was the name of a quarter of Jerusalem where they hulled rice, corn, &c., according to St. Jerome. Some think the city of Jerusalem is meant, where the inhabitants should be beat and pounded to death as grain is pounded in a mortar.

Newcome translates it, the *lower city*, and considers it the *valley* in Jerusalem, which divided the *upper* from the *lower city*.

They that bear silver] The merchants, moneychangers, usurers, rich men.

Verse 12. I will search Jerusalem with candles] I will make a universal and thorough search.

That are settled on their lees] Those who are *careless*, satisfied with the goods of this life; who trust in their riches, and are completely irreligious; who, while they acknowledge that there is a God, think, like the *Aristotelians*, that he is so supremely happy in the contemplation of his own excellences, that he feels it beneath his dignity to concern himself with the affairs of mortals.

Verse 13. Their goods (in which they trust) **shall become a booty]** To the Chaldeans. They shall have no profit of all their labours. *The houses they have built they shall not inhabit*; of the wine of the *vineyards they have planted*, they shall not drink. See ^{<3151>}**Amos 5:11**, where we find the same evils threatened.

Verse 14. The great day of the Lord is near] It commenced with the death of the good king Josiah, who was slain by Pharaoh-necho at Megiddo, and continued to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 15. That day is a day of wrath] See the parallel passages in the *margin*, and the notes there. From the *fourteenth* to the *sixteenth* verse inclusive there is a most beautiful amplification of the disasters that were coming on Jerusalem; the *invasion, incursion, attack, carnage, confusion, horrible din* occasioned by the *sound* of the *trumpet*, the cries of the *people*, and the *shrieks* and *groans* of the *dying*, are pointed out with great force and mighty effect.

Verse 17. They shall walk like blind men] Be in the most perplexing *doubt* and uncertainty; and while in this state, have their blood poured out by the sword of their enemies, and their flesh trodden under foot.

Verse 18. Their silver nor their gold] In which they trusted, and from which they expected happiness; these shall not profit them in this awful day. And God will bring this about speedily; and a *speedy riddance*—a universal desolation, shall in a short time take place in every part of the land.

ZEPHANIAH

CHAPTER 2

The prophet, having declared the judgments which were ready to fall on his people, earnestly exhorts them to repentance, that these judgments may be averted, 1-3. He then foretells the fate of other neighbouring and hostile nations: the Philistines, 4-7; Moabites and Ammonites, 8-11; Ethiopians, 12; and Assyrians, 13. In the close of the chapter we have a prophecy against Nineveh. These predictions were accomplished chiefly by the conquests of Nebuchadnezzar.

NOTES ON CHAP. 2

Verse 1. Gather yourselves] Others, *sift yourselves*. Separate the chaff from the wheat, before the judgments of God fall upon you. *O nation not desired—unlovely*, not delighted in; hated because of your sin. The Israelites are addressed.

Verse 3. Ye meek of the earth] *ywn* [*anavey*, ye oppressed and humbled of the land.

It may be ye shall be hid] The sword has not a commission against you. Ask God, and he will be a refuge to you from the storm and from the tempest.

Verse 4. Gaza shall be forsaken] This prophecy is against the *Philistines*. They had been greatly harassed by the kings of Egypt; but were completely ruined by Nebuchadnezzar, who took all Phœnicia from the Egyptians; and about the time of his taking Tyre, devastated all the seignories of the Philistines. This ruin we have seen foretold by the other prophets, and have already remarked its exact fulfilment.

Verse 5. The sea-coasts, the nation of the Cherethites] The *sea-coasts* mean all the country lying on the Mediterranean coast from Egypt to Joppa and Gaza. The *Cherethites*—the *Cretans* who were probably a colony of the Phœnicians. See on ~~<03014>~~ **1 Samuel 30:14**, and ~~<03007>~~ **Amos 9:7**.

Verse 6. And the sea-coasts shall be dwellings] *Newcome* considers *trk keroth* as a proper name, not *cottages* or *folds*. The *Septuagint* have *Κρητη*, *Crete*, and so has the *Syriac*. *Abp. Secker* notes, *Alibi non extat*

trk, et forte notat patriam τῶν μυτρκ. “The word *trk* is not found elsewhere, and probably it is the name of the country of the Cherethim.”

Verse 7. The coast shall be for the remnant] Several devastations fell on the Philistines. Gaza was ruined by the army of Alexander the Great, and the *Maccabees* finally accomplished all that was predicted by the prophets against this invariably wicked people. They lost their polity, and were at last obliged to receive circumcision.

Verse 8. I have heard the reproach of Moab] God punished them for the cruel part they had taken in the persecutions of the Jews; for when they lay under the displeasure of God, these nations insulted them in the most provoking manner. See on ^{<3010>}**Amos 1:13**, and the parallel texts in the *margin*.

Verse 9. The breeding of nettles] That is, their land shall become desolate, and be a place for nettles, thorns, &c., to flourish in, for want of cultivation.

Verse 10. Because they have reproached] See on ^{<3018>}**Zephaniah 2:8**.

Verse 11. He will famish all the gods of the earth] They shall have no more *sacrifices*; their worship shall be entirely destroyed. Idolaters supposed that their gods actually *fed* on the *fumes* and *spirituous* exhalations that arose from the burnt-offerings which they made unto their idols. It is in reference to this opinion that the Lord says, “He will famish all the gods of the land.”

Verse 12. Ye Ethiopians also] Nebuchadnezzar subdued these. See ^{<3442>}**Jeremiah 46:2, 9**; ^{<3304>}**Ezekiel 30:4, 10**. See also on ^{<3010>}**Amos 9:1-7**.

Verse 13. He will—destroy Assyria] He will overthrow the empire, and *Nineveh*, their metropolitan city. See on Jonah and Nahum.

Verse 14. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her] Nineveh was so completely destroyed, that its situation is not at present even known. The present city of *Mossoul* is supposed to be in the *vicinity* of the place where this ancient city stood.

The cormorant *taq kaath*; and the bittern, *dpq kippod*. These *Newcome* translates, “The pelican and the porcupine.”

Their **voice shall sing in the windows**] The windows shall be all demolished; wild fowl shall build their nests in them, and shall be seen coming from their sills, and the fine *cedar* ceilings shall be exposed to the weather, and by and by crumble to dust. See the note on ^{<2341>}**Isaiah 34:11, 14**, where nearly the same terms are used.

I have in another place introduced a remarkable couplet quoted by Sir *W. Jones* from a Persian poet, which speaks of desolation in nearly the same terms.

[Persian]

[Persian]


*“The spider holds the veil in the palace of Cæsar:
The owl stands sentinel in the watchtower of Afrasiab.”*

Verse 15. This is the rejoicing city] The city in which mirth, jocularity, and pleasure, reigned without interruption.

And **wag his hand**] Will point her out as a mark and monument of Divine displeasure.

ZEPHANIAH

CHAPTER 3

The prophet reproves Jerusalem, and all her guides and rulers, for their obstinate perseverance in impiety, notwithstanding all the warnings and corrections which they had received from God, 1-7. They are encouraged, however, after they shall have been chastised for their idolatry, and cured of it, to look for mercy and restoration, 8-13; and exited to hymns of joy at the glorious prospect, 14-17. After which the prophet concludes with large promises of favour and prosperity in the days of the Messiah, 18-20. We take this extensive view of the concluding verses of this chapter, because an apostle has expressly assured us that in EVERY prophetic book of the Old Testament Scriptures are confined predictions relative to the Gospel dispensation. See  Acts 3:24.

NOTES ON CHAP. 3

Verse 1. Wo to her that is filthy] This is a denunciation of Divine judgment against Jerusalem.

Verse 2. She obeyed not the voice] Of conscience, of God, and of his prophets.

She received not correction] Did not profit by his chastisements; was uneasy and ill-tempered under her afflictions, and derived no manner of good from these chastisements.

She trusted not in the Lord] Did not consider him as the *Fountain* whence all help and salvation should come; and rather sought for support from *man* and *herself*, than from God.

She drew not near to her God.] Did not worship him; did not walk in his ways; did not make *prayer* and supplication to him.

Verse 3. Her princes—are roaring lions] Tearing all to pieces without shadow of law, except their own despotic power.

Her judges are evening wolves] Being a little afraid of the lion-like princes, they practise their unjust dealings from evening to morning, and take the *day* to find their rest.

They gnaw not the bones till the morrow.] They devour the flesh in the night, and gnaw the bones and extract the marrow afterwards. They use all violence and predatory oppression, like wild beasts; they shun the light, and turn day into night by their revellings.

Verse 4. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons] They have no *seriousness*, no *deep conviction* of the awful nature of their *office*, no *concern* for the *immortal souls* of the people. *Treacherous persons*—they betray the souls of the people for the sake of worldly *honour*, *pleasure*, and *profit*. Even in our own enlightened country we find prophets who prefer hunting the *hare* or the *fox*, and pursuing the *partridge* and *pheasant*, to *visiting the sick*, and *going after the strayed, lost sheep* of the *house of Israel*. Poor souls! They know neither God nor themselves; and if they did visit the sick, they could not speak to them to exhortation, edification, or comfort. God never called them to his work; therefore they know nothing of it. But O, what an account have these *pleasure-taking false prophets* to render to the Shepherd of souls!

They have done violence to the law.] They have forced wrong constructions on it in order to excuse themselves, and lull the people into spiritual slumber. So we find that it was an ancient practice for men to wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.

Verse 5. The just Lord is in the midst thereof] He sees, marks down, and will punish all these wickednesses.

Every morning doth he bring his judgment to light] The sense is, says Bp. *Newcome*, “Not a day passes but we see instances of his goodness to righteous men, and of his vengeance on the wicked.”

Verse 6. I have cut off the nations] Syria, Israel, and those referred to, 23618 **Isaiah 36:18, 20.** —*Newcome*.

Verse 7. Surely thou wilt fear me] After so many displays of my sovereign power and judgments.

But they rose early] And instead of returning to God, they practised every abomination. They were diligent to find out times and places for their iniquity. This is the worst state of man.

Verse 8. Wait ye upon me] Expect the fulfilment of all my promises and threatenings: I am God, and change not.

For all the earth] All the land of Judah.

Verse 9. Will I turn to the people] This promise must refer to the conversion of the Jews under the Gospel.

That they may all call] That the whole nation may invoke God by Christ, and serve him with *one consent*; not one unbeliever being found among them.

The *pure language*, *hrwr b hpc saphah berurah*, may here mean the *form of religious worship*. They had been before *idolaters*: now God promises to restore his *pure worship* among them. The word has certainly this meaning in ^{<198105>}**Psalm 81:5**; where, as God is the speaker, the words should not be rendered, “I heard a language which I understood not,” but, “I heard a religious confession, which I approved not.” See ^{<231918>}**Isaiah 19:18**; ^{<214103>}**Hosea 14:3**; and see ^{<231228>}**Joel 2:28**, where a similar promise is found.

Verse 10. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia] This may denote both *Africa* and the southern *Arabia*. *Bochart* thinks that *Arabia Chusaer* is meant; and that the rivers are *Besor*, which flows into the *Mediterranean*; *Rhinocorura*, which flows into the *Lake Sirbonis*; *Trajanus Amnis*, which flows into the *Red Sea*; and the river *Corys*. *Calmet* thinks that these *rivers* mean the *Nile*, which by *seven mouths* falls into the *Mediterranean*. The *Nile* comes from *Ethiopia*, properly so called; and runs through all *Egypt*, and falls into the sea at that part of *Arabia* which the Scripture calls *Cush* or *Ethiopia*.

My dispersed] The Jews, scattered through different parts of the world. *Shall bring mine offering*. Shall acknowledge my mercy in sending them the *Messiah* to bless them, by turning every one of them away from their iniquities.

Verse 11. Shalt thou not be ashamed] Thy punishment shall cease, for God shall pardon thy sin.

For then I will take away out of the midst of thee] The wicked Jewish priests and scribes who blasphemed Christ, and would not come under his yoke.

Because of my holy mountain.] Thou wilt no more *boast in my temple*, but become *meeek* and *lowly* in following him who is meek and lowly in heart, that ye may obtain rest to your souls.

Verse 12. An afflicted and poor people] In such a state will the Jews be found when they shall hear the universal call, and believe in Christ Jesus. Indeed, this is the *general state* of the Jews in the *present day*; except a *few* that are *called Jews*, who are *very rich*; and who believe just as much in the *God of Jacob*, as they do in *Jesus Christ*.

Verse 13. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity] O what a change! And then, how different shall they be from their *present selves*! Iniquity, lying, and deceit shall not be found among them! A Jew once said to me, “Tere are shome of you Christians who are making wonderful efforts to convert the Tshews (Jews.) *Ah, dere ish none but Gott Almighty dat can convert a Tshew.*” Truly I believe him. Only God can convert any man; and if there be a *peculiar difficulty* to convert any soul, that difficulty must lie in the *conversion* of the *Jew*.

Verse 14. Sing, O daughter of Zion] Here is not only a gracious prophetic promise of their restoration from captivity, but of their conversion to God through Christ.

Verse 15. The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee] They have never had a *king* since the death of Zedekiah, and never shall have one till they have the *King Messiah* to reign among them; and this promise refers to that event.

Verse 16. Fear thou not] Thou shalt have no more captivities nor national afflictions.

Let not thine hands be slack.] This may refer, *first*, to the rebuilding of the temple of God, after the return from Babylon; and, *secondly*, to their diligence and zeal in the Christian Church.

Verse 17. The Lord thy God] *Ĕyhl a hwhy Yehovah Eloheycha*, “The self-existent and eternal Being, who is in covenant with you;” the character of God in reference to the Jews when standing in the nearest relation to them.

Is **mighty]** *rwbg gibbor*, is the *prevailing One*, the *all-conquering Hero*. The character which is given to Christ, ^{<3006>} **Isaiah 9:6**: “His name shall be called *rwbg l a El gibbor*, the prevailing Almighty God.”

He will save] *Deliver* thee from all the *power*, from all the *guilt*, and from all the *pollution* of thy sins; and when thus *saved*, “he will rejoice over thee with joy,” with peculiar gladness. “He will rest in his love,”—he will renew his love. He will show the same love to you that he did of old to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*.

He will joy over thee with singing.] The conversion of the Jews will be a subject of peculiar delight and exultation to God himself! There will be a *more than ordinary joy* in heaven, when the Jews return to God through Christ. This event cannot be at a great distance; they are as *wretched* and as *ungodly* as they can well be. The *arms of Christians* are open to receive them; and *all things are now ready!*

Verse 18. I will gather—sorrowful] This may refer to those who, during the captivity, mourned for their former religious assemblies; and who were *reproached* by their enemies, because they could not enjoy their religious solemnities. See ^{<4970>} **Psalm 137:1-9**: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song,” &c. This very circumstance may be the reference here.

Verse 19. I will undo all that afflict thee] They who have persecuted you shall be punished for it. It shows much malignity and baseness of mind, to afflict or reproach those who are lying under the chastising hand of God. This was the conduct of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, when the Jews were in adversity; and how severely did the Lord punish them for it! And he gave this as the *reason* for the severity of the punishment.

The first clause here is translated thus by Abp. *Newcome*: “Behold I will work with thee for thy sake at that time.” The original is obscure; and it may bear the above sense.

I will save her that halteth] See ^{<3306>} **Micah 4:6**, where there is a parallel place.

And gather her that was driven out] By captivity. The reference may be to renewing the covenant with the Jews, who were considered as an

unfaithful spouse divorced by her husband. I will bring her back to my house.

I will get them praise and fame in every land] They shall become a great, a good, and a useful people. And as they are now a proverb of reproach, full of base wives and degrading selfishness, they shall lose this character, and be totally changed; and they shall be as eminent for excellence, as they were before for baseness, in those countries where they had sojourned.

Verse 20. At that time] *First*, when the *seventy* years of the Babylonish captivity shall terminate. “I will bring you again” to your own land; and this restoration shall be a type of their redemption from sin and iniquity; and *at this time*, and at this only, will they have a *name* and *praise* among *all* the *people* of the *earth*, not only among the Jews, but the Gentiles.

Before your eyes] Some read *before* THEIR *eyes*; that is, the eyes of all people. On their conversion to Christianity, they shall become as eminent as they ever were in the most illustrious days of their history, Lord, hasten the conversion of Israel! Amen.