



Zephaniah Wk. 12
The Reversal of Babel Pt 1
By Pastor Jody May 07/19/2026

[CALL TO HEAR]

Zephaniah 3:9-13 ESV

The Conversion of the Nations

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| <p>⁹ “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.
¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush
my worshipers, the daughter of my
dispersed ones,
shall bring my offering.

¹¹ “On that day you shall not be put to
shame
because of the deeds by which you
have rebelled against me;</p> | <p>for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.

¹² But I will leave in your midst
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of
the LORD,

¹³ those who are left in Israel;
they shall do no injustice
and speak no lies,
nor shall there be found in their mouth
a deceitful tongue.
For they shall graze and lie down,
and none shall make them afraid.”</p> |
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Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”

People – “Thanks be to God.”

Pray

Introduction

Well, it has taken us 2.5 months to get to this point. It has been 11 weeks of explaining what judgment looks like on the Day of the Lord. That it has been a repeating if you will of the story of Genesis, but in reverse order. That the LORD had promised to take everything apart through judgment in order to correct the problem of sin. That He will gather the corrupt to sweep away everything, like a flood. That the corruption that cannot be changed because of wicked leadership and depraved hearts will be done away with. This judgement went from the specific city of Jerusalem, from its’ rulers to its’ elite, to the dwellers, to the surrounding countryside and into all the nations that surrounded them. It is a total judgment on all of creation.



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It is a Day we have said that will have for Zephaniah's time a fulfillment in the Babylonian invasion and subsequent wars. Three times they came in and each visit got a little worse as a stiff-necked people refused to bend a knee based on decisions of false prophets, bad rulers, and unfit priests. Then in 586 BC there is a total destruction of the temple, the elite are carted back to Babylon and put into subjection, and the poor are left to serve as conquered vassals in the land. Those neighbors who laughed and mocked Jerusalem as this happened, they too were put under subjection from this power from the east.

Of course, we also recognize that prophecy has a double fulfillment as well. That the Day of the Lord also references Jesus' incarnation, and the Grace and Truth of His visit. It was condemning again to the leaders of that day, it was victory over Devil, Demons, and death, while it also brought Salvation for His people. And now we His people look forward to the day when He shall return and the final recreation and purging take place. Zephaniah is a beautiful book to explore what has come and prepares God's people for what shall be in the end. That is why Zephaniah now in week 12 begins to paint the picture for us as to what this day will look like and that is where our text takes us this week. This week he shows us the first step in this process, in this recreation story. God remakes His people, He creates again like with Adam in the garden, a new people by breathing life into them.

MP

**The Lord makes a pure-speaking people from all nations
who call on His name and serve Him.**

The Lord starts with the very words that come out of people's mouths and that in itself is a HUGE miracle! I don't know about you, but have you ever tried controlling someone else's words!? You can't do it! You know why? Because language doesn't just come from the mind it comes from the heart. Our speech reveals to the world not just what we think but what we feel. Our language tells others who we are loyal to, how we really think about others, and what we are willing to let our will be done.



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What we will see today though in just these two verses is a mighty act of God, for God's first work in recreation is to change the language of a people. So briefly we will break it up like this. First, we will look at the act of the **conversion to pure speech**; how does it happen? Then to the **content of pure speech**, what is the thing that is 'said' that tells you speech is being changed. Then lastly, this beautiful picture of the **gathering of pure speakers** from all over the world.

1. Conversion to Pure Speech.

^{9a} "For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech,

At that time, what time is that? It is at the same time judgment is being carried out (1-8). What one notices is while judgment is taking place against the unrepentant sinner on the Day of the Lord there is another action, outside of punishment, that is going on. **God is judging people, and He is showing grace and mercy at the same time.** Here's what we mean.

I will change the speech of the peoples. (God is starving all the other gods of the earth 2:11)

First, notice it is the work of God – "***I Will change...***". God has taken the burden upon Himself to do the changing. In v. 6 he said that nations had been made desolate, so that in v.7, surely His people would see God's actions and turn back to Him. Instead, they chose to further corrupt/defile themselves. So, what God does in the Day of the Lord, when judgment can be seen, He is also acting and doing what men cannot do.

That is the action from v.8 when he rises to *pour out His indignation*. Part of that action, "*the rising up*" we discover here in v.9, along with the *fiery anger and burning jealousy* (8), is that He changes the speech of the people. He turns the corrupt language of the people into a **pure speech**. God's action judges and corrects the language, that which reveals the intent of the heart, getting rid of the impurities that contaminated His creation. Isn't it good to know family, that our God is **NOT the type to judge and forget, BUT He is a God that judges and restores!**



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Again, Zephaniah uses an image from Genesis to talk about God's interaction with rebels on the Day of the Lord, to express God's direct gracious actions. This purifying of speech points back to another event in Genesis when God had to intervene with men directly to disunify them because of their evil intentions.

Genesis 11:1-9 ESV
The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ²And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

What we see is that God judged at Babel by **confusing and scattering**, and He now restores in Zephaniah by **purifying and gathering**.

The people of this day in Genesis have one language (11:1), seeking to make one name for themselves "*let us build for ourselves*"(4), so we see the sin of self-exaltation and prideful imitation of God, whom man was called to serve. Instead of being an image of **good unity**, it is a picture of **sinful solidarity**. Now in Zephaniah, God is bringing about again the unification of mankind by first giving them a purified speech, a language that has been distilled down to one pure element, the exaltation of God not the rejection of Him.



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The Psalmist King David talks about what is necessary to make this pure speech.

Psalm 15:2-3 ESV

- ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth **in his heart**;
³ who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

The sign of pure speech is a changed heart! The beauty of the Gospel begins to dawn here in Zephaniah after the gloom of the Day of the Lord. God begins a purifying work, recreation is beginning, by changing the hearts of not just Jerusalem, but all men! This action echoes what happens in that famous passage from [Isaiah 6:5-7](#), where the prophet Isaiah notices he has unclean lips, his speech is not pure. His mouth though is purified with burning coal, showing the cleansing of sin and the removal of guilt. The direct result is he declares, send me to go speak for you oh God! He goes from a solidarity with sinful man to a unity with the Kingdom of God resulting in God exalting praise!

Purifying of Speech - means God has been at work, gathering His people from abroad, refining their speech, removing their sin, and releasing them from guilt. That is the action that comes along with judgment on the Day of the LORD.

That also means, and this is something really to be celebrated, that when Zephaniah refers to **speech of the peoples** in v. 9, he means people outside of Jerusalem, it means Gentiles as well.

Genesis 22:18 ESV

"and in your (Abraham) offspring shall **all the nations** of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Galatians 3:7 ESV (see also [Romans 4:16-17](#))

"Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham."

Again, family isn't it good to know, that our God is not the type to judge and forget, but He is a God that judges and restores!



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Application - Jesus taught us the universal language of God's family.

Luke 6:45 ESV

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for **out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks**. (solidifying Psalm 15:2-3)

The mouth declares what is found in the heart! This is why we must receive the encouragement from Paul to be mindful of one's words.

Ephesians 4:29-31 ESV

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Corrupting talk is the speech of Babel, in a church it disunifies, it tears down, it builds walls of its' own design, not God's. Let our speech HCC, our language that bares- bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor/verbal brawling, slander be put away, and let our speech be the kind that builds up.

This is our call to fight against the indwelling sin of bitterness and pride in our own hearts. We may not venture forth each day looking to get into a scuffle like some angry child looking to take out their anger on the world but what you bound up in your hearts and share with others may condemn you. How often do we talk behind someone's back? How often do we make slanderous remarks? How often do we resort to babble and gossip? How often do we pick verbal arguments and fights with those we say we care about? Family, keep watch over what you say because in Christ we all have been renewed so our speech should reflect His image, not the image of Babel. Let not our sin rule over us but let His Spirit have the domain in our hearts and let us build each other up in love for the sake of the one who has made claim on all our hearts.



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Now let's look at where this pure speech begins in each person, when God begins the changing of one's heart.

2. The Content of Pure Speech – *Calling on the Name of the Lord.*

^{9b} that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD
and serve him with one accord.

The first words that the new believer in God speaks is that they call on the name of the Lord. That is in reference to Salvation.

Romans 10:13 ESV

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Calling on the Name of the Lord means calling out for the Lord to save you. True 'PURE' speech begins with the first necessity that we all need, Salvation. Pure speech begins with the admittance that we the sinner have a problem and that the solution for our lives, exist outside of ourselves. Pure speech begins with the acknowledgement that we do not have what we need to build a way back to God; there is no tower like Babel that can bridge that distance, no compiling of good works to make amends for all our wrongs, no adding to the tally of good effort to buy the creator's favor. We realize the problem we have is too big for ourselves, so the first act of the saved person is the crying out to God for deliverance.

There was a prophet quite a few years before Zephaniah, Joel in the late 800s BCE before the N. Kingdom's fall. He had already been given the vision that it would take the work of God to prepare men's heart for a pure speech.

Joel 2:28, 31-32 ESV

The LORD Will Pour Out His Spirit

²⁸ "And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.



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- ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.
- ³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.

It would take the presence of the one true God, His Spirit, to fall on flesh, the living, to bring them to Spiritual awakening. The result would be to prophesy, preach the good news about God, to exalt Him. The sun and moon destroyed, again a reversal on creation, and a tearing down of earthly powers. We see what will happen first, what will happen according to Zephaniah on the Day of the Lord, is that God's Spirit will fall on men, and they will **call on the name of the Lord!**

This is what we call regeneration, the causing of a dead man's heart to come to life, to recognize they were dead, to recognize they have assaulted a Holy and Righteous God! You see family to call on the name of the Lord means you must be **made alive first!** Your eyes must be opened, your spiritual corpse must be resurrected from the dead, you must rise in order to call out. **Dead men cannot call out for help, they can only lie and rot!** It takes an act of God to bring people to Salvation, **to call on His name.** AND that is exactly what He did just over 2000 years ago!

Acts 2:17,21 ESV

- ¹⁷ "And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
- ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

WOW! What a moment in Biblical History! Peter with the weight of over 800 yrs in the making, is prompted by the Spirit to say these words from Joel. What a moment for this church father, when God allowed Him, who denied Christ with impure speech, to now in his first sermon, feeds Jesus' sheep the



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words of life, those that would know His voice! **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved!**

That day was [Pentecost](#), do you remember that day? It was the day that the Spirit of God fell on Jesus' disciples waiting in that house for the Spirit, and they all did what? They began to speak each in a foreign language, so that the visiting Jews from [Diaspora](#) would gather, hear and have God's Spirit fall on them too, those who were spiritually dead.

Peter preached the truth about Jesus that day. That He was the Messiah, that He was the descendant of David, that David testified to Him, and that they crucified Him! Then watch the response.

Acts 2:37-38, 41 ESV

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ⁴¹So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

God uses the purified speech of a saved man, to spread the good news to dead men, who heard the message of the Gospel, and **they came to life!** These men who would then take this Gospel back out into their Gentile world so this work may continue. There is MORE good news though, it doesn't just stop with coming to life, but it continues with shared work.

Notice the last line of v. 9 - **Serve Him with one accord**. That phrase actually means to '**serve with one shoulder**.' That means people who are changed by a new heart, that have a pure speech/God exalting language, can now once again work together like at Babel, by putting their shoulders together to support weight. **To add their collective force to work, and the work is now made Holy for it serves only God.**

From v. 8 when God rises in indignation he gets to work with both judgment and grace! God's great work initiated and empowered by His Spirit, reverses



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His curse in Genesis 11, bringing back together men from all nations, to serve Him as one people! - **Pentecost is the Reversal of Babel!**

Isn't it good to know that God **doesn't just judge and forget but that He judges and restores fallen man** to the rightful position of being His servants!? Finding worth, dignity, and the support of God-Fearing people/serving with one shoulder, in the given task of dominion for His name's sake once again.

Application

We should not look like Babel neither should we look like the recipients of the curse after Babel. This should not be a church with 100 different ministries going a 1000 different directions to increase a physical footprint in the county. People should not be talking at or over each other, building out their own corner in the church. Instead, it looks like one body shouldering together the Ministry of the Word, building out God's base camp in Dallas GA. It will look and have the feel of special forces unit, that are infiltrating enemy lines, rescuing its' POWs, working lean and mean, taking ground when they can, until the King comes in for the *coup de grace*. The church is built for offense not defense, we can stop worrying about building the biggest siege towers, we don't need them, the Spirit of God has fallen upon us.

When we pick up that responsibility then the last part of Zephaniah's prophecy begins to take shape in our understanding.

3. The Gathering of Pure Speakers.

¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush
my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones,
shall bring my offering.

From beyond the rivers of Cush. Pastor Onan covered that section a few weeks ago now, when we were talking about the neighbors of Jerusalem, those to the south. Cush is below Egypt, expanding across the Red Sea to cover Sheba and Ethiopia. At the point of this writing in Zephaniah it was known as the farthest point south you could go and know anything about. It



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represented the furthest distance away from Jerusalem by which you knew something about its' inhabitants.

Zephaniah makes this startling admission, he says, you know that place we talk about but never go to, where you think it must be the end of the known world? The LORD is going beyond the boundaries, the rivers of Cush, and outside the known boundaries of our present world, and in that place, **God will have worshippers!** Where Jerusalem failed to bring God to the nations, God will now bring the nations to Him!

The '**daughter of my dispersed ones**' (10) is simply the poetic way of saying the community/corporate gathering of those that I had a hand in dispersing. God is saying the one's I call to me are the ones I put out into the world, again it is foreknowledge, His work, predestination. This line of this prophetic poem again is a **double fulfillment**. It speaks to the dispersion of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem as well it looks beyond that to the promise of Genesis 22, where God has worshippers dispersed all around the world from every nation.

Isaiah saw this day as well, and in the final verses of His book gave this glorious image of the Day of the Lord, as a Day that comes with judgment but ends in Grace for His people.

Isaiah 66:20 ESV

And they (preachers of the Gospel) shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.

God will have His preachers, prophets, His Apostles go the ends of the earth and bring to the Lord Jesus, the new cornerstone of a Living Temple, an offering. The Father will bring the Son an offering of true worshippers, in true pure speech, that declares a new heart has been given. Peter again gives a testimony that this glorious prophecy has come true.

1 Peter 2:9-10 ESV



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⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Family, we are that people. - We were the ones dispersed/scattered, we were preached the Gospel of Jesus, our hearts were made to come to life, we have called out to the Lord, and now our speech has been made pure, so now we can put the strength of our shoulders together, to continue to bring the glory of God to this world. We have truly become a people who were once not a people, under the curse of Babel.

MP

**The Lord makes a pure-speaking people from all nations
who call on His name and serve Him.**

Again, family isn't it good to know, that our God is not the type to judge and forget, but He is a God that judges and restores!

[CALL TO OBEY]

1. Guard our tongues and train our hearts by giving positive words.

When you want to say something negative about a person give it to God first. Within the family of God, seek to build others up with words that describe how you see Christ in them, and encourage them towards those things. In the Kingdom of the world let our words reflect the grace and truth of Christ and give others no chance to build a case against you because of your language.

2. Call on the Name of the Lord with constant Humility.

Practice the stance of how you first came to Christ. Don't come to Him with complaints, and curses for others, but come to Him and call on His name to keep changing you! We are the biggest problems in our lives, not others. Practice the humility that God gave us when we first realized our desperate need for a Savior, every day.



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3. Serve shoulder to shoulder with those in the family.

If you want a ministry all to yourself stop, that is not the call here. We are called to join our efforts with others, so things to do in this body, are done in submission to one another. Seek the things that need to be done and practice in unity with other believers, and in such a way you will be conformed more into His glorious image.

Charge

Family, I hope that you have found it encouraging to discover that God has graced His people even in judgment of this earth and that this week you discover a new zeal to speak with a pure speech, working shoulder to shoulder, with others to bring Glory to God.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank You that You do not only judge sin but also show mercy and restore Your people. We praise You for giving pure speech, for causing sinners to call upon Your name, and for gathering one people from the nations to serve You together. Purify our hearts, guard our tongues, and make us faithful in worship, truth, and service. Keep us from pride, bitterness, and corrupt speech, and teach us to build one another up in love. Cause us to stand shoulder to shoulder for Your glory.

We also pray for our friends and family whose hearts have not been changed yet, for we know all too well that only you can make the dead come to life. Father, please open the eyes of those far from you, please let the dawning of your grace and judgment cause them to call on your name for Salvation. For those that can hear my voice today, turn and call on Jesus the Savior for He seeks true worshippers from all places on this earth. Cry out to Him, plead for His forgiveness, and seek to live shoulder to shoulder with other believers discovering a new life. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 22:19-20 ESV



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"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

That simple act of coming together in Jesus' name was passed on to God's children beyond known boundaries, from all over the world, represented in a city that we came to know well.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 ESV

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

When we partake of the bread of life we partake now as one people called from many nations, all relying on the work of Christ to make a way. We all agree that it is by His solo work in a perfect life that earned us the righteousness we could not attain. That instead of another tower of man's solidarity Jesus constructs a new way, His life, lived for us, to bring us back to God. All praise to Jesus who graciously has brought us back into the presence of our Father!

The juice we drink today is the symbol of the blood of the New Covenant. That when God rose up in indignation, He poured the wrath deserved by us on His Son. By participating in this act of the Lord's Supper we claim that yes, indeed we have, "Cried out on the Name of the Lord" and we celebrate His work of bearing judgment and granting us mercy. All praise to our rightful King by whose sacrifice we are saved!

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

* The Congregation will stand and recites:

LBCF 1689 Chapter 26 Of the Church Paragraph 5 The Purpose of Local Churches



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To carry out the authority given to him, the Lord Jesus calls people out of the world who are given to Him by his Father through the ministry of his word, by his Spirit. 9 He calls them to walk before him in all the ways of obedience that he prescribes for them in his Word. 10 He commands all who are called to walk together in local congregations, or churches, to edify one another and participate in the elements of public worship that he requires from them while they are in the world. 11

9. John 10:16; John 12:32

10. Matthew 28:20

11. Matthew 18:15-20

[OFFERING+LAST SONG]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that has opened our eyes and has changed our hearts by doing what no one else can do, raising the dead.

Go in the name of the Son, who creates in us a pure speech, by paying for our sins, redeeming us from the nations, and making us by grace into one people.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that now continues to purify our speech so that we may go into this world and call others to follow the one true God, bringing in the offering that He so desires.



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[FELLOWSHIP CONVERSATIONS]

1. What does it mean that God gives His people "pure speech"?
2. How is Zephaniah 3:9 a reversal of what happened at Babel?
3. Why is calling on the name of the Lord more than just using better words?
4. What does this passage teach us about God gathering worshipers from all nations?
5. How should this text shape the way we worship, speak, and live together as God's people?"



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