

# The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 9: The Lord Your God Is in Your Midst; A Purified Remnant

### Zephaniah 3:9-20

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This final lesson handles the book's glorious turn to restoration and rejoicing, and it carries the study's most important doctrinal guardrail. What is at stake is the right reading of Old Testament restoration prophecy. The promises here, a purified people, a gathered remnant, return from captivity, renown among the nations, and above all 'the Lord in the midst of thee,' are fulfilled in Christ, the gospel age, and His church (spiritual Israel drawn from every nation), not in a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel or a millennial reign. You must teach this positively and clearly, showing from the New Testament how each strand is taken up: the pure language and unified calling on God's name at Pentecost and in the church (Acts 2; Zephaniah 3:9), the humble remnant as the church (1 Peter 2:9-10; the poor in spirit of Matthew 5:3), God in the midst fulfilled in Immanuel and Christ's indwelling of His people, and the gathering and renown fulfilled spiritually (Ephesians 2; Hebrews 12:22-24). Guard the class explicitly against premillennial and dispensational readings, while keeping the tone warm and worshipful rather than merely polemical.

The formational aim is to land the whole study in joy and security grounded in God's presence and delight. The climactic promise that God 'will rejoice over thee with joy... will joy over thee with singing' is one of the most heart-shaping verses in Scripture. Many believers carry a picture of God as stern, reluctant, or barely tolerant of them; this passage shatters that picture with the image of a God who sings over His people. Aim to free your students from fear ('Fear thou not') and from a joyless, shame-bound faith, and to settle them in the love of the God who is in their midst. Tie it to the humble remnant theme: God delights not in our strength but in our trusting refuge in Him.

Since this closes the study, draw the threads of all three prophets together: the God who is slow to anger and great in power (Nahum), the God to whom we learn to say 'yet I will rejoice' (Habakkuk), and the God whose great day ends in His singing over a redeemed people (Zephaniah). Point throughout to Christ, in whom all these promises find their yes (2 Corinthians 1:20), and send your students out trusting, living by faith, and resting in the God who is in their midst.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*After all the judgment, God promises to give the peoples "a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:9). How does this*

*promise of a restored, unified people calling on God's name find its fulfillment in the gospel and the church, gathered from every nation in Christ (Acts 2; Ephesians 2:13-22)?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 9 marks the great turn: 'then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.' After judgment, God promises a restored, purified, unified people who call on His name together. This is the place to establish the lesson's central doctrinal point.

Teach the fulfillment in the gospel and the church. The reversal of Babel's scattered tongues begins at Pentecost, where people of every language hear the gospel and call on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:1-21), and where Peter tells them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The 'pure language' and the 'one consent' are realized in the worldwide church united in Christ.

Show that this is spiritual Israel, not national Israel. Ephesians 2:13-22 declares that in Christ, Jew and Gentile are made one new people, 'fellowcitizens with the saints,' built together into 'an habitation of God through the Spirit.' The gathered, unified people Zephaniah foresaw is the church drawn from every nation, calling on the one name of the Lord.

Set the guardrail plainly but warmly. Because the New Testament locates the fulfillment here, in Christ and His church, we should not read this as a prediction of a future earthly, political kingdom. The promise is being fulfilled now, every time people of every tongue call on the Lord with one heart. Apply it as a call to value the unity of God's people and our shared calling on His name.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The purified, unified people calling on God's name fulfilled at Pentecost and in the church (Acts 2:1-21, 38).
- The reversal of Babel: many tongues united in calling on the Lord.
- Jew and Gentile made one new people in Christ (Ephesians 2:13-22).
- Spiritual Israel, the church from every nation, not national Israel.
- Guarding against a future earthly-kingdom reading; the promise is fulfilled now.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How is the promise of a unified people calling on God's name fulfilled in the church?
- How does Ephesians 2 show the gathering Zephaniah foresaw?
- Why does the New Testament keep us from reading this as a future political kingdom?

### **Question 2**

**Student Question:**

*God promises to leave “an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord” (Zephaniah 3:12). Why does God’s restored people consist of the humble and lowly rather than the proud and strong, and where do you need to embrace your own ‘poverty of spirit’ as the doorway to trusting Him?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 12 describes the people God preserves: ‘I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.’ God’s remnant is humble and lowly, not proud and strong. This self-examining question turns the remnant theme inward.

Teach why God’s people are the humble. Throughout the study we have seen that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). The proud trust themselves; the ‘afflicted and poor’ have nothing to trust but the Lord, and so they actually trust Him. Their poverty is the doorway to their faith.

Connect it to the first Beatitude. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:3). The kingdom belongs to those who know their need, not to the self-sufficient. Zephaniah’s ‘afflicted and poor people’ are the poor in spirit who inherit the kingdom.

Apply it personally and gently. Many resist embracing their own weakness and need, equating it with failure. But poverty of spirit is not something to overcome; it is the very condition God blesses. Invite students to stop hiding their neediness and to let it become the doorway to deeper trust in the name of the Lord.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God’s remnant as the humble and lowly, not the proud and strong.
- Poverty of spirit as the doorway to trust (James 4:6).
- The first Beatitude: the kingdom for the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).
- Embracing weakness and need rather than hiding it.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God’s restored people consist of the humble rather than the strong?
- How is your own neediness a doorway to trusting God rather than a failure?
- Where do you need to embrace poverty of spirit this week?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*The remnant is described as those who “shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies... for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid” (Zephaniah 3:13). What does this picture of a purified, secure, unafraid people teach about what God is making His church to be, and how is this being worked out in us now?*

## Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 paints the character and security of the remnant: 'The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.' God is making a purified people marked by integrity and rested security.

Teach what God is forming His people to be. Note the moral transformation: no iniquity, no lies, no deceitful tongue. This is the holiness God works in His church (Ephesians 5:25-27, Christ cleansing the church to present it without spot). And note the security: they feed and lie down unafraid, like a flock safe under its shepherd.

Show that this is being worked out now and completed later. The church is even now being purified and is learning to rest secure in Christ, though imperfectly; the full realization, no more sin, no more fear, comes at last in glory (Revelation 21:4, 27). We live between the 'already' of beginning transformation and the 'not yet' of its completion.

Apply it to growth and assurance. God is genuinely changing His people, so we pursue truthfulness and integrity as those being made new; and God genuinely keeps His people, so we can rest unafraid under the Shepherd's care. Invite students to cooperate with the purifying work and to receive the security God offers.

## Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God forming a purified people marked by integrity and truthfulness (Ephesians 5:25-27).
- The security of the flock: fed, at rest, unafraid under the Shepherd.
- The 'already and not yet': transformation begun now, completed in glory (Revelation 21:4, 27).
- Pursuing holiness and resting in God's keeping.

## Discussion Prompts

- What is God making His church to be, according to this verse?
- How are integrity and security both marks of God's people?
- Where do you need to cooperate with God's purifying work or rest in His keeping?

## Question 4

### Student Question:

*Zephaniah calls God's people to "sing... shout... be glad and rejoice with all the heart" because the Lord has taken away their judgments (Zephaniah 3:14-15). When was the last time your heart truly rejoiced in what God has done for you, and what tends to rob you of the joy that should mark the redeemed?*

## Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 14-15 break into command: 'Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart... The Lord hath taken away thy judgments.' The proper response to God's salvation is wholehearted joy. This self-examining question asks whether that joy marks the student's life.

Teach that joy is the fitting response of the redeemed. When God has taken away our judgments, removed the condemnation we deserved, joy is not optional decoration but the natural overflow of salvation. The New Testament repeatedly commands rejoicing (Philippians 4:4) precisely because we so easily lose it.

Help students diagnose what robs their joy. Common thieves are unconfessed sin, ingratitude, comparison, anxiety, busyness, and forgetting the gospel. We often live as the redeemed who have stopped rejoicing, technically saved but joyless. Naming the thief is the first step to recovering the joy.

Move toward renewed joy. The cure is to remember and rehearse what God has done: He has taken away our judgments. Invite each person to recall a specific way God has saved and blessed them, to thank Him deliberately, and to identify one joy-thief to address this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Joy as the fitting response of the redeemed (Philippians 4:4).
- Salvation as the removal of our deserved judgments.
- Common thieves of joy: unconfessed sin, ingratitude, comparison, anxiety.
- Recovering joy by remembering and rehearsing what God has done.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When did your heart last truly rejoice in what God has done for you?
- What tends to rob you of the joy that should mark the redeemed?
- What is one way to recover that joy this week?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*The ground of the people's joy is that "the Lord, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee" (Zephaniah 3:15, 3:17). How is this promise of God's presence in the midst of His people fulfilled in Christ (Immanuel, 'God with us') and in His dwelling in the church, and why should this make us hold any reading that postpones God's kingdom to a future earthly reign?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The ground of all this joy is named twice: 'the Lord, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee' (verses 15, 17). God's presence among His people is the source of their security, holiness, and joy. This

is the heaviest doctrinal moment of the lesson alongside the restoration theme, so connect it firmly to Christ.

Teach the fulfillment in Christ. The promise of God dwelling in the midst of His people reaches its climax in the incarnation: Jesus is Immanuel, 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23). In Christ, God came and dwelt among us (John 1:14). After His ascension, He dwells in His people by the Spirit, for the church is 'an habitation of God through the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:22), and Christ is 'in the midst' wherever His people gather (Matthew 18:20).

Draw the guardrail clearly. Because 'God in the midst' is fulfilled in Christ's presence with and within His church now, we must reject any scheme that postpones God's kingdom and presence to a future earthly reign. The promise is not waiting for a millennial temple; it is realized in Christ dwelling among His people today, and consummated when 'the tabernacle of God is with men' in the new creation (Revelation 21:3).

Apply it to assurance and worship. The deepest reality of the Christian life is that God is with us and in us. This is the answer to fear (next question), the source of joy, and the ground of holiness. Invite students to live in the conscious reality of God's presence in their midst.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God in the midst of His people fulfilled in Christ, Immanuel (Matthew 1:23; John 1:14).
- Christ dwelling in His church by the Spirit now (Ephesians 2:22; Matthew 18:20).
- A clear rejection of postponing God's presence and kingdom to a future earthly reign.
- Consummation in the new creation: God's tabernacle with men (Revelation 21:3).
- God's presence as the ground of security, holiness, and joy.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How is the promise 'the Lord is in the midst of thee' fulfilled in Christ?
- Why does this fulfillment in Christ keep us from a future earthly-kingdom reading?
- How would living in the conscious reality of God's presence change your day?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*God says, "Fear thou not... let not thine hands be slack" (Zephaniah 3:16). Where is fear making your hands 'slack,' causing you to shrink back from what God is calling you to, and how does the truth that God is in your midst free you to act in faith?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 16 gives a tender command: 'Fear thou not... let not thine hands be slack.' Fear makes hands slack; it causes us to shrink back, to stop working, to give up. This self-examining question addresses fear that paralyzes.

Help students name where fear is making their hands slack. Fear of failure keeps us from attempting what God calls us to; fear of people keeps us silent; fear of the future keeps us anxious and passive; fear of rejection keeps us from loving boldly. Fear does not just feel bad; it stops good.

Teach the remedy named in the text: 'the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty' (verse 17). The cure for fear is not self-confidence but God's presence. Because the mighty God is with us, we need not be paralyzed. This is the logic of Scripture's repeated 'fear not': it is grounded in 'I am with thee' (Isaiah 41:10).

Move toward faith-filled action. Invite each person to identify one place where fear is making their hands slack and one step of obedience they will take, trusting that the mighty God is in their midst. Faith is fear that has heard 'the Lord is with you' and acts anyway.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Fear that makes our hands slack and causes us to shrink back.
- The many forms of paralyzing fear: of failure, people, the future, rejection.
- God's presence, not self-confidence, as the cure for fear (Isaiah 41:10).
- Faith as obedient action grounded in 'the Lord is with you.'

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is fear making your hands 'slack' right now?
- How does the presence of the mighty God address that fear?
- What step of obedience will you take trusting that God is in your midst?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*The most astonishing promise in the book is that God Himself "will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). What does it reveal about God's heart that He not only saves His people but delights in them, and how does this guard us against viewing God as merely stern or reluctant?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 17 is the summit of the book and one of the most astonishing verses in Scripture: 'he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.' God does not merely tolerate or save His people; He delights in them and sings over them.

Teach what this reveals about God's heart. We readily believe God is just, even that He is willing to forgive, but many struggle to believe He actually delights in them. This verse shows a God whose love is not grudging but glad, who rejoices over His people the way a bridegroom rejoices over a bride (Isaiah 62:5) or a father over a found child (Luke 15:7, 22-24).

Correct the distorted picture. Many believers carry an image of God as stern, disappointed, or barely tolerant of them, always slightly displeased. This verse shatters that. The God who sings over His people is not reluctant; His love rests, settles, and overflows in song. Let students sit with the wonder of being delighted in.

Guard it from sentimentality. This delight is not indulgence that ignores sin; it is the joy of a holy God over a people He has purified and gathered to Himself. It is costly delight, secured for us in Christ. Apply it to assurance: invite students to receive that they are not merely tolerated but treasured, and to let that reshape how they relate to God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God not merely saving but delighting in His people (Isaiah 62:5).
- The gladness of God's love: He rests in it and sings over them.
- Correcting the false image of a stern, reluctant, barely-tolerant God.
- Delight that is holy and costly, secured in Christ, not mere indulgence (Luke 15).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it stir in you to picture God singing over you with delight?
- How does this compare to the way you usually imagine God feels about you?
- How might receiving God's delight reshape your relationship with Him?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*God promises to deal with the proud and oppressors and to save "her that halteth," gathering "her that was driven out," turning shame into praise (Zephaniah 3:18-19). Where do you carry shame or a sense of being an outsider, and how does God's promise to gather and honor the lowly speak to that place in you?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 18-19 show God's special care for the wounded: 'I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.' God gathers the limping, the outcast, the shamed, and turns their shame into praise. This self-examining question speaks to those who carry shame.

Help students name their shame and sense of being outsiders. Many carry private shame, over past sin, over failures, over things done to them, and many feel like outsiders, never quite belonging. Zephaniah's words are aimed precisely at such people: 'her that halteth,' 'her that was driven out,' 'where they have been put to shame.'

Teach God's pattern of reversal for the shamed. God does not merely tolerate the wounded; He gathers them, saves them, and turns their shame into praise and fame. The gospel does this

fully: 'whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed' (Romans 10:11); those who were 'not a people' become 'the people of God' (1 Peter 2:10).

Apply it with tenderness. The God who gathers the limping and the outcast is gathering your students. Invite each person to bring one place of shame or exclusion to God, and to receive His promise to gather, save, and honor those the world overlooked. This is the gospel reaching the most tender places of the heart.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's special care for the limping, the outcast, the shamed.
- God turning shame into praise (Romans 10:11).
- Those who were 'not a people' becoming the people of God (1 Peter 2:10).
- The gospel reaching the tender places of shame and exclusion.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do you carry shame or a sense of being an outsider?
- How does God's promise to gather and honor the lowly speak to that place?
- What would it mean to let God turn your shame into praise?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*The book ends with God promising to "gather you... make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity" (Zephaniah 3:20). How does the New Testament teach us to read these restoration promises, gathering, renown, return from captivity, as fulfilled spiritually in Christ and His church rather than in a future political restoration of national Israel (1 Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 6:16; Hebrews 12:22-23)?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, gathering the closing promises of verse 20: 'I will gather you... I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity.' Gathering, renown, and return from captivity are exactly the language some read as a future political restoration of national Israel, so teach the right reading clearly.

Establish the New Testament fulfillment positively. The gathering of God's people is fulfilled in Christ gathering His church from every nation (John 11:52, Jesus would 'gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad'). The renown and honor are fulfilled in the church as 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9). The return from captivity is fulfilled spiritually in our deliverance from the bondage of sin (Luke 4:18; Colossians 1:13).

Show that the church is the Israel of God. Paul calls believers 'the Israel of God' (Galatians 6:16); the true children of Abraham are those of faith (Galatians 3:7, 29); believers have come to 'mount Zion... the heavenly Jerusalem' and to 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn' (Hebrews 12:22-23). The restoration promises are fulfilled in this spiritual reality, not in an earthly political kingdom.

Set the guardrail explicitly, consistent with sound teaching. We reject premillennial and dispensational schemes that postpone these promises to a future thousand-year reign or a restored national Israel. The kingdom came with Christ and was established when His church began at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44); Christ reigns now from the Father's right hand. The prophets' glorious restoration language is being fulfilled in the gospel age and will be consummated, not in an earthly Jerusalem, but in the new heavens and new earth and the heavenly city (Revelation 21).

Apply it with hope. Far from diminishing these promises, the New Testament fulfillment makes them greater: a people gathered from all nations, given honor in Christ, freed from a deeper captivity than Babylon, dwelling forever with God. Invite students to read these promises as their own inheritance in Christ and to rejoice in belonging to the gathered, honored people of God.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Gathering fulfilled in Christ gathering His church from every nation (John 11:52).
- Renown fulfilled in the church as a royal priesthood and holy nation (1 Peter 2:9).
- Return from captivity fulfilled in deliverance from sin (Luke 4:18; Colossians 1:13).
- The church as the Israel of God and children of Abraham by faith (Galatians 6:16; 3:7, 29; Hebrews 12:22-23).
- An explicit rejection of premillennial and dispensational readings; the kingdom came with Christ at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Daniel 2:44).
- Consummation in the new heavens and earth and the heavenly city, not an earthly Jerusalem (Revelation 21).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the New Testament fulfill the promises of gathering, renown, and return?
- Why is the church rightly understood as the Israel of God?
- How does seeing these promises fulfilled in Christ make them greater, not smaller?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back over this closing passage and the whole study of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you, through these three prophets, to trust the God*

*who is just and good, to live by faith, and to rest in the God who is in your midst, becoming more like Christ in whom every promise finds its yes.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone question closes both the lesson and the entire study, asking students to respond to all three prophets together. The aim is a settled trust in the God revealed across Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and a life of faith resting in His presence.

Draw the threads together. Nahum showed us the God who is slow to anger and great in power, just toward evil and a refuge to those who trust Him. Habakkuk taught us to bring our hardest questions to God and to say 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord' when everything fails, living by faith. Zephaniah warned us against complacency, called us to seek the Lord humbly, and ended with God singing over His redeemed people. Together they give us a God worthy of complete trust.

Point to Christ as the yes to every promise. 'All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen' (2 Corinthians 1:20). The justice of Nahum, the faith of Habakkuk, and the restoration and presence of Zephaniah all converge in Christ, in whom God is just and the justifier, in whom the righteous live by faith, and in whom God is forever 'with us' and delights over His people. To become like Christ is the goal toward which the whole study has pointed.

Invite a concrete, summarizing commitment. Ask each person to name one way these three prophets have changed how they see God and one specific way they will trust, obey, or rest in Him going forward. Encourage them to carry one verse with them, perhaps Habakkuk 3:17-18 or Zephaniah 3:17, as a lasting anchor. Close the study not in fear but, as the book itself does, in joy.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- A settled trust in the God revealed across all three prophets.
- Nahum's just and good God, Habakkuk's life of faith, Zephaniah's present and delighting God.
- Christ as the yes to every promise of God (2 Corinthians 1:20).
- Becoming like Christ as the goal of the whole study.
- Ending the study, like the book, in joy rather than fear.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How have these three prophets changed the way you see God?
- What is one specific way you will trust, obey, or rest in Him going forward?
- Which verse from this study will you carry with you as an anchor?