

Worship Material
Joyful news
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 15th December

Begin with an opening prayer

Lord, we trust you,
you are our strength and salvation.
We trust in you and come to you for refreshing.
We will shout aloud, sing for joy
and tell everyone how great you are.
Amen.

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20

Bible notes

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of the reforming King Josiah (Zephaniah 1:1; 640-609 BC). He is known for his striking images of 'the day of the Lord' (e.g. 1:14-18), which brings God's judgement on Jerusalem's enemies and salvation for his humble people. Some of these images are particularly disturbing whenever there is war in the Middle East, and God is seen as 'the king of Israel' (v.15) in the midst of Jerusalem, 'a warrior who gives victory' (v.17). So, we must take great care how we interpret this short book. These closing verses call for rejoicing because God's people are no longer living under the divine judgement that had them deported from their ancestral land to Babylon. During this exile, they would have been aware of the oppressive presence of a foreign king dominating their daily existence. But now it is not their enemies but 'the king of Israel, the Lord [who] is in your midst' (v.15). In their world, the most powerful are those with the biggest armies and the most effective fighters. So, it is not surprising that Zephaniah pictures the Lord as he does. But he modifies his image: 'he will renew you in his love' (v.17). His people's 60-year exile was ended by the Persian king Cyrus seizing power in Babylon in 539 BC. He then allowed exiled nations to return home. Isaiah 44:24ff (which most scholars date towards the end of the exile) sees Cyrus as the Lord's anointed. The return home is the reason for the gladness seen at festival times (vv.17-18). Joy renews confidence, removes fear and shame, and holds out the prospect of national renewal. This is good news, especially for

those who feel particularly excluded, such as the lame and the outcast, who can now believe that they too have a future.

Prayer

God of all,
we praise you for your life-giving promises;
for your life-changing word;
for the joy of knowing you are in our midst;
for the joy of knowing you love us,
and for the joy of knowing you will never let us go,
not today, not ever!

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

Lord, may we go forward in hope, love and joy.
May our lives bring joy to you and to those around us.
Help us to change when we need to
and give us joy in repenting.

Amen.