

Zephaniah 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies—this verse describes the purified remnant's moral character. "Remnant" (she'erit Yisra'el, שְׁאֵרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל) refers to those preserved through judgment, the faithful subset surviving divine winnowing. "Shall not do iniquity" (lo ya'asu avlah, לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ עֲוֹלָה) uses avlah (עֲוֹלָה) meaning injustice, unrighteousness, or wrong—particularly social and economic oppression. The remnant practices covenant justice toward others. "Nor speak lies" (ve-lo yedaberu khazav, וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ כָזָב) condemns falsehood, deception, and dishonest speech—contrasting with corrupt leaders and false prophets (3:4).

Neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth—ve-lo yimatse beppihem leshon tarmit (וְלֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּפִיהֶם לָשׁוֹן תַּרְמִית) intensifies the point through parallelism. "Deceitful tongue" (leshon tarmit, לָשׁוֹן תַּרְמִית) emphasizes fraudulent, crafty speech designed to deceive and exploit. The phrase "shall not be found" suggests thorough examination reveals no hidden deceit—complete internal and external integrity. This describes regenerate hearts producing righteous words and deeds (Matthew 12:34-35, James 3:2-12).

For they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid—ki-hemah yir'u ve-ravesu ve-en macharid (כִּי־הֵמָּה יִרְעוּ וְיִרְבְּצוּ וְאֵין מַחְרִיד) uses pastoral imagery of secure sheep. "Feed" (ra'ah, רָעָה) means to pasture or graze, suggesting abundant provision. "Lie down" (ravats, רָבַץ) depicts rest and security—

sheep lying down signals no predator threat. "None shall make them afraid" promises freedom from terror, anxiety, and danger. This echoes covenant blessings (Leviticus 26:6, Ezekiel 34:25-28) and anticipates the Good Shepherd's provision (Psalm 23, John 10:11-18). The remnant's righteousness produces security; walking in God's ways brings peace (Isaiah 32:17-18). This contrasts with the wicked who "are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest...There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20-21).

Historical Context

Zephaniah's description of the righteous remnant contrasts sharply with pre-exilic Jerusalem characterized by injustice, lies, and deceit (3:1-4). The exile purged corruption, producing a faithful remnant committed to covenant obedience. Historical fulfillment began with the post-exilic community. Jews returning from Babylon showed remarkable transformation: permanent abandonment of idolatry, renewed commitment to Torah, emphasis on justice and truth. Ezra and Nehemiah record the community's covenant renewal and commitment to righteous living (Nehemiah 9-10).

This didn't mean sinless perfection—post-exilic books address ongoing struggles with intermarriage, Sabbath-breaking, and neglect of temple support. Yet the character transformation was real: the besetting sins of pre-exilic Israel (idolatry, false prophecy, social oppression) largely disappeared. The community that preserved Scripture, maintained worship, and prepared for Messiah's coming demonstrated the remnant character Zephaniah prophesied.

The New Testament church inherits remnant identity. Paul identifies believers as the true Israel, the remnant chosen by grace (Romans 9:6-8, 11:1-5). Peter describes the church using language previously applied to Israel: chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). The remnant's characteristics—righteousness, truthfulness, security—should mark believers, though full realization awaits glorification. Sanctification progressively conforms believers to this pattern; glorification will complete it when Christ returns and sin is finally removed (1 John 3:2-3, Revelation 21:27).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does this description of the remnant's character—no iniquity, no lies, no deceit—serve as both encouragement and diagnostic for examining personal holiness?
2. What is the relationship between the remnant's righteousness and their security/peace, and how does this inform Christian living?
3. How should the church corporately embody remnant identity through commitment to truth, justice, and integrity?

Interlinear Text

כִּזְבִּי	וְלֹא	יְדַבֵּר	וְלֹא	עֲוֹלָה	יַעַשׂ	וְלֹא	יִשְׁכַּח	לְ	שְׂאֵר	יֵת
lies	nor speak	iniquity	shall not do	of Israel	The remnant					
H3577	H1696	H3808	H5766		H3478		H3808		H7611	
הִמָּה	כִּי	תִהְיֶה	יֵת	לֹשׁוֹן	בְּפִיהֶם	יִמָּצֵא	וְלֹא			
neither shall a deceitful	tongue	in their mouth	be found							
H8649	H3956	H6310	H4672				H3808			
מִמֶּהֱיָאֵל:	וְאֵין	וְיִכְבְּצוּ	וְיֵרָעוּ							
and none shall make them afraid		and lie down	for they shall feed							
H2729		H7257	H7462							

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 14:5 (Parallel theme): And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Isaiah 60:21 (Parallel theme): Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

Micah 4:7 (Parallel theme): And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

Zephaniah 2:7 (Parallel theme): And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

Isaiah 17:2 (Parallel theme): The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

Micah 4:4 (Parallel theme): But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

Isaiah 54:14 (Parallel theme): In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.

Jeremiah 30:10 (References Israel): Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.

Jeremiah 31:33 (References Israel): But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 23:4 (Parallel theme): And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.

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