

Zephaniah 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

Analysis

The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy—this verse provides the foundation for celebration commanded in verse 14. "Taken away thy judgments" (heysir Yahweh mishpatayikh, הַסִּיר יְהוָה מִשְׁפָטֶיךָ) uses sur (סֻר) meaning to remove, turn aside, or take away. "Judgments" (mishpatim, מִשְׁפָטִים) refers to judicial verdicts and covenant curses—God has removed the sentence and punishment that Jerusalem's sin merited. This is judicial forgiveness, not merely disciplinary relief.

"Cast out thine enemy" (pinnah oyvekh, פִּנְחָה אֹיְבֶךָ) uses panah (פָּנָה) meaning to turn, clear away, or sweep aside. "Enemy" (oyev, אֹיֶב) could be literal military enemies (Babylon, Assyria, etc.) or spiritual enemies (Satan, sin, death). God's decisive action removes both judgment and threat, creating complete security. This points ultimately to Christ's work: removing judgment by bearing it Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24) and defeating spiritual enemies through death and resurrection (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14-15).

The king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee—melekh Yisra'el Yahweh beqirbek (מלך יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּךְ) identifies Yahweh as Israel's true king dwelling among His people. "In the midst" (beqirbek, בְּקִרְבָּךְ) repeats the phrase from 3:3, 5, 11, 12, 17—central to the chapter's theology. Previously, God was "in the midst" while corruption surrounded Him (3:5); now, the purified remnant enjoys His presence without contamination. **"Thou shalt not see evil any more"**

(lo-tir'i ra od, לֹא־תִּרְאִי כַּע עַד promises permanent security—"no more" indicates final, lasting deliverance. This anticipates the new creation where "there shall be no more curse" (Revelation 22:3) and "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

Historical Context

This verse addresses the theological crisis of exile. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple (586 BC), it appeared God had abandoned His people and covenant. Where was Israel's divine king? Ezekiel witnessed God's glory departing the temple due to sin (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:22-23). The exile raised agonizing questions: Had God's promises failed? Was covenant relationship terminated? The answer: No—God removed His presence due to sin, but He would return after purifying His people through judgment.

Post-exilic return brought partial restoration. The rebuilt temple and renewed worship represented God's presence "in the midst" again (Ezra 6:14-16, Haggai 1:13, 2:4-5). However, the prophets indicated this wasn't full realization. Haggai declared the latter temple's glory would exceed the former (Haggai 2:9)—fulfilled not in the physical structure but in Christ's presence in it. Zechariah prophesied, "Sing and rejoice...I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee" (Zechariah 2:10)—ultimately fulfilled in the incarnation.

The New Testament proclaims full realization in Christ. Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23)—God literally dwelling among His people. Jesus declared, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9)—Israel's divine king appeared in flesh. Post-resurrection, Christ dwells "in the midst" through the Spirit (John 14:16-17, Matthew 18:20, Revelation 1:13). Ultimate fulfillment awaits the new Jerusalem where God dwells eternally with His people (Revelation 21:3, 22:23), and evil is permanently banished (Revelation 21:27, 22:3).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does understanding Christ as "the king of Israel, even the LORD, in the midst" transform your comprehension of the incarnation and His present spiritual presence?
2. What does "thou shalt not see evil any more" teach about the permanence and completeness of salvation's ultimate fulfillment?
3. How should the certainty of future complete deliverance from evil sustain hope and faithfulness during present trials?

Interlinear Text

הָסֵר יְהֹוָה מִשְׁפָט יְהֹוָה פָּגַע בְּ אָיָב בְּ תְּלִבָּה
hath taken away The LORD thy judgments he hath cast out thine enemy the king
H5493 H3068 H4941 H6437 H341 H4428

לְאָשָׁר לֹא תִּירְאָה כִּי־בְּקָרְבֵּן יְהֹוָה כִּי־יְשָׁרָאֵל
of Israel The LORD is in the midst of thee thou shalt not see evil
H3478 H3068 H7130 H3808 H7200 H7451

:תְּלִבָּה

H5750

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 51:22 (References Lord): Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again:

Ezekiel 39:29 (References Lord): Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Amos 9:15 (References Lord): And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

Zephaniah 3:5 (Judgment): The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.

Isaiah 60:18 (Parallel theme): Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.

Isaiah 33:22 (Judgment): For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

Psalms 85:3 (Judgment): Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

Zechariah 12:3 (Parallel theme): And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

Zechariah 14:11 (Parallel theme): And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

John 1:49 (Kingdom): Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.