

Zephaniah 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity—divine contrast illuminates human corruption. While Jerusalem's leaders are predatory lions, ravenous wolves, reckless prophets, and faithless priests (verses 3-4), Yahweh remains tsaddiq (צַדִּיק), perfectly righteous. "In the midst" (beqirbah, בְּקִרְבָּה) emphasizes God's intimate presence among His people, the same phrase used for His promised restoration (3:15, 17). God dwells among corruption without being corrupted—His holiness remains untainted by surrounding evil.

Every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not—God's faithfulness contrasts with leaders' treachery. "Every morning" (baboqer baboqer, בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר) repeats boqer for emphasis: morning by morning, with absolute regularity and reliability. "Brings his judgment to light" (mishpato yitten la-or, מִשְׁפָּטוֹ יִתֵּן לְאוֹר) uses mishpat, meaning justice, judgment, or ordinance. God continually reveals His righteous standards through creation's order, conscience, law, prophets, and providential acts. "He faileth not" (lo ne'dar, לֹא נִעְדָּר)—He never fails, is never absent, never neglects His just government.

But the unjust knoweth no shame—the indictment returns to human depravity. The Hebrew ve-lo yodea aval bosheth (וְלֹא יוֹדֵעַ אָוֶל בּוֹשֶׁת) describes the wicked as shameless despite persistent exposure to God's righteous standards. They "know no shame" because conscience has been seared, moral sensitivity destroyed through persistent sin. This describes judicial hardening: repeated rejection of

revealed truth results in inability to perceive truth or feel appropriate guilt. Paul describes the same condition: having conscience "seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2) and being "past feeling" (Ephesians 4:19).

Historical Context

This verse captures the theological tension of the exile period: How could righteous Yahweh dwell among corrupt Jerusalem? God's "midst" presence referred to the temple, His chosen dwelling (1 Kings 8:10-13, Psalm 132:13-14). Yet that same temple had been defiled by idolatry, corruption, and injustice. The prophet Ezekiel, Zephaniah's younger contemporary, had a vision of God's glory departing the temple due to abominations (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:22-23)—divine withdrawal from the "midst" because the people's sin made His presence impossible.

God's morning-by-morning faithfulness manifested through multiple means: the regular sacrificial system (Exodus 29:38-42) pictured atonement and restoration; natural cycles revealed divine order and reliability (Lamentations 3:22-23, "new every morning"); prophetic warnings came repeatedly, calling the people to repentance. Yet the leadership and people progressively hardened their hearts. Archaeological evidence shows continued syncretism despite reformist efforts. Ostraca and inscriptions reveal people swearing by Yahweh and Asherah together—shameless covenant violation while maintaining religious profession.

The pattern warns of judicial hardening: when people persistently reject revealed truth, God eventually gives them over to their chosen rebellion (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). The shameless unjust become increasingly unable to perceive their own corruption. This makes repentance humanly impossible—only sovereign grace can penetrate hardened hearts. The remnant preserved through exile demonstrates that salvation belongs to the Lord (Jonah 2:9), not human responsiveness.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God's perfect justice "in the midst" of human corruption provide both comfort and warning for the church today?
2. What are signs that individuals or communities have reached the dangerous condition of knowing "no shame" despite clear violation of God's revealed will?
3. How should the church respond when confronted with people who have become hardened through persistent sin and rejection of truth?

Interlinear Text

יְהוָה ה	צַדִּיק ה	בְּקִרְבּוֹ ה	ל א	יַעֲשֶׂה ה	עוֹלָה ה
LORD	The just	is in the midst	H3808	thereof he will not do	iniquity
H3068	H6662	H7130		H6213	H5766
בְּבֹקֶר	בְּבֹקֶר	מִשְׁפָּט ו	יָבִי	לְאוֹר	ל א
every morning	every morning	his judgment	doth he bring	to light	H3808
H1242	H1242	H4941	H5414	H216	
נָעַד ר	וְלֹא	יָדַע	עַל	בְּשֹׁמֶל:	
he faileth	H3808	knoweth	not but the unjust	no shame	
H5737		H3045	H5767	H1322	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:4 (Righteousness): He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

Lamentations 3:23 (Parallel theme): They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Psalms 145:17 (Righteousness): The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Isaiah 28:19 (Parallel theme): From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.

Zephaniah 3:15 (Judgment): 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.

Isaiah 12:6 (Parallel theme): Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

Deuteronomy 23:14 (References Lord): For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.

Zephaniah 3:17 (Sin): The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Psalms 37:6 (Righteousness): And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

Job 34:10 (Sin): Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.