



## LAUGHING WITH JOY

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

(Nehemiah 8:10)



What makes God laugh? We do, of course! Has it ever occurred to you that He does laugh? Or does God seem much too serious and stern to ever join us in laughter?

As much as we laugh at our children, knowing so well their personalities, strengths, and weaknesses, why would God not be amused at our antics, even knowing in advance what we are going to say and do? I think that God thoroughly enjoys good humor, enjoys a good laugh, and loves to see us enjoying it as well.

Joy and laughter are part of God's plan for us. Consider these verses from God's Word:

- > "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).
- > "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!" (Ps. 32:11).
- > "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. . . Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matt. 25:23).
- > "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).
- > "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

### LAUGHING WITH GOD

How one laughs with the Lord is as individual and private a decision as how one prays. Laughing is an expression of joy that comes from the heart of God Himself. Humor is encouraging and edifying to the body of Christ. The Bible says, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Col. 3:23). Laughter comes under the category of *whatever!* Humor exhibits the joy, the passion, and the adventure of the Christian life.

The key is that the humor of one who knows God is decidedly different from the humor of this world:

#### Worldly Humor:

- > Glorifies sin
- > Puts down others
- > Ridicules righteousness
- > Hurts the spirit

#### Godly Humor:

- > Avoids offense
- > Builds up others
- > Honors the Lord
- > Heals the spirit

Laughter and music are two of God's finest gifts. They give us the ability to express our inner feelings about God with a sense of joy, anticipation, and participation. The Bible reminds us, "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

The best source of humor is right at the end of your nose. Especially if you're looking in the mirror. The ability to laugh at ourselves is a sign of maturity, of healthy self-esteem, and of having our priorities straight. Remember, God is on the throne, we are on the ground. *Humble*, *humus*, and *human* are words well-suited to our earthly imperfection compared to God's heavenly perfection. Our richest resource for laughter can be found in our merry hearts and lives.

### EMOTION

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## EMOTIONAL HEALING

Even more emotionally healing than laughing at ourselves the moment something happens is to be able to continue to laugh about it as the story is repeated. A few years ago, a woman told me just such a story. Someone had given her a plant as a gift. She watered it, fed it plant food, and even set it outdoors in good weather—only to discover two years later that she had been watering a silk plant! Her family still gets a laugh out of that story today.

Laughter can be very healing. People in the medical field tell us what the Bible has declared all along: "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22). We can make a choice to be upset, or talk about sour grapes, or be embarrassed to the point of being downright angry about a situation—or we can choose to laugh at ourselves. When we laugh, we heal.

## PHYSICAL HEALING

Laughter puts the body in a state of relaxation. In a physically relaxed state, we take our foot off the pain accelerator and put on the brakes. I think our bodies were made for laughter. Our bodies were created by an amazing God who knew that we would get broken and bruised and would need all the natural painkillers we could get. Consider these key facts about laughter:

1. Laughter is a natural pain reducer.
2. Laughter increases our ability to cope with life.
3. Laughter massages our internal organs.
4. Laughter exercises our facial muscles.
5. Laughter increases the heart rate and improves circulation.
6. Laughter oxygenates the body.
7. Laughter stimulates the immune system.

We've all been in high-stress, low-strength situations where we turn to the next per-

son and sigh, "Someday we'll laugh about this." I say, why wait? If we can see the humor potential, let's dive right in! The time and distance between the difficulty and our ability to laugh about it is what I call the "stress zone." We can't hurry the time, but we can decrease the distance between the first and the last moment we spend in the zone.

Sometimes we have to stand back to see the big picture. We have to put things in perspective. The one who knows God can even laugh in the face of death because to die with Christ in our heart is to live—and laugh—with Him, forever.

## FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of joy include:

- Psalms 30:5; 126:5
- Ecclesiastes 3:4
- Luke 2:10
- John 16:24

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on joy at Proverbs 15:13–15 on page 817. See also the personality profile of Isaac on page 31.

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- But He loves him who follows righteousness.
- 10 Harsh discipline *is* for him who forsakes the way,  
And he who hates correction will die.
- 11 Hell<sup>a</sup> and Destruction<sup>b</sup> *are* before the LORD;  
So how much more the hearts of the sons of men.
- 12 A scoffer does not love one who corrects him,  
Nor will he go to the wise.
- 13 A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance,  
But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.
- 14 The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge,  
But the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.
- 15 All the days of the afflicted *are* evil,  
But he who is of a merry heart *has* a continual feast.
- 16 Better *is* a little with the fear of the LORD,  
Than great treasure with trouble.
- 17 Better *is* a dinner of herbs<sup>a</sup> where love is,  
Than a fatted calf with hatred.
- 18 A wrathful man stirs up strife,  
But *he who is* slow to anger allays contention.
- 19 The way of the lazy *man is* like a hedge of thorns,  
But the way of the upright *is* a highway.
- 20 A wise son makes a father glad,  
But a foolish man despises his mother.
- 21 Folly *is* joy to him who is destitute of discernment,  
But a man of understanding walks uprightly.
- 22 Without counsel, plans go awry,  
But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

15:11 <sup>a</sup>Or Sheol <sup>b</sup>Hebrew Abaddon 15:17 <sup>a</sup>Or vegetables

## KEY PASSAGE



Joy

## REJOICE!

(15:13-15)

The Bible is a book of joy. God wants His people to be in right relationship with Him, and He promises that He will give them joy.

- > Jesus prayed for His followers to have His joy (John 15:11; 17:13).
- > Belief in Christ gives "joy inexpressible" (1 Pet. 1:8).
- > In a time of trial, God's people can "count it all joy" (James 1:2).
- > A fruit of the Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22).
- > Believers look forward to God's kingdom, described as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

The joy given by God should give us "a cheerful countenance" and "a merry heart" (Prov. 15:13, 15). God's people should be the most joyful people there are, because they know God, His love and salvation, and their eternal destiny. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

To Learn More: Turn to the article about joy on pages 614, 615. See also the personality profile of Isaac on page 31.

they will kill me on account of my wife. <sup>12</sup>But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup>And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' "

<sup>14</sup>Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. <sup>15</sup>And Abimelech said, "See, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." <sup>16</sup>Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed this vindicates you<sup>a</sup> before all who are with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.

<sup>17</sup>So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children*; <sup>18</sup>for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the

house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

#### ISAAC IS BORN

**21** And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. <sup>2</sup>For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup>And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. <sup>4</sup>Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, *and* all who hear will laugh with me." <sup>7</sup>She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne *him* a son in his old age."

<sup>20:16</sup> <sup>a</sup>Literally *it is a covering of the eyes for you*

### PERSONALITY PROFILE



#### Joy

## ISAAC: UNEXPECTED LAUGHTER

(GENESIS 21)

When did Isaac discover he was the punch line of a joke? His parents were so old when God informed them about his arrival that they laughed out loud. Abraham and Sarah's incredulity in the face of God's promise was best contradicted by their descendant Jesus when He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

From a human perspective, God's plan was laughable. It flew in the face of common sense. Ninety-year-old women don't get pregnant. Sarah knew about God's long-standing promise to her husband. She had even tried to make it come true by arranging for her husband to have a child with her slave Hagar. But God had other plans.

Like the unexpected final words of a hilarious comment, Sarah turned up pregnant in her old age. When Isaac was born, she named him "laughter." What else would fit a child who had caused such mirth? Sarah voiced her mixture of delight and embarrassment when she said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6).

The result of trust in God takes the form of joy, which instigates genuine laughter. The psalmist wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). Sarah may have laughed in disbelief or even in frustration as the years rolled by, but when Isaac was born, she discovered what real laughter felt like. The rich laughter that rises in those who have known God's faithfulness expresses a deep satisfaction.

God will be faithful to His promises in your life. You may have to wait, but the joy God brings will be as real to you as the laughter that finally filled Sarah's life.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about joy on pages 614, 615. See also the key passage note at Proverbs 15:13-15 on page 817.

priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. <sup>14</sup>And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, <sup>15</sup>and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

<sup>16</sup>Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup>So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. <sup>18</sup>Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

#### THE PEOPLE CONFESS THEIR SINS

**9** Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup>Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup>And they stood

up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

<sup>4</sup>Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. <sup>5</sup>And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherubiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said:

"Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!"

NEHEMIAH 9:5

"Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever!

"Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

<sup>6</sup> You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

<sup>7</sup> "You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham; <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, The Hittites, the Amorites,

9:1 <sup>a</sup>Literally earth on them

#### SOUL NOTE



**Joyous Revival (8:10)** When the Book of the Law was read to the people of Israel, they were convicted of their sins. A great revival took place as the nation recommitted itself to God. Nehemiah told them to move from sorrow over their sins to joy in hearing God's Word. "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength," he said. When we face up to the seriousness of our sin, our hearts will naturally be broken. When we realize the wonderful grace of the forgiveness of sins, however, the joy of the Lord will be our strength as well. **Topic: Joy**

The Perizzites. And the Girgashites. To give it to him. You have performed. For You are righteous.

<sup>9</sup> "You saw the affliction of Egypt, And heard the cry of the sea. <sup>10</sup> You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all his land. For You knew the heart of Pharaoh, So You made him arrogant against You. And this day, You divided the sea on his behalf, And their perils were deep, As a stone in the water. <sup>11</sup> Moreover You brought them out of Egypt, And by night, You brought them out of Egypt, Which they saw.

<sup>12</sup> "You came down from heaven, And spoke with them, And gave them laws, Good statutes, and commandments. <sup>13</sup> You made known Your Sabbath, And commanded them, By the hand of Moses Your servant, <sup>14</sup> You gave them the law of the covenant, Which they saw, And brought them out of Egypt, And told them the land, Which You swore to their fathers, saying, I will give it to you.

<sup>15</sup> "But they did not obey, Nor did they listen to My voice, Nor did they keep My commandments, Nor did they do as I commanded them. <sup>16</sup> They refused to listen to My voice, And they would not do as I commanded them. And they did not listen to My voice, And they would not do as I commanded them. That You did to them, And they did not listen to My voice, And they would not do as I commanded them.

Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, <sup>36</sup>and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. <sup>37</sup>By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.

<sup>38</sup>The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, <sup>39</sup>and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison.

<sup>40</sup>So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; <sup>41</sup>and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, <sup>42</sup>Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; <sup>43</sup>also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jchohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director.

<sup>43</sup>Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

#### TEMPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

<sup>44</sup>And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and

Levites who ministered. <sup>45</sup>Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David and Solomon his son. <sup>46</sup>For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. <sup>47</sup>In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day. They also consecrated holy things for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated them for the children of Aaron.

#### PRINCIPLES OF SEPARATION

**13** On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, <sup>2</sup>because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. <sup>3</sup>So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

#### THE REFORMS OF NEHEMIAH

<sup>4</sup>Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. <sup>5</sup>And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. <sup>6</sup>But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Bab-

12:41 <sup>a</sup>Or Mijamin (compare verse 5)



#### SOUL NOTE

**Celebrate!** (12:43) The people of Israel experienced a radical spiritual revival and national transformation as a result of the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah. Against impossible odds, the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, the temple put back into business, and the sacrifices and celebrations reinstituted. The people rejoiced with such fervor that their joy was heard in surrounding towns. When we give our lives to God to let Him work through us, we may be astounded at what He will do. God's work in and through us will be a cause for celebration, a time to "rejoice with great joy."

**Topic: Joy**

ylon I had returned days I obtained came to Jerusalem Eliashib had a room for him <sup>8</sup>And it grieved the household <sup>9</sup>Then I came rooms; and I had cles of the house ing and the fra

also realized vites had not Levites and th gone back to the rulers, and forsaken?" And set them in brought the wine and the pointed as t Shelemiah the and of the Le was Hanan th taniah; for the their task was

<sup>14</sup>Remember and do not wi done for the vices!

<sup>15</sup>In those d ing wine pres in sheaves, a grapes, figs, they brought salem on the day. And I them about d which they ing provision of Tyre dw also, who br goods, and s children of J

<sup>17</sup>Then I o dah, and said that you do bath day? I did not our on this c Israel by pro

<sup>19</sup>So it wa began to be



themselves overpowered those who hated them. <sup>2</sup>The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. <sup>3</sup>And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. <sup>4</sup>For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. <sup>5</sup>Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them.

<sup>6</sup>And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. <sup>7</sup>Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, <sup>8</sup>Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, <sup>9</sup>Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha—<sup>10</sup>the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews—they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

<sup>11</sup>On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. <sup>12</sup>And the king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done."

<sup>13</sup>Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows."

<sup>14</sup>So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

<sup>15</sup>And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

<sup>16</sup>The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

<sup>17</sup>This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth of the month<sup>a</sup> they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

#### THE FEAST OF PURIM

<sup>18</sup>But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month<sup>a</sup> they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. <sup>19</sup>Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwallied towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

<sup>20</sup>And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, <sup>21</sup>to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, <sup>22</sup>as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. <sup>23</sup>So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, <sup>24</sup>because Haman, the

9:17 <sup>a</sup>Literally *it* 9:18 <sup>a</sup>Literally *it*

#### SOUL NOTE



**Keep a Record (9:26–28)** The Jews assembled to celebrate their victory on the very day on which Haman had decreed their destruction (9:1). Haman had chosen that date by casting *purim* (lots). In an ironic twist, the Jews declared that their celebration would be called *Purim*. Mordecai recorded these events so the

Jewish people could celebrate their deliverance for generations to come. When exciting, happy events occur in our lives, we should keep a record, reviewing it every now and then, and thank God for giving us reasons to celebrate. **Topic: Joy**

<sup>24</sup> The threshing floors shall be full of wheat,  
And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

<sup>25</sup> "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,  
The crawling locust,  
The consuming locust,  
And the chewing locust,"<sup>a</sup>

<sup>26</sup> My great army which I sent among you.  
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,  
And praise the name of the LORD your God,  
Who has dealt wondrously with you;  
And My people shall never be put to shame.

<sup>27</sup> Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel:  
I am the LORD your God  
And there is no other.  
My people shall never be put to shame.

#### GOD'S SPIRIT POURED OUT

<sup>28</sup> "And it shall come to pass afterward  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,

Your young men shall see visions.  
<sup>29</sup> And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

<sup>30</sup> "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

<sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

<sup>32</sup> And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved.

For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there shall be deliverance,  
As the LORD has said,  
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

#### GOD JUDGES THE NATIONS

**3** "For behold, in those days and at that time,  
When I bring back the captives of Judah  
and Jerusalem,

2:25 <sup>a</sup>Compare 1:4

#### SOUL NOTE



**Marvelous** (2:19–27) God delights in doing miracles. He loves turning hopeless situations into delightful possibilities. Joel warned his people that a terrible army would invade their land and destroy their hope. Even the very heavens and earth would tremble at the devastation (2:10). In the face of such disaster, however, Joel spoke of a day when God would do "marvelous things" (2:21). God's works are truly marvelous. In response, we should "praise the name of the LORD" (2:26). **Topic: Joy**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Outpouring** (2:28–32) Joel predicted that God's grand invitation to turn to Him (2:12) would be extended to all people: "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Christians are the beneficiaries of God's outpouring. The world hasn't been the same since the day a small band of apostles were energized by God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, Peter quoted this passage from Joel and encouraged people to repent and believe in Christ (Acts 2:16–21, 38). All who have accepted this call and received God's Spirit fulfill this prophecy of God's grace.

**Topic: Presence of the Holy Spirit**



That I might rest in the day of trouble.  
When he comes up to the people,  
He will invade them with his troops.

#### A HYMN OF FAITH

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from  
the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—

<sup>18</sup> Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD God<sup>a</sup> is my strength;  
He will make my feet like deer's feet,  
And He will make me walk on my high  
hills.

To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

3:19 <sup>a</sup>Hebrew YHWH Adonai

#### SOUL NOTE



**Joy in Hardships** (3:17–19) Habakkuk envisioned the devastation and despair of the Judeans when the Babylonians invaded their land—barren fig trees, desolate vineyards, malnourished cattle and sheep. This pictured ruin for the nation. No wonder Habakkuk trembled in fear (3:16). But Habakkuk didn't allow fear to immobilize him. He quieted his heart and cried to God for deliverance, knowing that whatever would happen, he would always be able to "rejoice in the LORD." No matter what happens, God is with us. In that, we can rejoice. **Topic: Joy**



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- 13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north,  
Destroy Assyria,  
And make Nineveh a desolation,  
As dry as the wilderness.
- 14 The herds shall lie down in her midst,  
Every beast of the nation.  
Both the pelican and the bittern  
Shall lodge on the capitals of her  
pillars;  
Their voice shall sing in the windows;  
Desolation *shall be* at the threshold;  
For He will lay bare the cedar work.  
This is the rejoicing city  
That dwelt securely,  
That said in her heart,  
"I am it, and there is none besides me."  
How has she become a desolation,  
A place for beasts to lie down!  
Everyone who passes by her  
Shall hiss and shake his fist.

## THE WICKEDNESS OF JERUSALEM

- 3 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted,  
To the oppressing city!  
She has not obeyed *His* voice,  
She has not received correction;

She has not trusted in the LORD,  
She has not drawn near to her God.

- 3 Her princes in her midst *are* roaring lions;  
Her judges *are* evening wolves  
That leave not a bone till morning.
- 4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people;  
Her priests have polluted the sanctuary,  
They have done violence to the law.
- 5 The LORD is righteous in her midst,  
He will do no unrighteousness.  
Every morning He brings His justice to light;  
He never fails,  
But the unjust knows no shame.
- 6 "I have cut off nations,  
Their fortresses are devastated;  
I have made their streets desolate,  
With none passing by.  
Their cities are destroyed;  
There is no one, no inhabitant.
- 7 I said, 'Surely you will fear Me,  
You will receive instruction'—  
So that her dwelling would not be cut off,



## SOUL NOTE

**Resting in God (3:11–13)** Zephaniah described the wicked (3:1, 2), contrasting them with the righteous (3:9, 12). The wicked Judeans had been rebellious, disobedient, and far from God. Despite of all God's warnings, the people continued to sin. In sharp contrast, true believers humbly waited on God; they were meek and humble people, the kind who "trust in the name of the LORD." Like this faithful remnant, believers who trust in God know that He will be with them, and they will allow no one to make them afraid. With God on our side, we have everything we need.

**Topic: Trust**



## SOUL NOTE

**Rejoicing in God (3:14–17)** When is joy felt most intensely? In health? In prosperity? Only when all is well? Strangely enough, the most profound joy often occurs during hardship. Zephaniah described this phenomena. The people had experienced the misery of suffering under God's judgment on their sins. But one day God would forgive them and free them to rejoice in Him. He would deliver His people and quiet their troubled hearts. He would accept their joyful praise, and He would rejoice in them as well. **Topic: Joy**

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