

## God's Silence

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### Zeph 3:17

(BHS)

(NASB)

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּקִרְבְּךָ	The LORD your God is in your midst,
גִּבּוֹר יוֹשִׁיעַ	A <b>victorious</b> warrior.
יְשִׁישׁ עֲלֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה	He will exult over you with joy,
יִחַרְיֵשׁ בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ	<b>He will be quiet</b> in His love,
יִגִּיל עֲלֶיךָ בְּרִנָּה:	He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.

NASB glosses “**victorious**” but of course the word has to do with salvation, and it actually the basis of the name “Jesus.” Thus, “the Mighty One will save you” (NCV); “a mighty savior” (NLT); “a warrior who saves” (HCSB); etc. It is imperfect and thus incomplete—which in English is glossed future. He *will* save, he *will* deliver.

A more important point of divergence between translations is in red. The verb is *harash*, “to be silent.” You pronounce the first letter like a hard *ch*, sort of like in “chaos,” but more drawn out. *Kkkhhh-arash*. Try it. Now say it fast. If you have had uvulopalatopharyngoplasty due to sleep apnea, you may have difficulty making the sound.

Anyway, the Hebrew verb as it stands has no pronominal suffix. In other words, it patently does NOT say, “He will quiet *you*.” Nevertheless, the Greek says, “he will renew you,” so יִחַרְיֵשׁ has been conjectured, an emendation which translations such as ESV imitate. But without emending the text, it is clear that *God* is the one being silent, not his people. Thus KJV and Jub: “he will rest in his love;” and GNV: “he will quiet himself in his love.” And so on.

*Harash* is often used in the sense of keeping silent in the face of some terrible situation. Jacob held his peace (*harash*) when he learned about Dinah (Gen 34:5). Samuel was urged not to keep silent (*harash*) about the Philistines (1 Sam 7:8). Saul held his peace (*harash*) despite insults (1 Sam 10:27). Tamar was counseled to hold her peace (*harash*) after being raped (2 Sam 13:20). Israel didn't answer (*harash*) Sennacherib (Isa 36:21).

Take a moment now and refresh your memory about how to read the Minor Prophets. Go on, read [this](#).

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*Harash* only is found three times in the Minor Prophets, and one of those that bumps right up against Zephaniah (not coincidentally) is also about *God's* profound silence. In Hab 1:13, the frustrated prophet asks why God inexplicably keeps silent in the face of injustice. But in Zephaniah his silence is a blessing, for silence = no condemnation. Thus NIV glosses, "in his love he will no longer rebuke you."

The book of Zephaniah thoroughly describes the coming judgment of God. It is so all-encompassing that it is worse than Noah's flood.

I will completely sweep away everything from the face of the earth—  
this is the LORD's declaration.

I will sweep away man and animal; I will sweep away the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea, and the ruins along with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth.

This is the LORD's declaration. (Zeph 1:2 – 3)

But despite this, at the end of his book there will be a remnant that is saved. The final judgment against all life fully expends God's wrath, leaving nothing to condemn. He will be silent on matters of punishment after that.

Gastor (1967) glosses this way, “Though now he be keeping silent about His love, He will then joy over thee in a burst of song.” He thinks it means that *then* God was silent about his love. I think it means that *soon* he will be silent about his wrath. Clean sweep of everything—followed by joyous celebration.

When I teach Zephaniah, I ask my class, how does this book fold in to the gospel of Jesus? The New Testament never quotes it. But the theme of judgment followed by joy and salvation is *the* theme of the gospel! The judgment Zephaniah preached fell on Christ. The salvation that follows began with his resurrection. Jesus is the one true Israelite who passed through the sweeping judgment, and in him all of us have as well. So we today now share in his sufferings, as we look forward to his return. Amen!

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Look at how, in Hebrews 11, the ancient sinners do not have their sins rubbed in their faces. They are treated only as heroes of the faith. On that Day there will be no word of rebuke. The Father will only rejoice over you in love. He really will.

Now go out there and show the world how grateful you are.