

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JUNE 28 - JULY 2, 2021



COURSE SERMON SERIES
5/9 - 8/1
CORRECTIONS

THE MINOR PROPHETS

MONDAY

Zephaniah 1; Matthew 13:41-43, 24:29

“Zephaniah ... [features] the most unpleasant subject in the Bible—the judgment of God. ... Zephaniah means ‘hidden of the LORD’ and the prophet [speaks] as if he were a representative of the [faithful] remnant ... who will remain true to God ... through the time of trouble ... upon the earth. They [were] hidden ... by God Himself among the nations of the earth, and God [would] watch over them to keep them in faith during this time.” (Ray Stedman)

“Following Assyria’s capture of Samaria in 722 BC, the Assyrian Empire first advanced to new heights until it had overstretched ... [and began to] decline.” (Peter Pett) Zephaniah’s time, between transitioning superpowers Assyria and Babylon, preceded Judah’s Babylonian captivity. He served under King Josiah (640–609 B.C.), “a reforming king, trying to reestablish acceptable worship practices that had fallen out of use since ... Hezekiah (perhaps Zephaniah’s great-great grandfather).” (TGC) Judah had not learned from the northern kingdom’s unfaithfulness and resultant judgment at Assyria’s hands about 100 years earlier.

“Zephaniah wants to clarify the decision [facing] Judah ... [as well as] all the other nations ... [and] the consequences of that decision. God is calling for Judah’s punishment because she has already shown herself sinful. If she should repent and abandon her evil, ‘perhaps’ God will forgive (Zephaniah 2:3).” (TGC)

Some scholars see Zephaniah catalyzing the reforms King Josiah strove for in Judah—you can read more about these in 2 Kings 22-23 and 1 Chronicles 34-35. Interestingly, unlike many other Old Testament prophets, Zephaniah is not quoted elsewhere in Scripture. However, his prophecy and themes resonate with Jesus' teaching and have many other fascinating New Testament parallels. We will consider several of these Friday.

There are two common camps of those misunderstanding God. In one are those seeing God as a vengeful, cosmic cop delighting in issuing tickets and making arrests. The other sentimentally pictures God as a doddering, kindly uncle, one defined only by "love" who would never condemn anyone "doing his or her best" or, at least, living "better than most." "God is love" (1 John 4:8) while also righteous and holy. A just and loving God must judge sin, or else He is neither. Zephaniah makes these divine attributes clear.

QUESTIONS

How does the meaning of Zephaniah's name relate to the faithful remnant? What are the two common, polar ways of misunderstanding God and His ways?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

The mission of Sowing Seeds for Life is to provide food for the hungry, to respond to emergencies for those in need, and to eliminate hunger in the communities that are served. Pray that Sowing Seeds can continue to serve these communities with dignity and respect.

TUESDAY

Obadiah 1:3-4; Ezekiel 25:12-14

A recurring pattern prevails throughout the prophetic books: Israel abandons God's ways, breaking covenant relationship; God sends a prophet to warn and call them back to Him; the LORD chastens Israel, often using pagan nations; the people repent and return to God (for a season). Sadly, I know a similar pattern when sinning; perhaps you do also.

Judah's problems—like the northern kingdom's before its Assyrian dispersion—were familiar. Worship of idols and other false Canaanite “gods” was escalating. Many of Judah's leaders misguided the people and profaned the holy. The Judaeans became complacent and self-satisfied, uncaring for the marginalized and oppressed. This downward spiral spawned outright rebellion against God, the essence of sin. To its own peril, Judah dismissed an eternal truth later taught by Jesus: *“To whom much is given ... much will be required”* (Luke 12:48).

God used Assyria, Babylon, and other gentile realms to discipline His wayward people. *“I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the strong, and their holy places shall be profaned”* (Ezekiel 7:24). The people lamented, even challenging God's fairness, *“Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape”* (Malachi 3:15).

Those nations God used for Judah's correction were accountable for their own attitudes and actions, even though God used these for His purposes. One by one, the prophet calls out Israel's enemies for overstepping their bounds and delighting in Judah's self-inflicted, painful circumstances. He prophesies of the Philistines' future destruction (Zephaniah 2:4-7). Moab (part of modern Jordan) would become desolate (vv. 8-11). Cush (south of Egypt) was similarly warned (v. 12), as was Assyria (vv. 13-15). Interestingly, none of these countries—unlike Israel—exists today.

Parents can understand God's loving correction, which may feel like abandonment—or worse—to its recipient while the discipline is happening. *"For the LORD reproveth one whom He loves, as a [parent] the [child] in whom [they] delight"* (Proverbs 3:12). The next two days we will explore some of the darkness and hopefulness in Zephaniah's prophecies, all fueled by God's love and holy righteousness.

QUESTIONS

What is the recurring pattern with God's people and their relationship with Him, shared throughout the Old Testament? Why did God sometimes use wicked, pagan nations to discipline His people? If God used gentile nations for Israel's correction, why did He subsequently judge the very nations He used?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for more volunteers who specialize in forklift operation and truck driving to be able to donate their time to the Sowing Seeds ministry. Lift up the volunteers in prayer as they travel to and from distributions centers.

WEDNESDAY

Zephaniah 2:1-3; Isaiah 13:6-9; Joel 3:11-15

“*The Day of the LORD (Yahweh)*” is Zephaniah’s key theme—Zephaniah 1:7, 14, and ten other passages are about this “day.” The Day of the LORD also shows up among other Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah and Malachi. It is central to Matthew 24, 1 Thessalonians 5, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation, and it appears elsewhere in the New Testament. It is clearly important, but what does it refer to?

This “day” identifies a time during which God personally and powerfully intervenes in history. It is a time of judgment, but also of cleansing salvation for the faithful remnant. Depending upon your relationship with God—reconciled or not—it is either affirming or frightening. It illustrates the “dance” between God’s loving patience (“*not wishing any should perish,*” 2 Peter 3:9) and His holiness. Jesus Christ personifies such harmony: He is the Suffering Servant who came to save while also the returning Conqueror, Judge and King.

Given Judah’s general unfaithfulness and Canaan’s wickedness, Zephaniah’s warnings must have been unpopular: “*I will sweep away [the wicked] ...*” (1:1-6); “*I will punish ... in the fire of [My] jealousy ...*” (1:7-18); “*A day of wrath ... of distress and anguish ... of ruin and devastation ... of darkness and gloom ...*” (1:15); “*Woe to [Israel’s*

defiant neighbors] ...” (2); “Woe to ... the oppressing city (Jerusalem) ... lions ... wolves ... treacherous men ... [who] profane what is holy ... [and] do violence to the law ... Surely you will fear Me ... [and] accept correction ...” (3:1-7); “In the fire of My jealousy ... all [wickedness] ... shall be consumed” (3:8).

Notice the references to God’s “jealousy”—such jealousy stems from God’s love. God did not wish to lose that which was His (His people). For God to be love (1 John 4:8), however, He must also hate and judge whatever threatens His beloved.

Note, however, the hopefulness of this “day” per Zephaniah: “All of them may call upon the name of Yahweh ... none shall make them afraid ... Shout, O Israel! ... The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst ... a mighty One who will save ... [and] restore your fortunes” (3:9-20). If you follow Christ, our Immanuel (“God with us”), the Day of Yahweh promises renewal. Whom do you know without such hope?

QUESTIONS

What does “the Day of the LORD (Yahweh)” refer to in the Bible? Why is God’s “jealousy” a positive thing for we who love God and follow Christ?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for the leadership and staff of Sowing Seeds. Pray that they would continue to be healthy, compassionate, and encouraged. Pray for wisdom in the distribution of resources so that Sowing Seeds can reach all those who need assistance.

THURSDAY

Zephaniah 3:15-17; Hosea 11:8; Revelation 21:3-4

This week we have touched already upon the interplay between God's love and His holiness. He created us for close, personal relationship. However, being holy, God cannot abide with evil—and each of us is fallen, sinfully inclined. This is an apparent dilemma: How can a loving, holy God be in meaningful relationship with sinful, fallen people?

God's heartfelt desire is that Israel and all people would *"Turn! Turn from your evil ways!"* (Ezekiel 33:11). When any seek God repentantly, He is joy-filled, *"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). The Prodigal Son's father, compassionately running to forgive and welcome his wayward son (Luke 15), reveals God's heart. God declares, *"I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live"* (Ezekiel 33:11).

It may have shocked ancient Jews that God's invitation and love extended beyond just Israel, including also gentiles. However, God promises, *"I will change the speech of the peoples ... that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve Him ... From beyond the rivers of Cush ... I will remove [rebellious deeds] from your midst ... [You] shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD"* (Zephaniah 3:9-12).

Believers know that Jesus Christ and His atoning, sacrificial death is the only Way to reconciliation with God. “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23)—in dying in our place, He paid a price that no other could pay. “*The LORD has taken away the judgments against you ... I will bring you in ... [and] gather you*” (Zephaniah 3:15-20). “[Jesus] said, ‘*It is finished,*’ and He ... gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). “*The King of Israel ... is in your midst*” (Zephaniah 3:15-16). Jesus told even hostile Pharisees, “*The kingdom of God ... is in [your] midst*” (Luke 17:21).

Revelation shares the ultimate promise in following Christ: “*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with [humankind]. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people*” (Revelation 21:3). You will live with God eternally! How and where will you share this glorious assurance?

QUESTIONS

How do God’s love and holiness create a sort of “dilemma” for Him? How did God deal with this dilemma in order to have close, meaningful relationship with believers?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray for those who come to the food pantry that they would feel loved by God and His people. Pray that God would help remove any fears or stigma of hunger that would keep families and individuals from seeking assistance from Sowing Seeds.

FRIDAY

Zephaniah 1:7; Genesis 3:1-19; John 3:14-18

Let's conclude comparing selected Zephaniah passages with parallel New Testament passages.

"The LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated His guests" (Zephaniah 1:7). "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). "For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7-8).

"I will save the lame and gather the outcast" (Zephaniah 3:19).

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:4-5). "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

"Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them" (Zephaniah 1:18). "Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver [Jesus] over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver" (Matthew 26:14-15). "For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off" (Zephaniah 1:11).

“And the kings of the earth ... will weep and wail ... And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn” (Revelation 18:9-11).

“... a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Zephaniah 1:15). *“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed”* (Luke 23:44-45).

“I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them might call upon the name of Yahweh and serve Him” (Zephaniah 3:9). *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... [and] the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven ... ‘Behold, I am making all things new’”* (Revelation 21:1-27).

Do you spend ample time in Old Testament and “harder-to-understand” books of the Bible? God’s Word is a gift—“unwrap” it so that you might know the Author better.

QUESTIONS

Which of the shared Zephaniah passages, harmonizing with those in the New Testament, resonate most with you? Do you find many of the themes in Revelation—“end times” imagery, etc.—particularly hard to follow? How will you address this?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray that God would be glorified in all that Sowing Seeds does. Pray that the leadership, staff, and volunteers would keep God at the center of its efforts they seek to serve the vulnerable in various communities. Praise God for the favor and blessings He has shown Sowing Seeds.

Sources

- Ray Stedman's quote is from <https://www.raystedman.org/bible-overview/adventuring/zephaniah-the-day-of-the-lords-wrath>
- Peter Pett's quote can be found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/pet/zephaniah.html>
- The Gospel Coalition's (TGC) quotes are from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/zephaniah/#overview>

