

Zephaniah: Hope through the Darkness

Lesson One • Zephaniah 1:1

Hope through the Darkness

Main Idea

The book of Zephaniah is the story of God's powerful JUDGMENT and His equally astonishing GRACE. It's about the hope of God's grace through the darkness of His judgment because of sin.

The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. Zeph. 1:1

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1. The PROPHETS: Who Were They?

Old Testament Prophets

Prophets like Zephaniah were MESSENGERS of God who spoke on behalf of God.

2. The PROPHET: Who Is Zephaniah and What Were His Times Like?

Background

- Zephaniah is a prophet of royal lineage who was born in the WORST of times in Judah's history under King Manasseh.
- Zephaniah's times were marked by COMPLACENCY in which the people regarded God as indifferent and impotent.
- Zephaniah helped prepare God's people for REVIVAL by calling them to repentance during the reign of King Josiah.

3. The PROPHECY: What Will God Do and Why?

Overriding Theme

THE DAY OF THE LORD: historically applies to Babylon's invasion of Judah in 606 BC, but prophetically speaks of a future day of judgment that is still to come when Christ returns.

Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near. Zephaniah 1:7

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast. Zephaniah 1:14

Overview

- God of JUSTICE: God is angry at sin and just in judging those who sin.

"I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD. Zephaniah 1:2

"...for in the fire of My jealousy all the earth shall be consumed." Zephaniah 3:8

- God of HOPE: God is abundant in His mercy to sinners who deserve only judgment.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing." Zephaniah 3:16-17

The Message of Zephaniah

God's judgment is coming, but there's HOPE for those who heed the warning to repent and seek refuge in Jesus Christ.

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:19-21

See Overview Chart for Zephaniah

ZEPHANIAH

"Yahweh Has Hidden / Treasured"

The Hidden Prophet Who Was Royal & Loyal in Dark Times! (1:1)

HOPE THROUGH THE DARKNESS FOR THE HUMBLE

The Day of the LORD Is Near, So Humbly Seek His Face and Saving Grace Before It's Too Late!

JUDGMENT on the DAY of the LORD

Darkness of Night ► Punishment for Sin ► Desolation of the Proud

1:2 – 3:8

SALVATION on the DAY of the LORD

Light of Day ► Purification from Sin ► Restoration of the Humble

3:9 - 20

1:2 DECLARATION GLOBAL DEVASTATION Creation Reversed "I will completely REMOVE all things from the face of the earth... I will REMOVE man and beast... I will REMOVE birds and fish... and I will CUT OFF man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.	1:3 CONDEMNATION BE SILENT, WAIL, LISTEN Judah and Jerusalem "NEAR is the great DAY of the LORD, NEAR and COMING QUICKLY" The DAY of the LORD <ul style="list-style-type: none">It's ArrivalIt's AttributesIt's ActionsIt's Accountability GLOBAL DEVASTATION (18)	1:4 INVITATION HUMBLY SEEK the LORD Before It's Too Late! "GATHER yourselves together, yes, GATHER... SEEK the LORD, all you HUMBLE of the earth... SEEK righteousness, SEEK humility..." Perhaps you will be HIDDEN in the DAY of the LORD's anger."	2:1 DESOLATION WOE to the PROUD Gentile Nations (2:4-15) <ul style="list-style-type: none">WEST: Philistia/CanaanEAST: Moab/AmmonSOUTH: EthiopiaNORTH: Assyria/Nineveh The Exulting City WOE to HARD-HEARTED Jerusalem (3:1-7) The Tyrannical City <ul style="list-style-type: none">Her Defiling RebellionHer Stubborn PrideHer Unfaithful LeadersHer Faithful LORD	2:3 EXHORTATION WAIT for ME to JUDGE the Nations "Therefore, WAIT for Me," declares the LORD, "for the DAY when I RISE UP as a witness..." GLOBAL DEVASTATION (8)	3:8	3:9 CONVERSION GENTILE NATIONS Will CALL on the Name of the LORD "For then I WILL GIVE the peoples purified lips that all of them may CALL on the NAME of the LORD..."	3:10 RESTORATION ISRAEL'S REMNANT Will TAKE REFUGE in the Name of the LORD "For then I WILL REMOVE from your midst your proud exulting ones... But I WILL LEAVE among you a humble and lowly people, and they will TAKE REFUGE in the NAME of the LORD."	3:11	3:13 CONSUMMATION THE KING'S PRESENCE CALLS for SHOUTS of JOY (14-17) "SHOUT for joy, O daughter of Zion! SHOUT in triumph, O Israel! REJOICE and EXULT, O daughter of Jerusalem!" Israel Will Rejoice Over His Presence <ul style="list-style-type: none">As the Faithful RedeemerAs the Successful RulerAs the Powerful Warrior The King Will Rejoice Over His People <ul style="list-style-type: none">Delighting over you with joySoothing you with His loveShouting with joy over you	3:14	3:20
GLOBAL REPUTATION: Kingdom Restored (18-20) His Presence Ruling with His People over His Place! "Indeed, I will give you RENOWN and PRAISE among all the peoples of the earth, when I RESTORE your FORTUNES before your eyes, Says the LORD."											

The Day of the LORD	1:7 For the day of the LORD is near 1:8 on the day of the LORD's sacrifice 1:9-10 on that day 2x 1:12 at that time 1:14 Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the LORD! 1:15 a day of wrath is that day 1:15-16 a day 5x with 2 pairs 1:18 on the day of the LORD's wrath	2:2 Before the decree takes effect—the day passes like chaff— Before the burning anger of LORD Before the day of the LORD'S anger 2:3 Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD'S anger.	3:8 Wait for Me...for the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is gather the nations	3:9 For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD to serve Him shoulder to shoulder.	3:11 In that day...for then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones... 3:12 But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.	3:15 The LORD has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel is in your midst 3:16 In that day...said to Jerusalem 3:17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior 3:19 Behold...at that time 3:20 At that time I will bring you in, even at that time when I gather when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the LORD.
Stretching and Gathering	1:4 So I will STRETCH OUT My HAND against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem	2:1 "GATHER yourselves TOGETHER, yes, GATHER O nation without shame before...before...before..." 2:2	2:13 And He will STRETCH OUT His HAND against the north and destroy Assyria and...Nineveh	3:8 Indeed, My decision is to GATHER the nations, to ASSEMBLE the kingdoms	3:18 "I will GATHER those who grieve... 3:19 I will SAVE the lame and GATHER the outcast 3:20 At that time I will BRING you IN...when I GATHER you TOGETHER..."	
Removing and Restoring	1:2 I will COMPLETELY REMOVE 1:3 I will REMOVE...REMOVE... And I will CUT OFF man... 1:4 I will CUT OFF the remnant of Baal from this place... 1:11 All who weigh out silver will be CUT OFF. 1:18 For He will make a COMPLETE END, indeed a terrifying one...	2:7 For the LORD their God will CARE for them and RESTORE their fortune. I have CUT OFF nations; from your midst 3:6 3:7 So her dwelling will not be CUT OFF	3:11 For then I will REMOVE from your midst your proud, exulting ones... 3:12 But I will LEAVE among you a humble and lowly people, and they will TAKE REFUGE in the name of the LORD.	3:19 And I will TURN their SHAME into PRAISE and RENOWN in all the earth. 3:20 Indeed, I will give you RENOWN and PRAISE among all the peoples of the earth, when I RESTORE your FORTUNES before your eyes," says the LORD.		
Repenting and Rejoicing	1:7 BE SILENT before the Lord GOD! 1:11 WAIL, O inhabitants... 1:14 LISTEN, the Day of the LORD!	GOD! 2:1 GATHER yourselves together, yes, GATHER... 2:3 SEEK the LORD... SEEK righteousness, SEEK humility.	2:5 WOE to [Gentiles]... 3:1 WOE to [Jerusalem]...	3:8 Therefore WAIT for Me declares the LORD...	3:14 SHOUT for JOY, O daughter of Zion! SHOUT in TRIUMPH, O Israel! REJOICE & EXULT w/ all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! He will REJOICE over you with SHOUTS of JOY.	

HOPE through the DARKNESS for the HUMBLE!

There's Hope for the Humble on the Day of the Lord, If They Seek His Face and Saving Grace Before It's Too Late!

NAME Zephaniah = “*Yahweh Hides*” could refer to his parent’s efforts to hide their treasured son from evil King Manasseh who reigned over Judah at his birth. His four-generation lineage is unique and could link him to good King Hezekiah, in which case he was a cousin of King Josiah who reigned (640-609 BC) during his prophetic ministry. Zephaniah possessed *royal blood* and prophesied the Word of the Lord with *loyal boldness* in dark times.

DATE Around **630 BC** before the Judah’s fall (586 BC; 3:1-7), Nineveh’s fall (612 BC; 2:13-15), and possibly before King Josiah’s reforms (622 BC; 1:4-6; see 2 Chr 34–35), perhaps helping spark the revival. Zephaniah is a contemporary of the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

PLACE He prophesied to Judah and especially the leaders in Jerusalem (1:10-13; 3:1-5). He may have even lived in Jerusalem with access to the royal court.

CANON Zephaniah is the last of the nine Minor Prophets before the Babylonian Exile. He refers to the Day of the Lord more than another prophet including Joel. He predicts both the near and far fulfillment of this Day.

PURPOSE A strong warning of judgment, yet God’s sovereign grace is clearly offered to undeserving Jew and Gentile. Zephaniah is a short book with a big message: There’s hope for the humble who seek the LORD before it’s too late! He hides those who take refuge in His grace!

“Only once does the work use moderate speech, when it urges that perhaps the humble may be hidden on the day of wrath (2:3). Apart from this, every sentence is a direct and forceful assertion, whether of accusation, judgment, or promise. The hearer is driven along and challenged down to the final verse.”

Schneider, D. A. Bromiley, Geoffrey W., ed. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Revised)*. Accordance electronic ed., version 1.2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.

FOCUS “*Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near...Near is the great Day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the LORD!*” (1:7, 14). The Hebrew understanding of a “day” comprised an evening and a morning – a night and a day. This understanding is the opposite of our Western way of viewing a day as comprising a morning and an evening. The Day of the Lord is first a time of darkness (judgment) and then a time of light (salvation). Zephaniah 1:14-18 graciously warns of four aspects of this coming Day in terms of its dark night of judgment:

1. Its **arrival** will be *soon, sudden, and sure*. (1:14)
2. Its **attributes** are divine wrath fully poured out resulting in *distress, desolation, despair, darkness, defeat, and death*. (1:15-16)
3. Its **actions** are the LORD Himself bringing fiery final judgment on the earth: *overall distress, total death, and global devastation*. (1:17-18)
4. Its **accountability** is God being true to who He is and what sinners are: *All humanity has sinned and fallen short of His glory*. (1:17-18)

But there’s hope for the humble through the darkness of this Day. Even in the midst of his message of universal judgment, the LORD through Zephaniah offers the hope of salvation and restoration according to His amazing grace (1:7, 14; 2:1-3; 3:8). The *very bad night of judgment* will be a *very glad day of salvation* for those who are hidden by the LORD (sovereign grace) and take refuge (repentance and faith) in His King, the Victorious Warrior (3:9-20).

CHRIST Jesus’ two advents fulfill the Day of the Lord in **judgment** (now on the Cross, not yet in the Tribulation) and **salvation** (now in the Gospel, not yet in the Millennial Kingdom). Jesus Christ is the LORD God who is present with His people as the Faithful Redeemer, the King of Israel, and the Victorious Warrior who overcomes all enemies (3:14-20; Rev 19). He alone perfectly possesses the humble and lowly heart (Matt 11:29; cf. Isa 42:3) of Israel’s remnant (3:12; cf. Isa 57:17). From His present reign in heaven (Heb 1:13; 10:12-13) and His future reign on earth (Rev 20-22), Jesus exults over His people with joy, quietly loves them unconditionally, and continually rejoices over them with shouts of joy (3:17). Believers are hidden in Him until the Day comes and, therefore, should set their minds on things above (Col 3:1-4).

APPLICATION

- A **Be silent** before the LORD to reflect on His holiness and our sinfulness. (1:7)
- B **Lament** over your sin and the soon, sudden, sure judgment to come on all the proud who refuse to repent. (1:11)
- C **Listen** and **heed** these woeful warnings. (1:14)
 - D **Gather together** with His people in kingdom outposts – local churches – for confession and repentance. (2:1)
 - E **Humbly seek** the LORD’s face and saving grace before it’s too late. (2:3)
 - D¹ **Wait together** with perseverance for the coming of the Day when all will be made right by the King. (3:8)
 - C¹ **Shout** and **rejoice** over His faithfulness to redeem us, His love that comforts us, and His joy in liberating us. (3:14-18)
 - B¹ **Share** both the Bad News and the Good News about the coming Day of the LORD with all the nations of the earth! (3:19)
- A¹ **Pray** for His Name to be hallowed and His kingdom to come, so His will be done on earth as it is in heaven! (3:20)