

Small Group Guide: The Book of Zephaniah

The Day of the Lord -- Judgment, Hope, and the Return of the King



Introduction for Group Leaders

This guide is designed to help your group engage deeply with the themes presented in the book of Zephaniah: the coming judgment of God, the call to repentance, and the extraordinary hope that follows the day of the Lord. Encourage honest conversation. These are weighty topics, and it is okay for group members to wrestle with the tension between God's wrath and his mercy.

Key Takeaways

- 1. God's judgment is righteous, not arbitrary.** Zephaniah makes clear that everything God does in the day of the Lord is just. He will do nothing unrighteous. The wrath that comes is a direct response to persistent wickedness and the rejection of his mercy.
- 2. The call to repentance is urgent and open to all.** Before the decree is issued, God calls the humble and meek to seek him. His mercy is available, and those who respond may be hidden in the day of his anger.

3. The day of the Lord is both a day of wrath and a day of restoration. Zephaniah does not end in despair. After judgment comes the establishment of God's kingdom, the expansion of Israel's promised borders, the reversal of Babel, and the worship of the one true God by all peoples.

4. Jesus is the King of Israel who is also Yahweh. Zephaniah 3 identifies the coming king of Israel as the Lord himself -- a direct Old Testament pointer to the identity of Jesus as both Messiah and God in the flesh.

5. The book of Revelation is not just about wrath -- it is about redemption. Just as Zephaniah moves from judgment to restoration, Revelation is ultimately the revelation of Jesus Christ and the fullness of redemption for all of creation.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- When you hear the phrase "the day of the Lord," what is your immediate emotional reaction? Does it produce fear, hope, or something else? Why do you think that is?

Section 1: The Reality of God's Wrath

Based on Zephaniah 1

1. The sermon described the tension of looking at the evils of the world and knowing that God will one day bring full justice. How do you personally hold that tension in your everyday life?
 2. Zephaniah warns against those who are spiritually complacent -- people who acknowledge God but do not truly seek him. In what ways can complacency creep into a believer's life without them noticing?
 3. The sermon pointed out that material wealth, personal desires, and human strength cannot protect anyone from God's wrath. What are the things people tend to trust in today as a substitute for genuine faith?
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Section 2: The Call to Repentance

Based on Zephaniah 2:1-3

4. Zephaniah 2:3 suggests that those who seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek humility may be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. What does it look like practically to pursue those three things in your current season of life?
 5. The sermon connected this passage to the pre-tribulation rapture and the pattern of Enoch and Lot being removed before judgment fell. Whether or not your group holds that same view, what does the broader pattern of God protecting the righteous before judgment tell you about his character?
 6. God's call to repentance goes out before the decree is issued. What does the urgency of that call mean for how we share the gospel with people around us?
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Section 3: The Nations and God's Justice

Based on Zephaniah 2:4-15

7. The sermon noted that nations surrounding Israel -- Gaza, Moab, Ammon, Assyria -- are all brought under judgment for their pride and arrogance toward God's people. What does this tell us about how God views the treatment of his people by the world?
 8. Verse 11 declares that all the gods of the earth will be reduced to nothing, and every person will worship the Lord. How does that future reality shape the way you think about the cultural idols and competing belief systems you encounter today?
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Section 4: Accusations Against Jerusalem and the Righteousness of God

Based on Zephaniah 3:1-8

9. The accusations against Jerusalem include failure to obey God's voice, refusing correction, lack of humility, failure to trust in the Lord, and eyes not drawn to God. Which of these five areas do you find most personally convicting, and why?
 10. The sermon emphasized that God's judgment is righteous -- he will do nothing unrighteous, and every morning he brings justice to light. Why is it important to hold onto that truth when we see injustice in the world going seemingly unpunished?
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Section 5: Restoration and the Kingdom of God

Based on Zephaniah 3:9-20

11. The sermon described the restoration at the end of Zephaniah as a reversal of the Tower of Babel -- one language restored, all nations worshiping together, but this time under the proper rule of God rather than in rebellion against him. What does it stir in you to imagine a world fully ordered under Christ's reign?
12. Zephaniah 3:17 describes God rejoicing over his people with gladness, quieting them with his love, and rejoicing over them with singing. How does this image of God challenge or expand the way you typically think about him?
13. The sermon closed by drawing a parallel between the spiritual redemption believers have now through Christ's sacrifice and the coming physical redemption of all creation when he returns. How does the future hope of full redemption affect the way you live and make decisions today?

Practical Applications

This week, choose at least one of the following to put into practice:

- **Seek before the decree is issued.** Identify one person in your life who does not yet know Christ. Commit to praying for them daily this week and look for a natural opportunity to share the hope you have.
 - **Examine your heart for complacency.** Spend time in honest reflection asking whether you are genuinely seeking God or simply going through the motions of religious routine. Journal what you find and bring it to God in prayer.
 - **Let the hope of restoration change your posture.** When you encounter injustice, evil, or suffering this week, intentionally remind yourself that God will make all things right. Let that truth move you from anxiety or bitterness toward peace and trust.
 - **Sit with Zephaniah 3:17.** Read that verse slowly each morning this week. Ask God to help you receive the reality that he rejoices over you, not just tolerates you.
 - **Study the pattern of protection.** Read the accounts of Enoch in Genesis 5, Lot in Genesis 19, and Noah in Genesis 6-7. Reflect on what each story reveals about how God deals with the righteous in times of judgment.
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Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together around these three themes drawn from the sermon:

1. **Gratitude** -- Thank God that his wrath is righteous and that his mercy has been extended for 2,000 years.
2. **Urgency** -- Ask God to give your group a renewed sense of mission to share the gospel while there is still time.
3. **Hope** -- Praise God that the story does not end in destruction, but in the full and complete redemption of all creation under the reign of King Jesus.

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on the Book of Zephaniah and the Themes of Judgment, Hope, and Redemption



Day 1: The Weight of Wrath and the Call to Humility

Reading: Zephaniah 1:14-18

Devotional: The Day of the Lord is described not to terrify the faithful into paralysis but to awaken the sleeping conscience. Silver and gold cannot buy a single moment of mercy when God's justice arrives. What we accumulate, protect, and trust in apart from God will be exposed as worthless in that moment. The question is not whether judgment is coming but whether we are found in humility before it does. Examine what you are trusting today. Is it material security, personal reputation, or human strength? Lay it down. Seek God while he may be found.

Day 2: Hidden in the Day of Anger

Reading: Zephaniah 2:1-3

Devotional: Zephaniah extends a remarkable invitation buried inside a book filled with warning. Those who are meek, who pursue righteousness, who walk in humility before God,

may be hidden in the day of his anger. This is not a guarantee purchased by moral performance but a promise extended to those who genuinely seek him. It echoes the pattern seen throughout Scripture: Enoch taken before the flood, Lot removed before Sodom burned. God's heart toward the humble is always shelter, always protection. Righteousness and humility are not burdens. They are the posture that positions you under the covering of God.

Day 3: When Everything False Falls

Reading: Zephaniah 2:11 and Zephaniah 3:5

Devotional: Every system of worship built around anything other than the living God will one day be silenced. Every idol, whether carved from wood or constructed from ideology, ambition, or self-sufficiency, will be reduced to nothing. And when they fall, what remains is the one who was always there: the righteous God who every morning brings his justice to light and never fails. In a world that offers endless substitutes for true worship, this is both a sobering warning and a profound comfort. God does not compete for glory. He simply outlasts everything that attempts to take his place. Worship him now, willingly and freely.

Day 4: The King in Your Midst

Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-17

Devotional: This passage is among the most tender in all the Minor Prophets. After chapters of warning and judgment, the tone shifts entirely. God is not only the righteous judge but the one who rejoices over his people with gladness, who quiets them with his love, who sings over them. The King of Israel, identified here as Yahweh himself, will be present among his people. This is ultimately the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God dwelling among us. Whatever season of fear or weariness you are carrying today, hear this: the mighty one saves, and he rejoices over you with singing. You are not forgotten.

Day 5: The Full Picture of Redemption

Reading: Zephaniah 3:18-20 and Revelation 21:1-5

Devotional: Zephaniah ends not with ash but with a homecoming. The scattered are gathered. The shamed are given praise. The captives are returned. This is the trajectory of all of Scripture, not destruction as the final word but restoration. The wrath that comes is

real, but it is not the conclusion. The conclusion is a redeemed creation, a gathered people, and a God who makes all things new. We carry that hope now in part, through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. But the fullness is still coming. Live today as someone who knows how the story ends, with confidence, with generosity, and with unshakeable hope.