

Through the Bible @ 30,000 Feet

Zephaniah | The Day We've All Been Waiting For

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Read **Zephaniah 1:1** | "...in the days of Josiah...king of Judah."

- He becomes King of Judah when he's 8 years old (**2 Kings 22:1**)
- Sometime later, he has his people begin work on rebuilding the temple (**22:5-6**)
- While this rebuilding work is in progress, the High Priest finds "The Book of the Law" (**22:8**).
- Josiah hears God Word, and he realizes how far God's people have run away from Him.
- And he repents.
- Josiah leads the nation in turning back to God (**23:1-3**), and revival sweeps through the land.

It was during this time (of rediscovering God's Word, of repentance, and revival) that Zephaniah was preaching "the word of the Lord."

Application: if your heart yearns for **revival** in our day – and in our country – and in our church, *THIS* (the Bible) is where it starts. It **starts with God's Word**.

- I am not aware of a revival or awakening or reformation that has ever taken place (in the history of God's people) that didn't begin with a fresh vision of God's Word.
 - **Revival begins** with men & woman who are captivated by the glory and the hope and the holiness and the joy and the life-changing power of God that they see in His Word.
 - **It doesn't begin** with gifted preachers. It doesn't begin with energetic music. It doesn't begin with tent meetings or altar calls.
 - It begins here...in God's Word.

Encouragement: To that end, let me plead with you, as your pastor, to bring your copy of God's Word with you to the gathering on Sunday mornings.

- The goal of a faithful preacher is to help his congregation **see** the glories of God in His Word **for themselves**. I'm not just sharing with you what I have seen in God's Word this past week; I am laboring from the pulpit to help you see it for yourself...and this happens most effectively when you have your own copy of God's Word in your hand.
 - Can't I just grab the Bible in the pew in front of me? The Bibles in the pews are primarily for visitors who don't yet have their own copy of God's Word.
 - But **no soldier** takes somebody else's weapon into war unless they have no other choice. **No athlete** wears somebody else's shoes when they compete.
 - We have the profound gift of having God's Word in our language (*which cost men & women their lives*).
 - And we have the profound gift of being able to afford a copy of God's Word (*which also cost men & women their lives*).
- And so I think one of the most beautiful sights in a **church** (that's longing for revival) is a preacher pointing to the Word of God – and a congregation full of people looking into their own copy of God's Word to see Him for themselves.

Zephaniah is preaching during *a Great Awakening* in Judah, and **the most prominent THEME** in his little book is a message of JUDGMENT. Right away, Zephaniah paints a picture of **TOTAL DESTRUCTION** across the land.

“I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,”

Says the Lord

“I will consume man and beast;

I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,

And the stumbling blocks along with the wicked.

I will cut off man from the face of the land,”

Says the Lord.

~ Zephaniah 1:2–3

If you underline all the **action verbs** in the first two chapters, you see just how pervasive and exhaustive and devastating this judgment is...

- God says, **“I will...**
 - Utterly consume everything (1:2)
 - Cut off every trace (1:4)
 - Punish (1:8)
 - Bring distress upon me (1:17)
 - Destroy you so there shall be no inhabitant (2:5)
 - Reduce to nothing (2:11)

That day is a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness.

~ Zephaniah 1:15

- The **result:**
 - The sound of mournful cry...wailing...loud crashing (1:10)
 - Desolation (1:13)
 - Blood shall be poured out like dust (1:17)
 - The whole land shall be devoured (1:18)
 - Nations are forsaken, desolate, driven out, and uprooted (2:4)
 - Nations will become like Sodom and Gomorrah (2:9)
 - ...as dry as a wilderness (2:13)

To get a picture of this kind of destruction, I try to think of **events in my lifetime** that have unleashed destruction across the land.

- Like the **earthquake** in **Haiti** in 2010 (where more than 100,000 people lost their lives.
- Or the **tsunami** that ripped across the **Indian Ocean** in 2004 (traveling over 500 miles an hour, with waves over 100 ft. high) killing over 200,000 people and destroying the homes of over 2 million people in 14 different countries through **Asia** and **Africa**.

- Or the **wildfires** in **Australia** just a couple years ago (2019–2020) destroying 46 million acres.
- Perhaps many of you read about this kind of devastation, and your mind goes back to the **Second Congo War** in **Africa** (or the Great African War) from 1998–2003 where over 5 million people lost their lives.

Zephaniah is painting a picture that is worse than all of these, and the **MESSAGE** (in the picture he's painting) is that **God is going to deal with sin.**

There is coming a day, called “*the great day of the Lord*” (**1:14**) when God will deal with sin.

Judah's sin has **contaminated everything** (worship, relationships, livelihood, economy...)

- Because that's what sin does.
- We often think that our sin only affects us, but that isn't true. Ever.

The **entire landscape** has been poisoned by generations of sin, and so Zephaniah speaks of a day when God is going “*utterly consume everything*” (**1:2**).

What is the message for us?

- Whatever sin you are holding onto in your life right now...this is where it leads.

Romans 6:23 says that “*the wages of sin is death,*” and this is a glimpse of what that looks like.

- Whatever sinful desire you are pursuing, it isn't worth it.
- Nothing is worth the price of your soul (that's going to live forever).
 - The **popularity**...isn't worth it. The **money**...isn't worth it.
 - The **relationship**...isn't worth it.
 - The **attention**, the **pleasure**, the **freedom**, the **comfort**, the **safety**... isn't worth it.
- Whatever you are pursuing outside the heart of God is **SIN**, and it isn't worth it.
- You can pursue it for a lifetime, only to find that, when you've reached the end, it's left you totally empty.

Therefore **their goods** shall become booty, and **their houses** a desolation:

They shall build **houses**, but not inhabit them;

They shall plant **vineyards**, but not drink their wine.

~ *Zephaniah 1:13*

WHAT SPECIFIC SINS?

- Zephaniah lists **three** specific sins that are leading people to this wholesale destruction:

1. **Spiritual Complacency** (1:12)

And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps,

And punish the men who are settled in **complacency**,

Who say in their heart, “*The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.*”

~ *Zephaniah 1:12*

People are “**settled** in complacency”

- They don’t really care.
- It’s not that they are hostile toward God; but it’s not like they love Him either.
- They’re indifferent: God just isn’t that big of a deal.
 - The God – who created the universe – “isn’t that big of a deal.”
- They believe in the idea of God, but they don’t think that God is relevant to their lives:

They say in their heart,
“The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.”
~ *Zephaniah 1:12*

I think there are **many Americans** that fall under this category.

- We’re happy to go the worship gathering on Sunday when it fits into our schedule...
- But that’s about as far as it goes.
 - We don’t spend time in God’s Word throughout the week.
 - We don’t gather with the church for Bible Study or prayer.
 - We don’t spend time thinking about the glories of God.
 - We would much rather spend an hour watching **Netflix** than spend 15 minutes in prayer.

If people were watching your life, I wonder what would they conclude about your relationship with God? Do we look like these people (**1:12**)? Would they say, “*These people don’t seem to be ‘against’ God; but neither do they seem to ‘love’ God with all their heart, soul, and mind.*” As a culture, we are living in a day when many professing Christians appear to be “*settled in complacency*” when it comes to our relationship with God. God has something to say about lukewarm Christians.¹

2. **Pride** (**2:10, 15**)

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...
~ *Zephaniah 2:15*

The nations around Judah had this attitude that they were above God:

- That they were **superior** to the people of God... they were **above** the Word of God...

- I think of all the nations where **Christianity is illegal** – where governments think that their laws are better than God’s laws.
- I think of arrogant dictators like **Adolf Hitler** or **Joseph Stalin** or **Kim Jong Un** (*Keem-Jong-Oon*; North Korea)
- I think of the arrogance of the seven justices on the **1973 Supreme Court** who said that we have the constitutional right to slaughter unborn babies.²

¹ Revelation 3:15–16

² They based this decision on the 14th Amendment’s right to privacy.

There is a judgment day coming over the pride of those who set themselves over the Word of God. “Yes, I know what the Bible says, but I’m going to do it my way anyhow” because I’m it.

3. **Hard Hearts** (3:2, 7)

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.
~ *Zephaniah 3:2*³

It didn’t matter what God did (if He blessed them; if He disciplined them...didn’t matter), their hearts had become stone cold toward God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about a day when “*lawlessness will abound*” and “*the love of many will grow cold*” (Matt. 24:12).

So, this is background as King Josiah is **rediscovering** the Word of God and as Zephaniah is **preaching** the Word of God.

Both of these men are calling for **REPENTANCE**.

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O shameless nation,
Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff,
Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you,
Before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you!
Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth,
Who have upheld His justice.
Seek righteousness, **seek** humility.
It may be that you will be **hidden** in the day of the Lord’s anger.
~ *Zephaniah 2:2–3*

Three key words in this call for repentance:

1. **SEEK**. You will never repent by accident! Nobody ever stumbles into repentance. Seeking God requires **action**. It requires **effort** and **intentionality**. It means opening His Word. It means coming to Him in prayer. It means gathering with His people. It means thinking about His character.

Then you will **call** upon Me and **go** and **pray** to Me, and I will listen to you.
And you will **seek** Me and find Me, when you **search** for Me with all your heart.
~ *Jeremiah 29:12–13*

2. **BEFORE**. There is coming a day when it will be too late.⁴

³ See also 3:7

⁴ Isaiah 55:6

3. **HIDDEN**. “It may be that you will be **hidden** in the day of the Lord’s anger” (2:3).

I read that, and I think “Where are you going to hide, Zephaniah?”

- God has said that He is going to “utterly consume everything” (1:2).
 - So where are you thinking people will hide from the from the Lord’s anger?

Remember what David said?

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
~ Psalm 139:7–8

- III. **Hide & Seek** | I hid on the top shelf in our closet, and Liz didn’t find me 😊
- But that’s not how it works with God.
 - You can’t hide from the God who is omnipresent (everywhere all the time)

David meant for this to be a comfort to us: no matter where we go, God is there.
But how does that comfort us if God is angry with our sin?

Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them;
Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.
~ Amos 9:2

Q. So where are you going to hide, Zephaniah?
A. You will be **hidden** in the arms of your Savior.⁵

At the conclusion of Zephaniah’s message, he looks forward to the day when the King of Israel would come and save His people from their sin and cover them in His righteousness – so that they are protected from the wrath of God.

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me...
Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
You shall see disaster no more.
In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love,
He will [dance] over you with singing.
~ Zephaniah 3:11, 14–17

⁵ **Illustration**: I remember hearing the story of baby birds that were saved from a forest fire because they were covered under the wings of their mother. Though, as far as I know, that story didn’t actually happen, it left a powerful picture in my mind of what it means to be hidden in the arms of Jesus (**Colossians 3:3**).

That's the Gospel in Zephaniah.

THE GOSPEL IN ZEPHANIAH

1. There is not a molecule on this earth or in your life that has not been affected by the curse of sin.
2. Because God is righteous in all that He does (**Zeph. 3:5**), He is coming as a consuming fire.
3. But He has made a way of salvation for His people.
4. How? By taking our judgment upon Himself.
5. When all the fierce anger of God's wrath against sin was unleashed on the cross, God's people (past, present, and future) were hidden in Jesus.
6. The call: turn toward God (away from our sin) and seek Him with all our heart.
7. Wait for the day⁶ when Jesus comes back⁷ and finishes what He started.⁸

That's the message of Zephaniah that led to revival!

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE WOMEN IN OUR CHURCH FAMILY!

In God's sovereignty, He ordained that this was the book that we looked at on Mother's Day, and the climax of Zephaniah's message is addressed to the "Daughter of Zion!"

*Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!*
~ **Zephaniah 3:14**

In the midst of devastation (of hardships & tears), God looks at His daughter and says, "*Daughter, I know you. I see you. I see your situation. I see your struggles. I see your tears. And I've got you. Keep your eyes on Me. It's going to be worth it!*"

You live in a world that is surrounded by sin and darkness and pressure...

- Being a **godly woman** is hard.
- Being a **young woman** who doesn't compromise her purity and her character for the sake of popularity is hard.
- Being a **faithful wife** who prioritizes her marriage is hard.
- Being a **mom** who is committed to raising her children to know the glory of God and love of Jesus as the most important reality in the universe is hard.
- Being a **mother-in-law** can be really hard. Being a **grandma** can be really hard.

Whatever your context... as a woman of God, the message of Zephaniah to you is this: "*Daughter, it's going to be worth it.*" So "*Sing, O daughter of Zion. Rejoice O child of Mine. Dance with all your heart and soul and mind.*" For the Lord your God in your midst has saved you. He dances with delight over you. He sings over you. And He loves you.

⁶ Zephaniah 3:8

⁷ Acts 1:11

⁸ Philippians 1:6