

And the book to which we turn our attention now is Zephaniah. It is a minor prophet. If you have any trouble finding it, you might be able to find Isaiah and then head right a little bit. If you get to Matthew, head left. It's between there. So Zephaniah was a prophet who prophesied during the days of Josiah's reign. Josiah was a king in Judah. He reigned from the year 640 to 609 BC, so that gives you a general idea of when he was prophesying.

You may know from your scripture reading that Josiah was a good king. He implemented many moral and religious reforms in Judah. And it's interesting because Zephaniah speaks to some of the same sorts of matters that Josiah was speaking to in his day because they were contemporaries. And so while we don't know the exact measure to which Zephaniah's prophesying was an influence on Josiah. We have every reason to believe that they were helping one another, that Zephaniah's message was complementing the sorts of things that Josiah was saying, and the things Josiah was saying were being complemented by Zephaniah, that they were helping together along with others to bring about the religious and moral reforms that took place during his day.

Now the message of Zephaniah is one of urgency. Zephaniah warns the people that the day of the Lord is coming. The day of the Lord is coming and he will judge all the earth. Now the day of the Lord, according to Zephaniah, is a day of wrath. It is a day of judgment. It is a day of gloom and deep darkness. It is a day of ruin and a day of devastation. Those are all his descriptions. Those vivid words to describe that day are all coming straight from Zephaniah's own description of that day. It's an unimaginable day of terror for everyone who is outside of Jesus Christ. But for all who are in Christ, it is a great day of triumph. It is a great day of triumph.

And this book is needed for our day today. It's needed for our day because many people don't take sin seriously. Many people do not take God's worship seriously. Many people think that, I know God's going to come one day and judge, but I mean, I'm better than most people. I mean, so and so is a lot worse than I am, so I know he'll bring judgment, but he'll have mercy on me because if you look around, I'm at least in the upper 10% of society in terms of my morality. But a book like Zephaniah says to you, you're not. Unless you're in Christ, and if you're outside of Christ, it doesn't matter what you think of yourself. It doesn't matter at all. You can have the highest view of yourself imaginable, and you can even be a really decent person in many respects. But outside of Christ, you're lost, and this day of judgment is coming, and there's no exceptions. God doesn't play favorites. He doesn't care if you're better than so-and-so. He cares if you're in Christ, and Zephaniah wants them to know this. He wants them to wake up.

It's not just a call to the world. Much of the text is a call to the church. The church needs to wake up. The church needs to get serious about God today because judgment is coming. If you had to sum up the whole book maybe in a sentence, you might say, God is coming and he is judging, so be ready. That would be my one sentence. God is coming, he is judging, so be ready.

With this in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and preaching of his word. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you've given us a Bible, that we don't have to grope in darkness but that we have the true light of your word. And we get to know what you expect of us, what you desire of us. We get to know the way of salvation and repentance. We can call upon the name of the Lord and be saved because you have told us who he is and what he has done. Oh God, we are a blessed people to have Bibles. We thank you for this Bible, these Bibles in this room. And we pray that through the preaching of your word, founded upon this Bible this evening, you would bless us in the name of Christ, amen.

text this evening, Zephaniah chapter one, verses one through six. Hear now the authoritative, inspired word of God. 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 Ammon, king of Judah. I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. I will sweep away man and beast. I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests, those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom, those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him.

This ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless it now. the reading and the proclamation of it to our lives.

We live in a sinned, cursed, and fallen world. And the only way this sinned, cursed, and fallen world can be purified is by way of judgment. If righteousness is to reign on the earth, Unrighteousness must be removed from the earth. An unrighteousness cannot be removed from the earth unless unrighteousness is judged and dealt with. So since we live in a sin-cursed and fallen world, the only way to have it purified is to have a judgment upon the sin and the curse of this world.

What is this theme of the needing to have unrighteousness addressed and righteousness established that this opening six verses deals with this evening? And we're going to try to capture it in the following way. Decreation and recreation. And these will be our two points this evening. Decreation and recreation.

creation. And as we begin to kind of unpack this theme of de-creation and re-creation, we need to take a moment to address what's being captured in verse one. So verse one is sort of its own little

introductory statement. We're going to address that separately before we really dive into de-creation and re-creation.

So first, let us just consider together some of the truths that are being presented to us in verse one. Verse one begins by stating for us that this book of Zephaniah is not Zephaniah's book. This book of Zephaniah is the Lord's book. These are the Lord's words. Look at the opening word. The word of the Lord. Zephaniah wants the audience and wants you to know that these aren't really his words. He is a divinely inspired author underneath the Holy Spirit. That what you read throughout this book, you must heed. And you must heed it because it is not coming from a mere man, but from God himself through Zephaniah. This book will be full of stern statements, hard sayings, really serious warnings, and you have to listen to it. Why? Because it's the Lord's word. Because this book is not Zephaniah's opinions or his great ideas, but God himself speaking to you. This word, which you have already heard read, is as much the word of God as if you heard a word from heaven right now audibly. This really is God's word. This really is the authoritative word of God. More so than even if you heard a word from heaven right now. for you really have in this book.

But you also see not only that it's the Lord's word, but you also see that the Lord is the central figure of the book of Zephaniah. So the book bears his name, but the central figure is actually the Lord. You see that in a number of ways in this opening verse. and in the context of the book as a whole. The fact that the book begins not by talking about Zephaniah, but actually begins first by talking about the Lord, indicates something that he might in fact be the central figure of the book. But that's further confirmed in a number of other ways. The book not only begins with the words, the Lord, but it also ends with the Lord. If you look at the final words of the book, the final words are the Lord has spoken or says the Lord. Literally the very last word of this book is Yahweh. So from the beginning to end, this book is really about the Lord and what he is going to do in his doing. His name is used 34 times in this book. Lord 34 times in a mere 53 verses.

Furthermore, you see in the opening verse that he indeed is a central figure by the genealogy that is listed. How does this genealogy indicate to you that the Lord is a central figure? Well, because three of the four people mentioned in Zephaniah's genealogy have Yahweh in their name, they have the Lord in their name. Gedaliah means Yahweh is great. Amariah means Yahweh has spoken. Hezekiah means Yahweh is my strength. And then Zephaniah's own name means Yahweh hides. So it is just abundantly clear from the opening verse, and then especially in the context of the book as a whole, that the central figure is the Lord.

We want to learn about the Lord. And do you know that we need that in the church today, don't we? A lot of churches are about what man wants and about man's opinions and man's desires and man's ideas. And the book of Zephaniah just comes right out and says, the church is about the Lord and the world is about the Lord. And whether the church likes it or the world likes it, this whole world is his. He owns it. He is the one to whom we are to ascribe worship and glory and honor. And

one day all men will bow indeed before this Lord and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the praise of God. Whether they want to or not, they will indeed bow. In other words, this opening verse says in its own way that God doesn't exist for you. You exist for God.

So what is with this genealogy here with Zephaniah? He traces his genealogy back four layers. says the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. There has to be some significance to this genealogy. Why does there have to be some significance to it? Because no other prophet lists their genealogy back this far, which just makes it stand out. Why would he do this? Some prophets, many of them don't mention their fathers at all. And then some of them do mention their fathers, but none of them go back to the fourth generation. So again, what is the deal here? We don't wanna be overly dogmatic on this point, but we can deduce some very probable reasons why he does go back four generations. What is he doing here? Well, he goes back to a man named Hezekiah. It seems like he's trying to draw your attention to that last name. I'm going to this guy, to this guy, to this guy, and then I'm gonna stop on Hezekiah so you realize who I am.

Hezekiah is very probably here the king Hezekiah. You might remember him. He was a former king in Judah a number of years before this. And he was also overall a pretty good king. You know, he makes some mistakes towards the end. You might know about those. But overall, he's a pretty decent king. And what Zephaniah is saying by tracing his lineage to Hezekiah, he seems to be suggesting two things. On the one hand, he's saying, I have royal lineage, which means I have access to the royal courts, which means I am able to get in with and speak with Josiah and the other royal figures, I have an end to the royal courts, which he'll speak about the royal courts throughout this letter or this book. But also he seems to be wanting you to remember that God is a faithful God to his covenants. God had promised to be faithful to his covenants and he's saying God has been faithful to me and to my family and I am reaping the benefits of God's covenant faithfulness.

Well, I suppose by now you have forgotten the actual two points of the sermon. This is the longest introduction I've probably ever given and maybe ever will give. What were our two points? See if I can remember. No, I do remember. Decreation and recreation. Decreation and recreation. So we're going to look at decreation and recreation in verses two through six.

Well, decreation is all over verses two through six, I'm sure. you can see that with just a quick glance. But let us go through it and try to bring out some of the ways you see decreation all over verses two through six. In verses two and three, the decreation is focused on all of the earth. You see that in verse two and three because the face of the earth is literally mentioned twice. So verse two, I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth. And then look at the end of verse three. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth. So in verses two and three, he's looking at the whole earth, the whole universe, the whole globe, and he's saying, I'm gonna wipe off everything. Notice that word everything in verse two. Not just everyone, but everything. Everything you know,

he's saying, I'm gonna wipe it off. I'm gonna sweep it away. I'm gonna get rid of it. Everything, he says in verse two.

to, well, what would be included in everything? Well, you might've guessed it, everything, but he decides to make sure his audience understands what he means by everything. So he begins to itemize it, so to speak, in verse three. He lists man and beasts, and he says, I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea. So he goes from man and beasts to birds and fish.

And this again is the creation. It's a reversal of the created order. If you remember back in Genesis 1, when God created all things, the ordering of the creation went like this. It went fish, then birds, then beasts, then man. And he's saying, I'm gonna reverse everything that I did at the start. I'm gonna sweep away Man and beasts and birds and fish. It's the exact opposite order. It's a de-creation.

And man is quite interestingly listed twice. Mankind and man. One time it's translated mankind, another time it's translated man. But look at verse three. It starts and ends with man or mankind. Verse three, I will sweep away man. So it begins with man, and look how verse three ends. I will cut off mankind. So man is mentioned twice. None of the other creatures, the fish, the birds, the beasts, none of them are mentioned twice.

So again, why? Why is because man is the crown of creation, and man is the one who plunged all of creation into sin. When man fell, all of creation fell with him. Therefore, he's wanting to show that man is going to bear the bulk of the responsibility. That man is the one who is going to be judged most harshly because man is the one who got us into this mess.

Romans chapter eight talks about this, that the creation groans and eager longing underneath sin because of us. Creation is groaning because of our sin. So he stresses that.

But let us consider a moment more this phrase, face of the earth. You've probably remember hearing that phrase before, the face of the earth. You remember where you probably might most likely remember hearing it? Well, back in the flood narrative. Remember how God talks about how he's going to get rid of everything on the face of the earth in the flood narrative? This language is used five times by my count, face of the earth or similar language is used in the flood narrative in Genesis. And here it is used as well. It's reminding you of God's previous great judgment at the flood. But this judgment is actually going to be greater than that judgment. And it's going to be greater than that judgment because this judgment includes even the fish. Do you remember, the flood narrative never mentions that the fish are going to be wiped away because presumably they were able to swim just fine in the waters. I'm not saying some didn't die throughout the event, but

presumably they were able to live. But here it's even greater. This is an even greater flood, so to speak, that is to come.

But what were those flood waters other than a decreation and a recreation, weren't they? Because in that great judgment of decreation, in that great judgment when so much was destroyed, not everything was destroyed, was it? There was a recreation. Eight people lived, namely Noah and his family. God preserved a remnant for himself even through those great floodwaters of decreation.

So you see decreation over all the earth in verses two and three, but then you see decreation of the church. Decreation of the church, verses four through And verses four through six, he begins to narrow his attention from the whole earth, specifically to the covenant community, the external people of God, of the church. And you might ask yourself, why would he do this? Don't the people who live in Judah, don't God's people who are living in Judah and Jerusalem realize that they would probably be included in the whole earth that he's just been saying is going to be judged?

Well, we have to remember the human heart. I have to remember how human beings tend to think. Well, man, I'm glad I'm part of the church. The whole earth is in trouble. I'm just glad I'm one of the people of God. I'm just glad I live in Jerusalem and Judea. Can't you see how that's the human heart? And again, you see this same attitude today. Well, I know that God's gonna come in judgment, but I go to church. I'm a church member. I grew up in the church.

Well, God doesn't care if you're a church member or if you grew up in the church, if you don't know Jesus. I'm not saying he doesn't care at all about church membership. That would be entirely false. God wants people to be church members, but there's that distinction between the visible and the invisible church, right? If you are merely part of the visible church, God doesn't care. You will be judged. And in fact, one might make the case you will be judged more harshly. You need to be part of Christ's church. You need to know Jesus. That's what he is wanting them to understand here.

He says judgment's going to come to the whole earth. And before Judah and Jerusalem can throw a party about this future judgment thinking it won't affect him, he comes down in verses four through six and says, and it's coming for you too. That's what he wants them to understand. He says in verse four, look there, I will stretch out my hand against Judah. Formerly in scripture, that phrase, I will stretch out my hand was often used in judgment, just like it is here, but judgment against the people of God's enemy. So you can think of the book of Exodus. God stretches out his hands against whom in the book of Exodus? He stretches them out against the Egyptians in judgment. And God is saying, I will stretch out that same hand in judgment on you, right? I stretched it out against them, but I will stretch it out against you too. If you are not truly of my people, I will stretch it out against you. Those who are merely circumcised in the flesh, to reference the end of Romans two. Those who are

merely Jews in the flesh, circumcised in the flesh, I will stretch out my hand against you, just as I stretched it out against the Egyptians. Make no mistake, I'm coming.

Then he goes on to specifically outline the way, the reasons he's going to do this. And what's so interesting in verses four through six is the sins that are listed are not the sins that you might anticipate. What is the real issue here? Why does he say he's gonna come and judge them so harshly, really justly? It's because of false worship. Isn't that interesting? Wouldn't you expect murder, violence, sexual immorality, covetousness? You would expect a whole host of sins. Probably, maybe, maybe the case of false worship would not be on your list, or at least not front and center of your list. But God wants to be worshipped, and he wants to be worshipped rightly, and he does not take his worship lightly. He cares about how he's worshipped. And thank the Lord that we have Rob teaching that very subject now in our Sunday school class.

It says in verse four that it begins with the priests. And I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests." So the priests, the pastors, if you will, are going astray. And God is saying, I'm going to bring judgment upon them. And it lists specifically in the name of the idolatrous priests. Some of the commentaries I read this week brought out this point, and I think they were right, that when it mentions the name here, that he's going to cut off the name, it's not merely mentioning the fact, although it is mentioning this, that there will be a total annihilation of these priests. That is in view. But it's also highlighting the fact that these people were ministering for their own name. They were wanting to be renowned. They were wanting to have their name known. They were wanting to be liked by the people. They were wanting to have, be ear ticklers, right? They wanted to tell people what they wanted to hear rather than being faithful to God. And he says, you wanted to have a renowned name, but you did not call upon my name. You will now have no name. I will cast you off. And so, he says to the priests, but as go the priests, so go the people.

Look at verse five, he begins to zero in on the other people more broadly, those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens. Who are these roof worshipers? Well, these roof worshipers are simply those who want to worship God in a more convenient way. I can imagine, you know, there in Jerusalem, and you're thinking, I really have to go to the temple to worship God? You know, I lay down at night, every single night on this roof, and you know, God, me and God, we can have a relationship right here on the rooftop, can't we? And I'm looking up at these beautiful stars he made, and they're kind of divine or something, I think, they might be gods, I'm not really sure, but as long as I'm sincere, I'm really heartfelt in my roof worship, can't you picture the way that you get to this place?

It's because they didn't wanna worship according to the Bible. They didn't wanna go to the temple. They didn't wanna do what God asked them to do, to worship him rightly. And this isn't foreign to today. This really is not foreign to today. You get to worship God with your family, and that's real.

Family worship's a real worship service, a real worship of some sort, right? But private devotional life, that's worship. You worship God privately. Private worship is good, but never to the exclusion of public worship. The me and my Bible alone mentality is clearly not biblical and that's the sort of attitude that these rooftop worshipers had.

And then you see this. Kind of, if we will, it's almost a stepping stone down. It kind of gets worse and worse and worse. You move from the rooftop worshipers to sort of a natural but wicked trajectory. You go from the rooftops and then look where you find yourself next in this syncretistic worship. Verse five, second half. Those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom. So this is what we know, right, is syncretism, which is really just when you try to mix different religions together, to sort of have a hodgepodge, and you think somehow God's gonna be okay with that, even though you know, I hope, right, that God said, I will have, thou shalt have no other gods before me. But syncretism says, I'll have some other gods who mingle in, maybe a little bit of Buddhism, maybe a little bit of Hinduism, maybe a little bit of yoga worship, some sort of other stuff to just kind of like mitigate, to fill in the gaps where you believe God's lacking. That's the attitude of these people towards the end of verse five.

But God says you can't worship him and worship money. God wants your whole heart. And then it leads to this final group of verse six. Those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him. They've totally rejected the Lord. They don't seek him any longer. And that's exactly what Zephaniah says you need to do. You need to seek the Lord. Where does Zephaniah say that? Zephaniah 2, 3. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. He wants you to seek the Lord, but they are not seeking him. This is decreation of the church itself.

Well, how do we see recreation throughout these verses? That's our second point, recreation. How do you see that in these verses? Well, it's implied really throughout all of these verses, verses two through six. Recreation is implied at every point.

Because what does the removal of all this false worship mean for the true believer? It means that the day of pure right worship is coming. What does the removal of all this wickedness in verse two through six imply for every true believer? It means that the day of unrighteousness, the day of righteousness is coming when all the unrighteousness will be judged. It will be removed. This day is coming. The Lord is going to come. He's going to remove all of this.

Do you here this evening not want to live in a world full of righteousness? Don't you want to live in a world where righteousness reigns at every point? Don't you want your own heart to be a heart that swells and overflows with righteousness, with pure thoughts and with good intentions and with right

actions? That day is coming according to these verses and you should be excited about it. It's recreation. It's the very thing that our assurance of pardon talks about.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, not just a new creature. It's a new creation. The old is passed away. Behold, the new has come. But how can you hear this evening, hear that and be excited? When when you're honest with yourself, you have sin in your very bosom. You have unrighteousness in your very soul. And this very text says he's going to come and he will make no exceptions. He will judge every sin. As far as a curse is found, he's coming in wrath. And so you have to ask yourself, how is this a recreation in any sense? How can this be good news for me?

And it's because if you were in Christ here this evening, every single bit of the sin of yourself has been dealt with already in judgment. He already brought this wrath of verses two through six on Jesus for you, on your Savior for your sins. And so you don't have to think he's gonna bring the sword down on you and damn you because he damned Christ in your place. This is an incredible testimony for you this evening to be rejoicing, to be glad, because everything about this that is horrible is not true for you in Christ. And everything about it that is good, which is the promise of a righteous land that is to come, is true for you.

All of the unrighteousness of your life and of the world around you is going to be removed one day. All of it. And if you're trusting in Christ, you will be remaining and you will be perfectly righteous in all of your ways. That day is coming if you are in Christ Jesus this evening.

Let us just bring a few very brief concluding applications tonight from this text. Take God's warning seriously. This is not a joke. God is coming and he's gonna judge. And this is not something that we can just say, well, I'll deal with it later. Right? The old saying is so good from the Puritans. You say, I'll repent tomorrow. Well, God hasn't promised you a tomorrow in which to repent. Right? Today, God could be calling for your very soul. And so you need to be serious about this warning tonight. But then also, take worship seriously. We live in a world, as we know, that just doesn't care about worship. Well, they care about it, as long as it does primarily whatever they want worship to be for them. But God really wants you to worship him his way. He cares. Worship is not a tertiary or secondary issue. Worship is primary. Worship matters. The first commandment's about worship. And then the next three are about worship. Worship matters. And so we have to take worship seriously. God judged them for their false worship.

And then, seek God daily. You want to seek Him. You don't want to be like those in verse 6 who don't follow after Him, who don't seek Him. You want to seek Him. You want to seek Him every day. Seek Christ. Seek Him every day. Because in Him, there is a hiding place to be found. Isn't that incredible? Verse 3 of chapter 2. Perhaps you may be hidden. You want to be hidden somewhere,

don't you, on that great day of judgment? Do you want to be hidden on the day of judgment? There's only one hiding place that's safe, and that's Jesus.

Do you remember in Revelation chapter 6 where the people are trying to hide? Everyone from the slaves and the kings, do you remember what they're trying to hide? They go to a pretty decent fortress as far as things go. They go to a cave. according to Revelation chapter six. Everybody from the kings to the servants are running into a cave on the great day when Jesus Christ comes back. That's where they go, they go to the cave. They think they'll be safe there. And you know what they say inside of the cave? Fall down on us, bring down the cave walls, crush us. They would rather be crushed by the cave walls than actually meet Jesus because they're so terrified.

Who in the world is going to be able to keep you safe on the day? Only if you're on his side, only if you're in Christ. And then you're completely safe. Then you have absolutely nothing to be afraid of. You have no reason to fear. There's nothing to be afraid of. When Christ is with you and you are with Christ, come what may, you're completely safe. If God before you, dear ones, this evening, who can be against you?

Earlier this week, I read something profound. The author of some book, that's who it was. It was Thornwell. I was reading in Thornwell this week and he says, for those who are elect, the most amazing thing in the world is that you could ever think they could be unelect. That's the most amazing thing to Thornwell is that somebody who God has chosen could ever be. It can't happen. You're safe. God has you. You're in his hands. He loves you. But only in Christ. So outside of Christ, dear ones, this evening, hear the warnings.

Let us all here this evening take worship seriously. In closing, I just want to say again what Rob said in the Sunday school class. Do we expect God to meet us in worship? Do we think he's going to do something in worship? Because we ought to. That's something we really should be striving for. And this text commands that of us.

Well, let us pray. Almighty God, we do praise you and thank you that you have met with us this evening. You've been with us. You have been in this very building. You have searched our very souls. You have sought out the very depths of our hearts. You know us better than we know ourselves. And we praise you that in Christ, there is a hiding place for us. There is a refuge. We are safer than we could ever be anywhere else outside of Christ. Man could put up the best fortress imaginable, but the eyes of the all-seeing and almighty God would penetrate instantly. But in Christ, we are totally safe. The judgment of verses two through six have been brought down on him for us. such that we cannot be condemned, we are safe, safe at last.

But if anyone, O God, know not Christ and obey not the gospel here this evening, O Lord, we do pray for them, that they would be converted. And we pray, O God, for our city. We pray for Yazoo City. Be saving in great number those around us. Be raising them from the dead and drawing them to this church or some other faithful church where they might be built up in the only Redeemer of God's elect, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.