

# From Judgment to Joy: The Message of Zephaniah


## Part 3

# TALKING POINTS WALKINGPOINTS

## Leader's Guide

2026-6-21



A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a “transforming church”. We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Since “Talking Points, Walking Points” is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to “dive deep” too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled “Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time”, are perfect for private reflection.

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

### Observation—*What do I see?*

- 1 Zephaniah prophesied against surrounding nations in every direction. What recurring sin did he identify as the reason for judgment on Moab and Ammon?
- 2 But it wasn't just pagan neighbors who received Zephaniah's rebuke—he criticized Jerusalem's leaders too. What images did he use for describing Jewish leaders?
- 3 The greatest contrast is between God and Jerusalem—see Zephaniah 3:5! How do they differ?

### Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- 4 What do we learn from the fact that Zephaniah condemns both Judah and its foreign nations?
- 5 What does the fall of powerful cities such as Nineveh teach us?
- 6 Why is mocking God's people treated so seriously?
- 7 What is the root of Jerusalem's guilt and why is it especially serious?

### Application—*What do I do with this?*

- 8 When circumstances are difficult, do you rely on God or primarily on yourself? Why do you think that?
- 9 How might pride show itself in our attitudes or actions today?
- 10 How should the certainty of God's judgment affect the way we live today?

- ① Pride, arrogance, and taunting God's people are repeatedly emphasized as the cause of their judgment.
- ② Princes are described as roaring lions, judges as evening wolves, prophets as treacherous and fickle, and priests as profaning what is holy.
- ③ God is righteous, just, and faithful, while the people are unjust, shameless, and rebellious.
- ④ He demonstrates that God is impartial; both covenant people and pagan nations are accountable to His justice.
- ⑤ Human strength, wealth, and political influence are temporary and cannot protect people from God's judgment.
- ⑥ Because hostility toward God's people reflects a deeper rebellion against God Himself.
- ⑦ Their problem was not a lack of information but a refusal to trust God and respond to His correction. Jerusalem possessed great spiritual privileges—prophets, Scripture, temple worship, and God's presence—yet still refused to listen and obey.
- ⑧ Be prepared with your own brief, concrete thoughts on this, but let group members go first.
- ⑨ Pride can appear as self-sufficiency, resistance to correction, or looking down on others, just as it did in the nations and Jerusalem.
- ⑩ It should produce humility, repentance, gratitude for Christ's righteousness, and a desire to live faithfully before God.



Make plans as a group to use this summer's conference as an outreach to neighbors and co-workers.

Jim Dieffenderfer will speak the first three Sundays:

- Sunday morning, July 5                      Entering into the Debate
- Sunday morning, July 12                    Evaluating Evolutionary Icons
- Sunday morning, July 19                    Evolution's Fatal Flaw

Then, Dr. Terry Mortenson of Answers in Genesis will speak the final Sunday morning, followed by evening sessions Sunday, Monday and Tuesday:

- Sunday morning, July 26                    Evolution v. Creation: Why Does it Matter?
- Sunday evening, July 26                    Ape-men, Adam and the Gospel
- Monday evening, July 27                    Millions of Years: Unscientific Origin, Catastrophic Consequences
- Tuesday evening, July 28                    Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years

Learn more about Dr. Mortenson's here:



# Sermon Summary Zephaniah 2:4–3:8

God sent Zephaniah to warn the people that judgment was just around the corner, and that judgment would be devastating! In our last study, Zephaniah called the Jewish people to take a look within. He warned of a coming judgment that would be imminent, justified, intensive, and comprehensive. In today's message, Zephaniah is going to tell us to take a look around. He informs us that God's judgment is not limited to His own people. It will also fall on the Gentile nations surrounding Judah. We all have a conscience. We all know that there are certain things we ought to do, and certain things that we ought not do. Those outside of God's covenant community will be judged for disobeying their consciences. Zephaniah is keen to point out that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is not only a righteous God, but He is also a gracious God.

**I. God Judges the Proud Nations Who Reject Him** (2:4–15) Every empire eventually becomes rubble: west (Philistia), south (Moab & Ammon), east (Cush) and north (Assyria). Human power is temporary. Zephaniah then speaks a word of comfort to a remaining faithful remnant of God's people (vv.6-7). Zephaniah refers to God's people as His sheep. He is saying that the humble survivors of God's coming judgment will find pasture and rest in the abandoned houses of the city of Ashkelon.

Zephaniah turns his attention to Judah's antagonistic "cousins" on the east side of the Jordan River. For hundreds of years there had been hostility between these nations (Num. 22:1–6; Judg. 3:12–14; 2 Sam. 10:1–4; 1 Kings 11:7–8). Despite their hostility, God had not permitted Judah to attack them. But here God says that He will use another nation to chastise them for their arrogant attacks on His beloved people (vv.8-9). Why would God judge these nations in this way? Mocking God's people often reveals a deeper rebellion against God Himself (v. 10). History repeatedly shows that empires that mock God eventually fall (v.11). These words remind us that people really can change. Through the power of the gospel, God changes people (1 Thess.1:8,9)! Despite their distance from Judah, other nations will be judged too – even the great power of Nineveh (vv.12-15). Zephaniah declares that this great city will become a desert, only inhabited by wild beasts. A city that was once marveled at will be mocked by those who pass by.

**II. God Judges His Own People** (3:1–7) The people of Jerusalem must be brought to a place of repentance. And so, the prophet once again turns his attention to them. The denunciation for these sins comes in the form of a woe pronouncement (3:1,2). The tragedy is that Jerusalem had every spiritual advantage, yet they still rebelled. Because of her prideful sin Jerusalem's residents closed their ears so that they would not hear words of warning. They were unreceptive to God's guidance. Had the people of Jerusalem trusted in God, they would have drawn near to Him and responded to His words of revelation. When leadership becomes corrupt, society collapses from the top down (v.3).

Zephaniah continues his focused denunciation. He turns his attention to false prophets and corrupt priests who were polluting the city (v.4). They could not be trusted. They delivered false messages to the nation. They promised peace rather than warn the nation of impending judgment (e.g., Mic 3:5). After extending judgment to everyone, in verse 5, God draws a stark contrast between Himself and His rebellious people. Zephaniah concludes this section by reminding them of God's past discipline, but they have stubbornly refused to turn back to God (v.6). Zephaniah is painting the picture of a radically depraved people. God, in His love and grace, extends discipline with the hope that the nation will come to their senses and walk in obedience to Him. Sadly, they do just the opposite; they pursue evil with even greater vigor (vv.7-8).

A list of questions I would like for you to reflect upon this week:

- How have you seen God work restoratively in your life? In what specific ways?
- The enemies of God taunted God and His people. As a believer, how have you experienced the world's taunting?
- Do you understand that sin is, first and foremost, a heart issue?
- Do you treat your sin as if it is a behavior to correct, or a heart issue to repent of?
- Do you often struggle with the same sin over and over again?
- Do you realize that you do not have to be a slave to that sin?
- Have you confessed and repented of that sin? Have you asked God to strengthen you in the face of this temptation?
- Have you contemplated that Jesus died so that you could be made righteous? Have you thanked God for that recently?
- In what areas do you struggle to trust God? Can you confess that to Him right now?
- In what ways have you seen leaders steer people away from God?
- Are you stewarding the responsibility to point people to Jesus with your life and your words?
- Chesterton once said, "If I had only one sermon to preach, it would be a sermon against pride." In what ways have you seen your pride make its presence known?

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

***In Psalm 50, God—the righteous Judge—calls all the earth as witnesses as He examines both His covenant people and the openly wicked. Mere religious activity cannot substitute for heartfelt devotion, and association with God's covenant cannot excuse rebellion.***

**Monday— God Condemns Empty Ritualism (Study Psalm 50:1–6.)** God appears as the Judge of all the earth, summoning heaven and earth to witness His case against His covenant people. The scene is majestic and solemn, emphasizing that God's judgment is neither arbitrary nor hidden. God evaluates worshippers, not merely worship practices. We must approach worship with reverence, remembering that God sees beyond outward actions to the heart.

- Why does God summon all creation to witness His judgment?
- What does this opening scene teach us about God's holiness and authority?
- How should the certainty of God's judgment affect our worship?

**Tuesday— God Rejects Mere External Religion (Study Psalm 50:7–13.)** Israel's problem was not that they failed to bring sacrifices; they brought them regularly. Their error was assuming that God needed their offerings or could somehow be indebted to them. God reminds them that every animal already belongs to Him. Religious activity cannot replace a genuine relationship with God. We must guard against thinking that church attendance, giving, or ministry service can substitute for sincere love and obedience.

- What misunderstanding about sacrifice was God correcting?
- Why is it impossible for human beings to enrich God?
- In what ways can Christians fall into similar patterns today?

**Wednesday— God Desires Thankful Trust Rather Than Mere Ceremony (Study Psalm 50:14–15.)**

God identifies the worship He truly seeks: gratitude, covenant faithfulness, prayer, and dependence upon Him. The proper response to God is not merely ritual observance but thankful trust. True worship combines gratitude, obedience, and dependence upon God. Our worship should be marked by thankfulness and reliance upon God rather than mere religious routine.

Why does God emphasize thanksgiving?

- What does it mean to "pay your vows to the Most High"?
- How does calling upon God in trouble demonstrate faith?

**Thursday— God Condemns Hypocritical Profession (Study Psalm 50:16–17.)** The wicked recite God's laws and speak of His covenant while refusing to obey Him. They claim God's truth with their lips while rejecting it in their lives. God is not impressed by a profession of faith that lacks obedience. We should regularly examine whether our lives align with the truths we profess.

- Why does God object to these people speaking His statutes?
- What does it mean to "cast" God's words behind us?
- How can believers avoid becoming hearers but not doers of the Word?

**Friday— God Exposes the Sins the Wicked Tolerate and Practice (Study Psalm 50:18–21a.)** God lists specific sins: theft, adultery, deceit, slander, and betrayal. These people not only committed evil but became comfortable with it. Their greatest mistake was interpreting God's patience as indifference. God's silence should never be mistaken for God's approval. We must view God's patience as an opportunity for repentance, not permission to continue in sin.

- Why is consent to sin nearly as serious as committing it?
- What sins does God specifically identify?
- Why do people often mistake divine patience for divine acceptance?

**Saturday— God Calls the Wicked to Repent Before Final Judgment (Study Psalm 50:21b–23.)**

God warns that judgment is coming. Yet even in this warning there is mercy. The psalm concludes with a promise that those who offer true thanksgiving and order their lives rightly will see God's salvation. God's warnings are invitations to repentance before judgment falls. Today is the time to remember God, repent of sin, and walk in grateful obedience.

- What does it mean to "forget God"?
- Why is God's warning itself an act of mercy?
- How does v. 23 point to the blessing of genuine repentance and faith?