


From Judgment to Joy: The Message of Zephaniah

Part 1

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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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

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Note: For each of the following questions, refer to the **Sermon Summary** inside.

Observation—*What do I see?*

- The phrase, “the great day of Yahweh” is central to Zephaniah’s message. From Zephaniah 1:14–18, catalogue what that day will bring—and **why**.
- Zephaniah 3:8 continues the theme of “the day” of Yahweh. More of the same—right? But notice that “Yahweh’s day” will bring something else too. From Zephaniah 3:9–20, catalogue what that day will bring to the recipients of God’s grace!

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- Why is Zephaniah’s historical context important for understanding his message?
- Why does Zephaniah speak of both judgment and salvation?
- What is the significance of Josiah’s reforms in relation to Zephaniah’s ministry?
- What theological idea is drawn from the structure of Zephaniah’s opening and closing verses?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- How should non-believers respond to the idea of “the day of Yahweh”?
- How should Christians respond to the idea of “the day of Yahweh”?
- Pastor Doug asked each of us: **“Is your heart completely devoted to God?”** Take a moment now to honestly answer that question. Mark where you are today.



What would it require of you to move higher up on the scale?
Are you willing to do that? Why or why not?



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 is the last of nine pre-exilic prophets. Pre-exilic prophets are those Jewish prophets who ministered to Israel and Judah before the Babylonian exile. Zephaniah ministered in the time period between the fall of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC and the fall of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. More specifically his ministry occurred somewhere around 636-623 BC. As obscure as this book may be to most of us, it contains an important message that we need to embrace as we seek to better understand what the God whom we worship is up to in the world. This short book powerfully depicts both God's judgment on sinful people as well as His gracious act of salvation for the humble and undeserving. Christian salvation is also related to God's justice—that is, we are saved for something (eternal life with God) and we are saved from something (the just wrath of God). The writings of the Biblical prophets in general, and the prophet Zephaniah in particular, describe a coming time when God will crash into human history and bring about salvation and blessing for all who trust Him. But He will also bring a terrible wrath on those who have rejected Him as their God. Zephaniah calls this period in history “the day of the Lord.”

Zephaniah 1:1 places the ministry of Zephaniah during the reign of King Josiah who was the last good king of Judah. He ruled from 640–609 BC. Zephaniah is called the “son of Cushi.” Biblical scholars debate the implications of Zephaniah's father having the name “Cushi” (the Cushite). Verse one also mentions that Zephaniah was the son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was perhaps Judah's most famous king. If that is the Hezekiah spoken of here, that would make Zephaniah his great-great-grandson. If so, then Zephaniah was a member of the royal family! The fact that throughout his ministry Zephaniah attacks the sins of princes, priests, judges, and false prophets, further suggests that he was acquainted with these powerful people and that he had a great deal of boldness to call them out (3:3–5).

When King Josiah's reign began, the Assyrians dominated the region. But during this time period, to the east of Assyria, the Babylonians were rising to power. By the end of Josiah's reign, the Assyrians were in retreat and the Babylonians were aggressively expanding. About forty years after Zephaniah's prophetic ministry, the nation of Judah was conquered by Babylon and many of its citizens were exiled there. Josiah began his reign at the early age of 8! He would go on to reign for 31 years and the Scriptures reveal that he was a good and godly king. The book of 2 Kings tells us that in the eighth year of Josiah's reign, he began to seek the God of King David (2 Chronicles 34:3). Josiah's life is a reminder that God can use young people in powerful ways to advance His purposes in the world (2 Chronicles 16:9). In the 18th year of his reign (622/621 BC), Josiah initiated repairs to be done on the Jewish temple. While doing those repairs, a long-lost copy of the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple and brought to King Josiah. Somehow, over the years, the nation had lost Moses' writings! How does that even happen? It was the result of spiritual complacency and neglect. For 60 years, they had No Scriptures -No Word from God - No moral and spiritual guidebook. Is it any wonder Judah had fallen into such a moral and spiritual decline?

In the Law there were both blessings and curses attached to the Mosaic covenant (1:11-16). It is the spiritual law of sowing and reaping. We live in a cause-and-effect universe. In verses 17-20, we see that because of King Josiah's tender, godly heart, God would forestall His coming judgement on Judah until after Josiah's death. It was a kindness of God for Josiah's faithfulness to Him. King Josiah, with Zephaniah's help, was attempting to reverse the evil trends promoted by the two previous kings of Judah—King Manasseh and King Amon. Evil reigned in the land. It was into this spiritual context that God called Zephaniah to minister. He sought to shake the people of Judah out of their spiritual complacency and urge them to return to God. Zephaniah's ministry is yet another indication that God's eyes are on all the nations of the world, not just the Jewish people (John 3:16). Zephaniah accuses the nation of Judah of the same basic covenant violations that the other Jewish prophets raged against—things like idolatry, social injustice, empty religious ritualism, among other offenses. Tragically, the sins identified by the prophet Zephaniah are indistinguishable from the sins that plague our nation today. And like Judah, the Christian church is sometimes guilty of adopting the values of the culture around us (1 Peter 4:17–18). The book of Zephaniah is not just a book written to warn Judah of her sins; it serves as a warning to us today (Titus 2:11-14).

The book of Zephaniah can be organized into the following five sections: [1] Judgment in the Day of the Lord (1:1–2:3), [2] Judgment on the Nations (2:4–15), [3] Judgment on Jerusalem (3:1–8), [4] Restoration of Jerusalem and the Nations (3:9–13), and [5] Rejoicing in the Lord's Salvation (3:14–20). Zephaniah makes it clear that divine retribution must come before there can be divine restoration. After all, Jesus' crucifixion preceded His resurrection. Judgment on sin preceded the glories of resurrection. “Through God's Judgement comes Blessing.”

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

In preparation for entering the Promised Land, God, through Moses, warned the people:

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by walking after other gods which you have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28).

By Zephaniah’s day, they’d chosen the path which led to God’s curse. Israel forsook Yahweh in six key ways...

Monday—Sin # 1: Idolatry Israel worshiped Baal, Asherah, the “host of heaven,” and imported gods from surrounding nations. This violated the first two commandments (Exodus 20:3–5).

Study: 2 Kings 17:7–12 and Jeremiah 2:11–13

Now read Ezekiel 14:1–8. Three times in this passage (v. 3, 4 & 7) God refers to “idols in the _____”. Idolatry does not require a statue. Valuing or trusting anything besides the one true God is idolatry. Is your heart attached to anything more than it is to God?

Tuesday—Sin # 2: Persistent Covenant Unfaithfulness Despite warnings from prophets, Israel repeatedly violated the covenant God made with them. They ignored God’s law, rejected the prophets, and hardened their hearts. This is described as “breaking the covenant” itself.

Study: 2 Kings 17:15–16 and 2 Chronicles 36:15–16

God’s covenant is relational and moral—not merely legal. Rebellion is portrayed as betrayal, not just rule-breaking. How often do you think about your moral and relational responsibilities toward God?

Wednesday—Sin # 3: Oppression The prophets repeatedly connect exile with systemic injustice—exploitation of the poor, corrupt courts, dishonest business practices, failure to defend widows, orphans, and foreigners.

Study: Isaiah 1:21–23; Amos 5:11–12, 24 and Jeremiah 5:26–29

Worship is inseparable from ethics; injustice toward people is rebellion against God. Are there any obligations to the marginalized which you are ignoring?

Thursday—Sin # 4: Violence and Bloodshed The land itself is described as being “defiled” by violence. Murder, injustice in courts, and general societal brutality are highlighted. When one man, Cain, killed **one** other man, “blood cried out from the ground” (Genesis 4:10-11).

Study: Ezekiel 7:23 and Isaiah 59:3–7

Violence pollutes the land. America is stained by the blood of sixty-five **million** innocent pre-born.

Friday—Sin # 5: Religious Hypocrisy and Empty Ritualism Israel continued temple worship while living in rebellion. External sacrifices, festivals, and prayers were offered without repentance and heart obedience. God rejects worship disconnected from righteousness.

Study: Isaiah 1:11–17 and Jeremiah 7:9–11

God is not impressed by religious activity when the heart and life are unchanged. Are you worshiping “in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24)?

Saturday—Sin # 6: Hardness of Heart God sent prophets “again and again,” but Israel refused to listen. Instead, these prophets were ignored, mocked, and killed. Exile is the penalty for persistent refusal to repent.

Study: 2 Chronicles 36:15–16 and Jeremiah 25:4–7

God warns before He acts, but we will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8).

Do you truly believe that God will judge you according to your works (Jeremiah 17:10; Psalm 62:12 & 28:4; Proverbs 24:12; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6 and Revelation 2:23 & 20:12-13)?