

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



THE DAY OF THE LORD

ZEPHANIAH

It's no secret that in our day, people hate the idea of other people being judgmental. In fact, they hate judgment so much that they begin to judge the person they believe is judging them!

However, we can't get away from judgment; we have to judge. Judgment is how decisions are made, friendships are forged, safety is sought, and life is lived. But still, people are completely against the idea of judgment, and as a consequence, they are completely against the God of the Bible.

Out of the many things we know about God and how He reveals Himself, one of the ways God reveals Himself is that He is Judge. In other words, God is very judgmental. He has righteous standards that are perfectly in step with His righteous character, and by this, He judges all of mankind.

It is with this acknowledgment that we come to the book of Zephaniah. In this prophecy, God is Judge and as He compares His standard against His people, we find that they have fallen desperately short. Needless to say, this prophecy is not a very happy prophecy.

Zephaniah was written at the time of Jeremiah, and it was his task to join Jeremiah and speak against Judah to inform them of the impending judgment coming by way of the Babylonians.

We're not told an incredible amount about Zephaniah, but what is known captures the imagination. His name means "He Whom Jehovah Hides" and he is the only prophet who was of royal blood. He claims in his introduction to be of a royal lineage. This was a man with a name that would allow him to rule, but who had a heart that caused him to proclaim.

The world was in near chaos. Two huge forces were at odds with each other. The Assyrians were done with their ascent of power, and the Babylonians were the empire that was taking center stage on the world's scene.

Because of this, Judah was able to experience a large amount of freedom for the first time in about fifty years however, what was done with this relief was the truly tragic part. King Josiah, one of the few godly kings of Israel made little impact on this nation in terms of driving them away from their sin. If you remember, they even found the book of the law that had once been lost, and though there was a little bit of excitement, on the whole, it was very shallow because the people still did not respond.

So they had a godly leader, and they had God's book, and then God sent a godly man to warn them. It would seem they had every resource imaginable to turn back to God but still their time was wasted and still they were left unmoved. And so Zephaniah's message comes down like a hammer against these people who refuse to change.

How to Think About Zephaniah

You'll notice very straightforward tones in this book. Zephaniah is a very 'matter of fact' style prophet and his message was written very simply and plainly.

Judgment Will Come (1:1-3:8): This places a bull's eye on every single nation of the earth. This is how it operates:

Judgment Will Come Against the Entire Earth (1:2-3): "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked: and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD."

As we see from this passage, no specific nation is mentioned here. It is, once again, a 'matter of fact' statement. Worldwide judgment will come.

Judgment Will Come Against Judah (1:4-2:3): Throughout this passage you see God explaining what He will do: "I will punish..." "I will bring distress..." "I will search [to bring judgment]..." All of this against the nation of Judah.

Judgment Will Come Against the Surrounding Nations of Judah (2:4-15): Several nations and cities are mentioned here that we have seen in the past. Assyria, Nineveh, Ethiopia, and others all find themselves on the wrong side of God's judgment.

Judgment Will Come Against Jerusalem (3:1-7): Jerusalem, what was to be God's holy city, appears to be the very source of all of the oppression experienced by and perpetuated by the rest of the nation. God speaks against the princes, the false prophets, and the priests. God tells them that they lost their ability to feel shame. These offenses are what will cause God to come against Jerusalem.

Judgment Will Come Against the Entire Earth (3:8): "Therefore wait ye upon the me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."

Once again we see God grouping all of those who would stand against Him, and instead of them being allowed to continue in their rebellion one moment more, He brings swift and complete judgment against them.

Blessing Will Come (3:9-20): As we can see, the entire earth will be in complete disarray and upheaval as God brings judgment against the world. However, it is Zephaniah's name that becomes a beacon of hope. This prophet who was named "He Whom Jehovah Hides" becomes an indication that God always has a remnant. We have seen this word before in our journey through the prophets. This word speaks to the fact that no matter the evil, chaos, and judgment, no matter how many fall away from God, He always has a small remnant of people whom He calls His own and whom He hides in the midst of trouble.

A Blessing for the World (3:9-10): "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed shall bring mine offering."

Once the hammer of judgment has fallen, God's glory will then be known to all the world and all people, even those rebellious people of the nation of Israel, will all serve God together.

A Blessing for Judah (3:11-20): A further explanation of how God's people would respond. What once was filled with judgment and sorrow, ends with peace and rejoicing as God's blessings cause God's people to sing. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem."
(vs.14)

What to Look for in Zephaniah

Phrases—

The Day of the LORD: You'll find this phrase twenty times during your reading of this prophecy. If someone was unfamiliar with this phrase, and they only heard it by itself, they might believe that this phrase is used to describe the day when God would like to be worshipped or honored. "Why are you praying?" Says one. "Haven't you heard?" The other answers, "It's the day of the LORD!"

However, if you're reading this phrase in context and you see this phrase attached to the calamity surrounding it, you might look and be tempted to look at a singular point in time that has already occurred. And yes, the scope of this phrase included the impending invasion of the Babylonians, but it also had a much wider scope.

The Day of the LORD is a phrase that encompasses God's final judgment on every affair of man. Jesus speaks of this time in Matthew 24.

What to Gain from Zephaniah

Faithfulness Is the Test of Real Change: We touched on this briefly, but during this time, one of the reasons no one thought that judgment would come was because not only were these people experiencing a new peace, but it would appear there was what would consider a brief little revival among the people. Of course, it wasn't a real revival. Sure there was a renewed sense of God, there was a new pleasure and fascination with God's Word, but Zephaniah could see the underpinning foundation in this spiritual resurgence and saw that it was cracked, and flawed, and shallow.

This happens to many of God's people today. They hear a sermon, they look at their Bible on their coffee table and decide it has been sitting there too long and that they really should grab it and pick it up, they decide that their prayer life isn't what it should be, and suddenly they are re-inspired for a moment, but if you were to examine the foundation, you would see that it was rooted in emotion and not because of revival.

The real test of real change in a person's life is this: Are they continuing in faithfulness?

Judgment Is the Result of All Sin: We may have been wearied in speaking about this in our study of the entire prophetic section of the Old Testament. But we should be warned; those hearing these messages for the first time wearied of them and ignored them also. When the Bible repeats itself, it is not by accident. If we see judgment as a continued theme, then not only should we pay attention, but we should give our lives to continually have it on our minds and in our hearts. As it relates to God's justice, we need to peer out and do all we can now for the cause of Christ because judgment will come.

Hope Is the Future of God's Own: The most glorious facet of this prophecy is the fact that God has a remnant of people whom He calls His own. And as God's own we are able to experience firsthand the hope God brings in the eternal ages to come. We will experience the hope of salvation. We will rejoice over the hope of God's preservation. And we will watch as God brings hope to His created nation, by way of restoration. Being one of God's own brings brings endless joy because of the future of His hope.

THE DAY OF THE LORD - ZEPHENIAH

VISIT ONLINE AT LAKEWORTHBAPTIST.ORG/ABIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION



THE FOLLOWING RESOURCE IS OWNED BY LAKE WORTH BAPTIST CHURCH AND IS FREE FOR PERSONAL USE.

PLEASE DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE THE MATERIALS WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

WWW.LAKEWORTHBAPTIST.ORG