

Zephaniah
Lesson 2

Text: **Zephaniah 1:1-2:3**

Intro: Last we we began Zephaniah by looking at the time frame he was prophesying in. It is important for us to remember that he was speaking these things in a time of relative peace. Josiah was king, Assyria was on the decline, Egypt was licking their wounds, and Babylon was not a power house yet. Israel was divided, but the southern kingdom was left alone to govern it's self. As an act of government, Josiah began a religious revolution, rebuilding the temple, cleansing the land from pagan influences, re-establishing the law, and the feast. Trying to put things back under the leadership of God. And Zephaniah comes along with bad prophecies.

A Mid-Evil Latin hymn used the fifteenth verse of chapter one to sing, it went like:

Day of wrath! O day of mourning!
See fulfilled the prophets warning,
Heav'n and earth in ashes burning!

O what fear man's bosom rendeth
When from Heave'n the Judge descendeth
On Whose sentence all dependeth! Day of Wrath, William Irons

I wonder how popular this song would be today. In a contemporary style? But the “Day of Wrath” or the day of the Lord are big ideas in the bible, and they do need to be discussed. This is what Zephaniah is going to do. The first two chapters of the book, Zephaniah relates the day of the Lord to both Jew and Gentile.

I. The Day of the Lord and the Jews

A. The Wrath of God

i. An (Not So) Easy Life,

- a) The book was written by Zephaniah, the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah.
 - One would expect someone like this to be living in a very comfortable life. After all he was of royal decent.
 - But the calling on Zephaniah's life was somewhat different from that of his great grandfather.
 - He was called to be a prophet.
 - **Proverbs 22:6** “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
 - the proverb uses the definite article, it is talking about a particular child, not all children together.
 - We should help our children find what God has called them to do, and

not expect them to do what we have done.

- b) Back to the life of a prophet, it was not easy being the mouth piece of God,
- one of the contemporaries of Zephaniah was Jeremiah,
 - he was arrested, beaten, and put in stocks, and imprisoned.
 - **Jeremiah 20:2** “Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.”
 - **Jeremiah 37** Jeremiah was arrested again, in **38** he was placed in a dungeon.
 - Other prophets were treated worse.
 - So being a prophet was not necessary a desired calling on ones life.
 - A pastor friend of ours told when he announced his calling to his family, his mother broke down in tears, and not the tears of joy. She knew what he was in store for.
- c) God was going to use Zephaniah to pronounce judgment on Judah, in the form of Gentile (Babylonian) captivity.
- He paints a gruesome picture of the day, and it is a picture of what will happen again.

ii. A Picture of the Flood, vs.2&3

- a) the **2nd** and **3rd** verse look a lot like and are written a lot like the flood event recorded in **Genesis 6:7; 7:4; 9:8-10**.
- b) The word consume is to “sweep away completely” or to make an end of
- Here the picture is not only is God going to destroy the idols, and the things brought in by others, but He is also going to destroy the things of Israel.
 - The things He made, The nation of Israel
 - He is going to destroy the “stumbling blocks” that is the idols.
 - His out stretched hand is a symbol of the judgment.
 - It is interesting to note that the outstretched hand can be a hand of judgment or a hand of mercy.
 - **Psalm 136:12** tells of the mercy of God pictured in His outstretched hand.
- c) The two gods mentioned in these verses:
- Baal, the Canaanite god,
 - the god of rain and fertility, these are two things that are or were essential in the middle east to ensure the future. Rain for the crops, and fertility for the future generations.
 - Malcham the Ammonite god,
 - god of fire, this was a god that the people offer child sacrifice to.
 - The shedding of innocent blood
 - the image of Malcham was that of a calf head on human body with

outstretched arms.

- (the priest would place a child into his arms for sacrifice)
- I must wonder if God was using the description of his judgment coming in the form of outstretched hands and the picture of a flood, as a jab toward these gods.

d) The nation may have claimed to be worshiping God,

- after all they re-entered into a covenant.
- But they still flirted with the worship of false gods.
 - This would be something God would take care of in the Babylonian captivity.
 - For 70 years they would not be allowed to worship in the manner God had ordered, but upon their release, they would rebuild the temple, and begin sacrifices again.

iii. A Picture of a Great Sacrifice, Vs.7-13

a) Guest, Attendance, and Sacrifice,

- the nation of Israel, because of their acceptance of pagan gods were familiar with a service of this type, and even participated in them.
- They would expect there to be some order of service, who were the ones of high importance, those who were under them, down to the lowest, including the one being sacrificed.
- They would expect the kings, princes, and the upper class to be in attendance in the places of honor,
 - but this would be different for them.
 - According to **vs.8&9** it was them to be sacrificed.
 - God was going to punish them because of their rejection of His law, and the acceptance of these pagan influences, including their clothing.
 - Also they were the ones who were in charge of the nation, physically and spiritually.
 - With their abandoning of the law, they taught by example that the people should abandon the law as well.
- After Josiah, four kings arose who yielded their rule to the authority of the Egyptian government. Instead of trusting the Lord, they placed their trust in the allies.

iv. The Layout of the City of Jerusalem,

a) when God's guest the Babylonians they would come in this way:

b) The Fish Gate

- the fish gate was just as it sounds, where the fisherman would set up market

c) The Second Quarter

- this is where the wealthy people lived, and their fashionable houses (built from wages owed to the poor)

d) And Maktesh

- this was the business district.

e) This was the way the Babylonian empire would come in and destroy the city.

- All this could have been avoided if they would have listened to the prophets and repented.
- But, they thought they were God's chosen people and they could do anything and get away with it.

v. The Picture of a Great Battle, Vs. 14-18

a) this is a vivid picture,

- hearing the cries of the people
- the shout of the warriors, the sounds of the chariots

b) what Zephaniah tells about here is not only a picture of the day coming for Israel, but also a picture of what this world is in for on that day.

c) The violence and destruction is gruesome, and none would be hid from it,

- they all, old young, weak strong, rich poor. They will all alike suffer.
- The same is true for the end times of this world,
 - the old young, weak strong, the rich or poor. They will all suffer.
 - Going back to the picture of the flood, who was spared?
 - Noah and his family, but who was lost in the flood?
 - Are we to assume there were no children, no elderly, no cripple, no weak? They all perished in the flood. These are not disqualifying requirements, God will still judge.

vi. A Plea for Repentance, 2:1-3

a) there is only one way to escape the judgment of God, and that is to partake in His mercy, and that was provided by Jesus Christ.

b) Zephaniah is pleading with the people:

- Gather together,
- Before all this happens, there is time now, but it will not always be so,
 - judgment is coming and sure,
- Seek the Lord,
- Seek Righteousness
- Seek Meekness/ Humility. (be not proud)
- that in the day of His judgment, He will hide you.