

Zephaniah

Get Ready



Let's open our road map to the Old Testament book of Zephaniah. For several years, my wife and I had the privilege of attending the Pastors Conference at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. When we first attended there, Homer Lindsey Jr. was the pastor. A short time later, Jerry Vines became the co-pastor of that great church, a church that literally lead and baptized thousands for Christ every year. Homer told a story while we were there once about a time when he was preaching a series of sermons about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In the midst of a sermon preparation, he was in his office when his secretary buzzed him to say that his son was there. You see, his son had called Homer's secretary and set up an appointment to meet with him. Homer thought it was strange that instead of just asking him a question at home, he actually set up an appointment through his secretary. So, Homer thought this must be really serious. Homer decided when the secretary let his son in that he was going to treat him like he would any other member of his church. When his son came in, they exchanged some pleasantries and then Homer got down to business. Homer asked his son why he was there. His son said, "Dad, I want to get married, (he named his girlfriend) and I want you to perform the wedding." Homer was surprised just a little bit, but after gathering his composure, he said to his son, "I would love to perform the wedding ceremony for you and your girlfriend. We think she is an awesome young girl. She is already a believer in Christ. She comes from a respected family

in this church, and I would just be honored to perform the ceremony. Your mother and I would love to have her as a daughter-in-law. Just as soon as you guys get out of college, we would be glad to do that for you." Homer's son said, "No Dad, I want to get married now." Homer looked at his son, and the next words out of his mouth were, "Do you know how old you are?" His son said, "Yes Dad, I am 12." Homer said, "You want to get married now?" His son said, "Yes Dad that is right. We want to get married right now." Homer thought quickly, *why would you want to get married now?* Instead of just thinking it to himself, he said it out loud. His son said, "Dad, you have been preaching about the coming of Jesus and I want to be ready. I believe He is coming soon, and I also want to be married when He comes."

When was the last time you heard a sermon about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and thought you had really better hurry up and do what you want to do because you might not have time to do it if Jesus comes soon? Or, have you been on the other end of it where you heard a sermon about the Second Coming of Jesus and you really wished He would wait because there were some things you really wanted to do down here before He comes. I pray you get the idea in this lesson that Zephaniah just might be related somehow to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Our Scripture will be Zephaniah 1:14-2:3, but let me just make a few introductory remarks before we read these verses. Zephaniah, according to his own words, is the great-great grandson of Hezekiah. He is prophesying during the time of Josiah, the king of Judah. We already know this from our historical book study. Josiah is the great grandson of Hezekiah. This is cool! We are talking about two cousins; one is the great-great grandson, and the other is the great grandson of Hezekiah. One is the king and the other is the prophet. Because of the internal evidence of the book, we believe that Zephaniah is probably prophesying in the period between 635 BC and 625 BC. Why do we say that? We know it is before the fall of Nineveh, which occurred in 612 BC. From the conditions described in the book, we would believe that the reforms that took place during Josiah's

day hadn't taken place yet, and we know those reforms took place in 621 BC. So, it would be before that. Josiah didn't start reigning until 640 BC. So, somewhere between 640 BC and 609 BC, Zephaniah prophesied, and the internal evidences would say it was during the first part of Josiah's reign.

The very name, *Zephaniah*, means, 'Yahweh hide,' or it can mean, 'whom Yahweh has hidden.' Now, the word, *hide*, means, 'to shelter or protect.' So, it is either talking about 'Yahweh hides,' or it refers to 'the one whom Yahweh has sheltered, protected, hidden,' that being Zephaniah. He is the ninth Minor Prophet.

We are going to be taking exit 36 on Route 66. Being the ninth Minor Prophet means there are only three more to go. Historically, Zephaniah is the last prophet before the Babylonian invasion. The last three prophets we will study on Route 66 prophesied after the exile.

The Old Testament Day of the Lord

As I was reading this book, it seems like everything he says has already been said. When Amos started proclaiming the day of the Lord, it was just a statement. Now, in the life of the Southern Kingdom the day of the Lord is upon them. Unlike any other prophet in the Old Testament, Zephaniah is going to expound on the day of the Lord and what a picture. If I were to give a theme to Zephaniah, it would be "Get Ready."

Scripture

"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will

bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. 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.”

The purpose of this study is to see the big storyline of the Bible, and how each individual, big story in the 66 books, fit into the overall big story of the Bible. We are learning how God has taken us from a garden of ruin, and one day, to a city of restoration, because of what He has made right that was wrong, in the work of His Son Jesus Christ.

- **Silence**

We are studying a prophecy by a man named Zephaniah. When you study the book of Zephaniah, you quickly see that it breaks down into three parts. It starts out with silence and it ends with singing. Chapter 1 verse 7 says, “Be silent before the Lord, for the day of the Lord is near.” When this book opens up...wow...usually, what you say in the beginning is supposed to grab the attention of your audience and cause them to listen, but this introduction has a tendency to cause you to want to run. I thought it sounded a whole lot like Genesis. In Genesis, God created everything good, created man very good, and then sin came into the world. By the time we get to Genesis chapter 6, God is ready to judge the world and rid the world of mankind and all living things, with the exception of a few. When the

flood came, it swept away the sinner. Only one man and his family found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Can you imagine that? That is how Zephaniah starts out, with God in His anger. The fire of His jealousy is unleashed on the planet and He sweeps away animals and man. Except this time, He even covers the fish, total destruction on the planet. Verse 17 says the reason is because the people have sinned against the Lord.

Do you hear this? How many times do you watch sin on TV and chuckle at it, let it entertain you? How many times have you tuned the radio when a song about sin comes on and it brought you pleasure? Do you know what the Bible says God is going to do because of sin? He is going to wipe out every inhabitant on the planet, not just men, but animal life too. Therefore, Zephaniah says you had better stop what you are doing, shut your mouth, and quit making excuses for sin; and you better be silent before the Lord. Zephaniah says it isn't about Ammon, Moab, Syria, Assyria, and the Philistines. It is about Judah and Jerusalem first. Whoa! That means God's judgment will start among His covenant people, then it will encompass the nations of the world. "Be silent before the Lord."

Now, he begins to talk about the sins by which God is judging the nations and Judah. You see, we have come to believe that as we set silent before the Lord we deserve what we are getting. But, watch this...when you get to chapter 3, verse 9, the book ends, not with us being silent, but with God's people singing and rejoicing because of what the Lord has done. There are specific things in chapter 3:9-20 that talk about why we should sing.

- 1. God has judged our sin.**
- 2. The enemy has been defeated.**
- 3. The King has come and living in the midst of His people. He has reversed the fortunes of His remnant and are now being renowned and praised for following Him. They have life made.**

Do you see this? There are two big aspects concerning the day of the Lord and concerning Zephaniah. We need to zero in on these.

1. It is going to be a day of judgment.

2. It is going to be a day of restoration.

When you think about it being a day of judgment, it will be a day of darkness, a day of distress, a day of anguish, a day of wrath, a day of thick dark clouds; the sun is not going to shine and it is going to be bad. You don't want to be on this side of the day of the Lord! While it appears this is the majority of the book, it is not. Zephaniah, as a prophet, is setting up his message. He begins by talking about how we should be silent before the Lord and contemplate the day of the Lord's coming. Then he offers this hope: When He comes; it is going to be a day of restoration, sin will be judged, and the enemy will be defeated. Imagine an earth where there is no sin, no enemy of God, and no enemy of the people...wow...and the King, the Lord, is reigning in the midst of His people. His people are now renowned. We are the exalted ones. Those who lived humbly, while man was having his day, will be exalted when God has His day, and now the humble person will be renowned. Zephaniah begins with silence before the Lord and it ends with singing because of the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:17 is a picture of the Lord, who is mighty to save, and He steps in and rescues His remnant that is on the planet. Here is the deal. God has ordained His people to live in the midst of the fallen world. Therefore, there is going to be a lot of heartache, a lot of disappointment, and a lot of failure. He is teaching that in that final restoration, God is going to rejoice over us with gladness. When He steps in and rescues His remnant, He is going to rejoice over them with gladness.

Picture it as God picking up His children, and they've had it tough; they've had it rough. They have been beaten up; they've been battered. It is sort of like me picking up my youngest grandson. He takes a lot having two older brothers. He gets beat up all day long! So, when he is facing those hurts, I reach down and become his rescuer, his deliverer. I get the older

ones off him, rescue him, and put him on my lap. I am now rejoicing over him with gladness, and I have a big old smile on my face. He was crying, but I am now quieting him by telling him how much I love him, and explaining to him that he is now safe.

- **Singing**

That is what verse 17 says. God is going to quiet us with His love. Then it says that He is going to exalt us with singing. There is a song we sang years ago that I didn't like. It was called Sing Over Me, Come Sing Over Me. I just thought it was horrible. All it said was "come sing over me, come sing over me, come sing over me"...I thought that was a silly song! (I repented this week.) The Bible teaches that on the day of restoration when God judges the world of sin, removes the sinner from the face of the planet, and makes all things new, He is going to quiet us who have been through tribulation with His love. He is going to rejoice over us with gladness, and He is going to sing to us! Wow! The book of Revelation pictures us singing to God. But can you see a little child who has been beaten and battered and his grandfather singing to him? You need to see this...God holding you in His arms and He is singing to you. Wow!

- **Seeking**

Zephaniah uses a Hebrew poetic technique called 'chiasm.' Chiasm is where the book is arranged with ideas in a pattern that repeat in reverse order with another idea in the middle. When you get rid of all the repetitions, there is just one idea left in the middle, and that is what the book is really about. Guess what the middle of this book is...the center of this book is chapter 2:1-3. After the silence, and before the singing, is seeking. Did you catch that? After the silence, while we sit and contemplate the day of the Lord, realizing it is a terrible day of judgment, we understand when that day is over, if we have been hidden by the Lord, it will be a day of restoration for us. It calls for this...we had better get ready right now, because right now is the only time you have to get ready. Are you ready? Zephaniah said, "Seek the Lord...seek righteousness...seek

humility.” Then, just hope that He will hide you from this great coming day of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, ‘to seek the Lord’ basically meant you need to repent of how you think life should be lived and bring your thinking to God’s way of thinking. When you do that, you have a life change. When you begin to believe in Him and trust in what He says is right, in Old Testament, it brought to you a life change. Life change is that biblical word ‘repentance.’ That was the message of Jesus, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

I pray that you understand that Zephaniah is writing about a day of the Lord that would happen in the lives of those in the Southern Kingdom. It would happen when the Babylonians came down, destroyed them, and took them into exile. While this book has a historical fulfillment in the life of the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC, and Zephaniah told them about it, it also looks ahead to another day, a day in the future. The reason this book is in our Bible is because this book heavily influenced, not only Jesus, but Paul and Peter. Paul actually teaches in Romans 2:16 and Acts 17:31 that God has fixed a day in the future when He is going to judge the world by His son Jesus Christ. Wow! Do you realize that? There is a day fixed in the future when God is going to judge mankind, and all will stand before His Son, Jesus. God, in Christ, is going to judge the world.

The New Testament Day of the Lord

Now, the New Testament writers take this theme of the day of the Lord and this day that God has fixed where He will judge the world by Jesus, and talks about some events that happen at the Second Coming of Jesus. Both Paul and Peter, when referring to the Second Coming of Jesus, referred to it as the day of the Lord. They got that from the Old Testament Minor Prophets who talked about a day when God would step into the life of the people and judge them. We need to understand when we read the Old Testament and see ‘the day of the Lord,’ that yes, that day was fulfilled historically in the life of God’s people in the Old Testament in an event

where an army came down and destroyed the Southern Kingdom. But, they came out of exile and started sinning all over again. The New Testament takes that concept of the day of the Lord in belief that there will be a day in the future when God is going to step into human history again and judge the world of its sin. When that day comes it is over. It is over! The New Testament is clear that on that day there will be no more life on this planet, as we know it...whoa! When that day comes, the Heavens are going to pass away. All the Heavenly bodies are going to dissolve. The earth and the works on it are all going to be burned up, and it is gone! Do you understand this? Everything down here that we think is so important; it is all gone! Every piece of land that borders you is all gone. No matter how big of a house you build, one day it will be gone.

Now, Peter says we should look forward to that day. The reason is because when that day comes and the old passes away, a new heaven and a new earth is going to replace it. Where sin dwelt in the old one, righteousness will reign in the new one (2nd Peter, chapter 3). Peter tells us the prophets have been predicting this for a long time, and he would include Zephaniah in that prediction. Six hundred years before Christ, Zephaniah made a prediction that one day there would be a day of the Lord when God would sweep away all humanity, and He would judge the world of its sin! Peter tells us the apostles talked about it, and that there are scoffers saying, hey, you guys have been talking about this for a long time and it still hasn't come. Here we are 2000 years later than Jesus and we are still talking about a coming day of the Lord, and there are a lot of people who believe we are just talking.

- **God's Patience**

Now, Peter answers this question and it is a good question. Why is the Lord delaying the day of the Lord? Why has He not come? Why has He not sent His Son back yet? Is it because He can't keep His promise? Is it because He is slow and He is struggling? No, it is because He is patient. Patient people have the ability to bear with, and in, the situation they are

in without losing it. It is not so with impatient people. God is not impatient; God is patient. The Bible says the only reason Jesus Christ has not come yet is because God is delaying, because He is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. Did you catch that? If he sent His Son today, some of you would be in Hell forever and ever and ever. You know who you are; it would be over!

Now, the flip side of this is that if God is patient with people, we should be patient with people. We should never want people to get what they deserve, but we should want them to get what we have, and that is grace. There is still opportunity for us to tell others about the day that is coming and to be an instrument God uses to help them get ready for the day.

- **With His Saints and for His Saints**

Paul wrote in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-5:1 about the day when we bury our loved ones. When we bury our loved ones, we don't grieve like others who don't have hope grieve. We believe that Jesus is coming again, and when He comes, He will bring all of His Saints, all of our loved ones who trusted in Christ, with Him. They are going to come with Him when He comes for us, who are still alive. Hear this, 1st Thessalonians chapter 4 says when Jesus comes, He is coming for His Saints and with His Saints at the same time. Jesus coming with His saints and for His saints is not divided by seven years of time; it happens at the same time. He is coming for His Saints, with His Saints who have already died but don't have a glorified body yet. When He comes, they will get a glorified body.

- **A Thief in the Night**

In chapter 5, he says you don't have any worry that you need to be looking for the seasons or the times. Isn't that strange? If I wanted to fill a building, all I would have to do is advertise that I was teaching on prophesy and the end of the world and make a prediction of when Jesus is coming and everyone would want to come. Yet the Bible says we don't need to worry about that. We don't worry about that because He says the

day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night. Paul said when the Lord comes as a thief in the night it is not going to overtake you as a day of darkness, because you are not living in the night, you are living in the day because you are a child of light. It is the same thing Zephaniah said. He said when the day of the Lord comes, God is going to judge the world, but He is going to restore at the same time. In other words, He is coming to judge, but He is also coming to bring salvation. Paul taught that when Christ comes, He is coming to judge the unbeliever, but the believer is not going to be judged. The believer is not living in darkness; he is not a child of night. He is a child of the light, a child of the day. Therefore, when Christ comes, the believer is ready.

1st Thessalonians 5:9 says, "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ." This means at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, God is going to pour His wrath out on unbelieving man. But the believing man will receive the final phase of his salvation, which is a glorified body, and we are going to live with God forever and ever on a new heaven and a new earth. Wow! Is that cool, or is that cool? That's cool.

- **Live Ready**

Both Paul and Peter said it would be like a thief in the night. Where did they get that? I think they got it from Jesus. In Matthew chapter 24, after talking about the destruction of the temple, Jesus begins to talk about His ***Parousia***, when He manifests Himself. He begins to talk about a day of darkness, when the moon won't give its light and the sun refuses to shine, and the Son of Man appears in the heavens to gather His elect from the four corners of the earth. He sends the angels to do that. He begins to speak about His return to the planet. He teaches that no one knows the day and no one knows the hour. How dare we go to a conference where someone tells us the day or the hour! Quit sending your money to those guys on TV! Are you listening to me? Jesus said we don't know the day or the hour, not even He knew while he was here on the planet. He did say

the thief wouldn't have broken in and stolen everything you had if you had been ready for his coming. If you had known he was coming, you would have stayed home. You would have been awake and would have put up a fight. It would have been over your dead body! That is how Jesus wants us to live. He wants us to live ready. You can't be ready until you get ready, but once you get ready, you are ready! What are you ready for? You are ready for Him to come because you're right with Him. When you are right with Him, you live right with others.

- **As in the Day of Noah**

Jesus went on to teach that it was going to be like it was in the days of Noah. Whoa! We just agreed that Zephaniah might be alluding to the flood. And now Jesus is doing the same thing and said when He gets ready to return, it is going to be just like it was in the day of Noah! Let me note that He teaches that it is going to be after the tribulation of those days. He is not coming before the tribulations for His people; He is coming after the tribulations for His people. When He comes, there will be two people in the field. One will be taken and one will be left. Two people will be at the mill grinding. One will be taken and one left, just like it was in the days of Noah. Listen to me. In the day of Noah, who got taken and who got left? The waters of the judgment came to destroy the world, but they also came to rescue Noah and his family. When the judgment came, there was a family in an ark, and they were hidden, because Yahweh hides His from His wrath. He put them in an ark, and when the judgment was over, the lost, the sinners, were taken from the earth. Noah and his family were left on the earth. When the day of the Lord comes, the unbeliever will be taken in judgment. The unbeliever will be cast into the eternal place of fire, separated from God forever and ever and ever. Those who have been hidden in the ark of Christ will be left on the new earth and new heaven.

Zephaniah says *maybe* if you seek the Lord, He will hide you. The New Testament takes the *maybe* away, and says in Christ your sin has already been judged! If you stand in the place where the fire of Hell has already

burned and the anger of God has already been released, fire can't come where fire has already been, amen! At the return of Christ, yes, there is a dark side, but there is also a bright side, we will be with Him forever and ever and ever.