

THE BOOK OF

ZEPHANIAH

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**NEXT
LEVEL** 
ONLINE

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OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

The Book of Zephaniah: Session 1 (Zephaniah 1:1-6)
A NextLevel Video Series

Session Highlights:

Zephaniah is a relatively unknown prophet. He epitomizes the term “Minor Prophet.” He is easily forgotten and often overlooked; however, he has the longest recorded genealogy of any of the prophets.

- I. Zephaniah’s Lineage (1:1)
 - a. Zephaniah begins and ends by emphasizing that his words are God’s (1:1; 3:20).
 - b. Zephaniah’s genealogy goes back to a man named Hezekiah. Is this King Hezekiah?
 - i. Arguments against:
 1. Tradition
 2. Title-he is not called king
 3. Generations: there are 3 generations between Hezekiah and Zephaniah but only 2 between Hezekiah and Josiah.
 4. Name-The Bible doesn’t mention King Hezekiah having a son named Amariah
 - ii. Arguments for:
 1. Parallels-both Hezekiah and Josiah made significant reforms
 2. A clay seal from Hezekiah’s time mentions Amariah, son of the king.
 - c. King Josiah’s reign (640-609 BC)
 - i. Key Dates:
 1. 628 BC: removal of Baal worship
 2. 621 BC: major reforms
 3. 612 BC: defeat of Nineveh
- II. Zephaniah’s message (2-6)
 - a. God’s judgment is a reversal of creation (2-3a)
 - b. Judah will not escape (3b-6)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. Before beginning this study, what did you know about the book of Zephaniah? Have you ever heard a sermon or lesson over any of it?
2. Based on the arguments you heard, do you think Zephaniah was a descendant of King Hezekiah? Why or why not?
3. Why would God want Zephaniah to begin his message with language that sounds like a reversal of creation and a second worldwide flood?
4. What does the strong language of judgment suggest about the seriousness of sin, particularly the sin of idolatry?
5. Zephaniah offered six indictments against Judah (Baal worship, idolatrous priests, astrology, mixed worship, turning away from God, acting like God can’t do anything). Which do you find most common in our culture, and where do they show up?
6. Of the indictments against Judah, which ones do you believe could be brought against you personally? In what ways have you acted like the people of Judah?

The Book of Zephaniah: Session 2 (Zephaniah 1:7-2:3)
A NextLevel Video Series

Session Highlights:

In the previous session, we heard Zephaniah declare God's plans to reverse creation and bring judgment. This should prompt us to ask two questions that Zephaniah will answer in this passage: How long do we have? Is there anything we can do to avoid this judgment?

- I. The day of God's judgment is close (1:7-13)
 - a. It is closer than you think (7)
 - i. Day of the Lord: God is a divine warrior who is now fighting against Judah.
 - b. It is close for the powerful (8)
 - c. It is close for false worshipers (9)
 - d. It is close for those who trust in wealth (10-11)
 - e. It is close for the complacent (12-13)
 - i. Dregs: If wine sits too long during fermentation, parts settle and congeal at the bottom, making the wine useless.
 - ii. Much of verse 13 has connection to the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28.
- II. The Day of God's judgment is close, because God is fighting (14-18)
 - a. God is fighting against Judah (14-16)
 - b. Judgment is inescapable (17-18)
 - i. Zephaniah has answered their first question: How long do we have? Now he turns to the second question: Is there anything we can do to avoid this judgment?
 - ii. Answer: maybe?
- III. Seek God & maybe be protected (2:1-3)
 - a. Seek God through humble obedience.

Seek God with humble obedience, because the Day of the Lord is near.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. If you lived in Zephaniah's day, how do you think you would have responded to Zephaniah, the bullhorn prophet? Would you have listened or walked right past?
2. Whenever we use battle language like "the day of the Lord," we generally picture God fighting for us, on our behalf. What are the dangers of not realizing that he could fight against us?
3. In 1:7-13 we identified four categories of people being warned about God's judgment: the powerful, those who mixed worship of God with worship of another god, those who trusted in wealth, and those who grew spiritually complacent. Which one of those four is the greater threat to your relationship with God?
4. Where you turn when crisis hits often reveals what gods you've placed your trust in. The people of Judah turned to wealth when crisis hit. Where do you turn when crisis hits?
5. In what area or relationship in your life do you find it difficult to seek humility?

The Book of Zephaniah: Session 3 (Zephaniah 2:4-15)
A NextLevel Video Series

Session Highlights:

In this session, we hear Zephaniah announce judgment on various nations surrounding Judah: Philistia to the west, Moab and Ammon to the east, Cush to the south, and Assyria to the north. Zephaniah wants Judah to learn from their failures.

- I. From Philistia we learn about God's character: He cares & restores (4-7)
 - a. Four major Philistine cities would be destroyed (4)
 - b. Kerethites may be a Philistine clan, or they may have originated from the same area as the Philistines (5)
 - c. God cares for and restores his people (6-7)
- II. From Moab & Ammon we are warned: Watch your mouth (8-11)
 - a. The Moabites and Ammonites are distant relatives to Judah through Lot, but their words got them into trouble (8)
 - b. They will face judgment because of their words (9-11)
- III. From Cush & Assyria we are warned: Watch your pride (12-15)
 - a. Cush was defeated by Assyria in 663 BC
 - b. Assyria faces judgment for its pride (13-15)
 - i. In 1:4, God stretched out his hand against Judah; now he stretches out his hand against Nineveh.
 - ii. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC, and a Greek historian named Xenophon came looking for it 200 years later but couldn't find it.
 - iii. Compare their boast to Moses' description of God in Deuteronomy 4:35.

Seek the Lord in righteousness and humility by recognizing that he cares for you and restores you, by watching your mouth and by watching your pride.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. If you found yourself in a situation like the students mentioned at the beginning of this session, would you be more likely to go first or go last? Why?
2. In the Old Testament prophets, God repeatedly brought judgment upon disobedient nations as an act of discipline. Do you believe he still judges nations similarly today? Based on what we see in passages like this one from Zephaniah, what might lead a nation to face judgment from God?
3. Have you ever been through a season in which it felt like God's judgment was upon you? How did God demonstrate his care for you in that season, and did he work to bring some kind of restoration?
4. It can be tempting for the church to get into a war of words with those who speak against us. How should the church respond when those around us (politicians, celebrities, thought leaders, etc.) mock, insult, or taunt the church? What would it look like to watch our words?
5. When you think about your experiences with various churches, where do we seem prone to pride or arrogance?

The Book of Zephaniah: Session 4 (Zephaniah 3:1-8)
A NextLevel Video Series

Session Highlights:

As Zephaniah begins chapter 3 he is intentionally ambiguous as to who is the target of this judgment. Judah had heard Zephaniah's words of judgment against surrounding nations and probably thought they were safe. Zephaniah uses this as a rhetorical device to draw attention to Judah's judgment.

- I. The target of judgment is ambiguous: the last city mentioned was Nineveh (1)
- II. Jerusalem's disposition changes (2-4)
 - a. Four indictments:
 - i. The first two are general: does not obey, does not accept correction
 - ii. The last two are responses to God: does not trust, does not draw near
 - b. The first four indictments are mirrored by four more indictments:
 - i. The first two are general: officials and rulers
 - ii. The last two are specific: prophets and priests
 - c. When we don't learn, God saves the longest indictment for his people.
 - i. Jerusalem gets 8 verses compared to 1-4 verses for other nations.
 - ii. This follows the pattern we saw in 1:2-18.
- III. God's righteous character vs. Jerusalem's unrighteous character (5)
- IV. Why Jerusalem? They've seen what God has done (6)
- V. Jerusalem wasn't teachable (7-8)
 - a. Waiting on God, in this context, is a negative warning.
 - b. God is gathering nations, and Judah is not spared.

Pay attention to God's warning signs.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. Zephaniah begins chapter three ambiguously crying "woe to the city of oppressors." He doesn't really identify the city. Why do you think he chose ambiguity over clarity in this instance?
2. In verse 2, Jerusalem receives four indictments (does not obey, does not accept correction, does not trust God, does not draw near to God). If you were to look into the mirror, which one of these indictments would you be most likely to see in yourself and why?
3. Why do you think people have such a difficult time looking into the spiritual mirror and acknowledging their own spiritual blemishes?
4. How does knowing God's character help us better recognize our own character, including our character flaws?
5. One of Jerusalem's fatal flaws was her unteachableness. What does it mean to have a teachable spirit?

The Book of Zephaniah: Session 5 (Zephaniah 3:9-20)
A NextLevel Video Series

Session Highlights:

As we have seen in this study, Zephaniah is filled with judgment; however, it ends on a call to celebrate. We don't often think of judgment as something worth celebrating, but it's not judgment we celebrate. We celebrate what judgment accomplishes.

- I. Judgment brings purification (9-13)
 - a. Read Isaiah 6, Genesis 11, and Acts 2.
 - b. Cush=exiles who will return from the farthest ends of the earth.
 - c. The meek and humble are the purified remnant (see 2:3).
 - d. They will do no wrong, just like God (3:5).
- II. Judgment brings restoration (18-20)
 - a. Those mourning festivals are probably unfaithful Jews who enjoy pagan worship festivals that God is removing. This parallels 1:4.
 - b. 19-20 are similar to Micah 4:6-7.
 - c. God's restoration is as complete as his destruction (1:2-3).
- III. This leads to celebration in the form of a chiasm (14-17)
 - a. Sing: rejoice (14)
 - i. The Lord has taken away punishment (15a)
 1. The Lord is with you (15b)
 - a. Do Not fear (15c-16)
 2. The Lord is with you (17a)
 - ii. The Lord will no longer rebuke you (17b)
 - b. He will rejoice with singing (17c)

His purification and his restoration are worthy of our celebration.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. We attend a variety of different celebrations (graduations, weddings, birthday parties, etc.). What makes something worth celebrating?
2. God's judgment on Judah purifies their speech and purifies them of pride. If God were to bring judgment on your community or your church, what would he need to purify?
3. In 3:13, the remnant does no wrong; they begin to act like their God. How does judgment shape and transform our character to align it more closely with God's character?
4. In Zephaniah's chiasm in 3:14-17, Judah receives an exhortation to sing and rejoice because punishment has been removed and God is with them. If you were creating your own chiasm calling yourself to sing and rejoice, what would be included in it as reasons to rejoice?
5. What hardship or struggle have you faced that is worth celebrating because of what it accomplished? What might it look like to celebrate what God's judgment accomplishes?

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