

Message #1

Various Texts

In Matthew 24, Jesus predicts what the vast majority of the world will be like just before He pours out the horrific wrath of God just prior to His Second Coming. The people will be eating and drinking and marrying and living life totally oblivious to the fact that they are heading to destruction and are about to be cut to pieces and thrown into hell (Matt. 24:32-51). The world will be given to that which is immoral and even demonic and there will be no fear of God or any thought of His coming judgment.

There will be a small remnant of people who will love God and His word, but most in the world will not give any thought to the fact I am going to face the judgment of God.

That is the kind of world we are in right now. It is an immoral, evil, demonic world and most people have no thought that I am heading to the judgment of God and had better be right with Him.

Here were some of the news headlines this week which people think are real important:

- 1) We need to save the climate so cities don't become Ghost towns. Not that we need to save souls by the Gospel so people don't end up in hell.
- 2) An actor we love died in a Hot Tub. Not all people have been given the death penalty and apart from Jesus Christ all are heading to eternal death.
- 3) FDA warns 26 eye drops could lead to eye infection. Not we need to use our eyes to carefully study God's word so we may have spiritual health.
- 4) Snow storms and cold could affect Halloween. Not that a cold heart against the Scriptures will bring the judgment of God.

People in this world don't care about God and His word. That is the same kind of world in which Zephaniah lived.

What God wanted Zephaniah to do was to take a message to His people and the specific message that He wanted Zephaniah to take to Israel and the world was this: "My Eternal Judgment is going to come and if you do not reverence Me and humble yourself before Me, I am going to totally destroy you and nothing is going to change that or stop that!"

The only people who are given any hope in this book of Zephaniah are the remnant of people who are serious about God and His word.

Furthermore, Zephaniah says not only will God's judgment come upon His rebellious nation; it is coming against the whole world. God wants His people and all people to know **My judgment is coming**. The Day of the LORD is on the way and wise are people who realize that and do something about it in their own lives.

In the next weeks we would like to go on a journey through this very important book of Zephaniah.

QUESTION #1 – Why study Zephaniah?

There are four reasons we are going to study Zephaniah:

Reason #1 - Because Zephaniah is one of only 66 inspired books God gave to man and one of only 12 minor prophet books.

Zephaniah is a prophet who received direct revelation from God. He is one of only 12 Minor Prophets that God ever had in this world: We may break these 12 down into three categories:

- 1) Prophets of Israel to north - Jonah (780-750 BC); Amos (765-750 BC); Hosea (755-715 BC)
- 2) Prophets of Judah to south - Obadiah (840 BC); Joel (835-796 BC); Micah (740-690 BC); Nahum (663-612); Habakkuk (606-604 BC); Zephaniah (625 BC)
- 3) Prophets after captivity - Haggai (520 BC); Zechariah (520 BC-518 BC); Malachi (450-400 BC)

Zephaniah is one of only twelve of these prophets to whom God gave direct revelatory data. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah were all living around the same time period and all of them warned of judgment.

When verse 1 says, “The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah,” it is a statement of prophetic inspiration. In fact, you will notice the Personal Pronoun “I” occurs 27 times in 53 verses (1:2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 8, 8, 9, 12, 12, 17; 2:8, 9, 15; 3:6, 6, 7, 12, 18, 19, 19, 19, 20, 20, 20, 20). These are direct revelatory statements coming from God Himself. This is God telling the world what He is going to do.

In 1952, in the Dead Sea Scroll discovery in Qumran Cave 4, Zephaniah was among the Minor prophet books found in the cave. Then, in the same year in caves south of Bethlehem, another manuscript was found of the Minor Prophets that contained the book of Zephaniah.

What we learn from this is that this was a book that was carefully copied and protected by the people of God.

The Septuagint 250-150 BC contained the book of Zephaniah translated from Hebrew into Greek.

In 1881 two fragment manuscripts of Zephaniah were found in a monastery in Egypt. They were published in 1885.

Philo (BC 15-AD 45), the one who translated Jewish teaching into Greek, and Josephus (AD 37-100), the Jewish historian, both accepted Zephaniah as one of the O.T. inspired books.

The Talmud, which is a compilation of Jewish teachings from 3rd century AD to 5th century AD, cites Zephaniah.

Early Church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria (AD 150), Cyprian (AD 240), and Augustine (AD 400), also cite Zephaniah. The Masoretic Hebrew Text, produced in the 10th century AD, which is the vowel pointed Hebrew text, contains the book of Zephaniah.

R. K. Harrison said the Hebrew Text of Zephaniah has been well preserved.

Clearly Zephaniah is one of God's rare inspired books and that makes it not only valuable to study, but necessary to study since all Scripture is inspired and profitable for us.

Reason #2 - Because Zephaniah is a book that tells us why God is going to bring specific catastrophic judgment against the world.

This is a wicked, dark world and God promises to bring about the ultimate of judgments. In fact, one commentator said this book of Zephaniah presents, "the dark side of love."

This book cannot be any clearer on what God intends to do to all the evil that is in this world. Keil and Delitzsch said, "Zephaniah proclaims the judgment upon the whole earth, upon all the heathen nations, and upon Judah and Jerusalem," (*Zephaniah*, Vol. 10, p. 122).

When God decides to judge, it will hit everyone in the world and **the ONLY chance anyone has to survive it is to be part of a small remnant of people who fear God and are humbly dedicated to be in a right relationship with Him based on His word.**

Other than Amos, Zephaniah is the only Minor prophet to specifically include specific prophecies concerning other foreign nations. He names Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Cherethites, Canaan, Philistines, Ethiopians and coastal people. It is clear that his prophecies of a horrible judgment shoot at everyone in the world, not just Israel.

In his book, Zephaniah lays out a history list of things as to why God will judge this world:

Fact #1 - God will destroy the world because of the false religious priests who have not led the people into truth. **1:4 - False religion is a key reason God will destroy the world**

Fact #2 - God will destroy the world because people have practiced religious idolatry. **1:5**

Fact #3 - God will destroy the world because people have turned their back on God. **1:6a**

Fact #4 - God will destroy the world because people do not seek Him or pray to Him. **1:6b**

Fact #5 - God will destroy the world because people follow godless leaders at all levels. **1:8**

Fact #6 - God will destroy the world because people practice violence. **1:9a**

Fact #7 - God will destroy the world because people practice deceit. **1:9b**

Fact #8 - God will destroy the world because people have stagnant hearts for God. **1:12**

Fact #9 - God will destroy the world because people sin against God. **1:17**

Fact #10 - God will destroy the world because people have arrogance and pride. **2:10**

Fact #11 - God will destroy the world because people live in rebellion. **3:1**

Fact #12 - God will destroy the world because people do not heed His warnings. **3:2**

Fact #13 - God will destroy the world because people do not accept His instruction. **3:2**

Fact #14 - God will destroy the world because people had evil and ruthless leaders. **3:3**

Fact #15 - God will destroy the world because people had corrupt religious leaders. **3:4**

Reason #3 - Because Zephaniah is a book that tells God's people what God wants them to do as they wait for God's judgment. **2:3**

Zephaniah is very clear as to what God's people need to be doing as they wait for God's judgment. They want to be in a right relationship with God. There are five actions they are to take which they are to pursue:

(Action #1) - God wants His people to seek Him. **2:3a**

(Action #2) - God wants His people to be humble before Him. **2:3b**

(Action #3) - God wants His people to understand and obey His word. **2:3c**

(Action #4) - God wants His people to seek righteousness. **2:3d**

(Action #5) - God wants His people to seek humility. **2:3e**

One of the main reasons people are not serious about God and His word is pride. Most will proudly do what they want to do rather than what God's word tells them to do. It is very clear that God does not want pride in His people (Zeph. 3:11).

Reason #4 - Because Zephaniah is a book that promises God's faithful people some wonderful blessings no matter what God is doing in the world.

One of the real benefits of living in a world that is heading to judgment is we learn that God takes care of His faithful people. There are twelve amazing, futuristic blessings promised in this book to the remnant of people who are serious about their relationship with God:

(Blessing #1) - God will deliver His faithful people. **2:1-2**

(Blessing #2) - God will rescue His faithful people. **2:7**

(Blessing #3) - God will restore His faithful people. **2:7**

(Blessing #4) - God will prosper His faithful people. **2:9**

(Blessing #5) - God will forgive His faithful people. **3:9, 11**

(Blessing #6) - God will be a refuge for His faithful people. **3:12**

(Blessing #7) - God will completely purify His faithful people. **3:13**

(Blessing #8) - God will bring joy to His faithful people. **3:14**

(Blessing #9)- God will remove all judgment and fear from His faithful people. **3:15**

(Blessing #10) - God will cause nations to praise His faithful people. **3:19**

(Blessing #11) - God will give worldwide fame to His faithful people. **3:20**

(Blessing #12) - God will give great prosperity to His faithful people. **3:20**

These are four reasons we are going to study this book of Zephaniah. It is convicting. It is intimidating and it is uplifting.

QUESTION #2 – Who is Zephaniah?

The name Zephaniah means “the Lord hides.” This is very appropriate because if one is right with God, when God is pouring out negative judgments, He will hide and protect those who are right with Him.

There are four men in the Bible with the name Zephaniah:

- 1) There is a Levite who descended from Kohath (I Chron. 6:26-38).
- 2) There is a priest who was second in command under the high priest Seraiah during the reign of King Zedekiah (II Kings 25:18-21; Jer. 52:24-27).
- 3) There is the father of Josiah who returned from Babylon after the exile (Zech. 6:10, 14).
- 4) There is this Zephaniah who wrote this book of Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1).

What we learn about Zephaniah is found in **verse 1**. Zephaniah goes to great lengths to identify himself by his pedigree. **Zephaniah is the only prophet, we know of, who has political royalty in his ancestry.**

In **Zephaniah 1:1** we get a list of four generations:

Zephaniah was the son of Cushi.

Cushi was the son of Gedaliah.

Gedaliah was the son of Amariah.

Amariah was the son of Hezekiah.

Zephaniah is the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah is one of the greatest Kings in Israel's history and Zephaniah was related to him.

Zephaniah had royal blood in him and it is clear that God had His hand on Zephaniah. We may assume that he developed in a love for the Lord just like his great-great-grandfather.

QUESTION #3 – When did Zephaniah write?

Verse 1 informs us that Zephaniah wrote during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah reigned for 31 years from 640-609 BC. Josiah came to the throne when he was 8-years-old, but at age 16, he committed himself to God and at age 20 he began to turn the nation back to God. He rebuilt the Temple and tore down the idols. Zephaniah was alive at that time; in fact, it was probably this warning book of Zephaniah that prompted Josiah to get the nation back on track. In the year 722 BC, Assyria attacked and destroyed the ten northern tribes of Israel. Hezekiah became King of Judah in the south six years after this happened and he turned the nation back to God so when Assyria attacked Judah and surrounded Jerusalem, God intervened and had 185,000 soldiers die in their sleep. The Assyrians went home and didn't attack.

After Hezekiah was gone, the most godless King of Judah to ever hold office, Manasseh, was in power. He reigned for 55 years (697 BC-642 BC) and he was evil. He promoted Baal worship, witchcraft, child sacrifices and immorality. He hated God's word and God's prophets.

Two years after Manasseh was dead, Josiah was King (640 BC-609 BC). It was during this time when Zephaniah was prophesying and predicting what God was going to do. The nation had become so corrupt that God was going to destroy it. Zephaniah writes in close proximity with Nahum because Nineveh had not yet been destroyed (612 BC) (**Zeph. 2:13**).

We learn from **Zephaniah 1:4-6** that idolatrous Baal worship was actually in Jerusalem which means Josiah had not yet removed the idols which he did in 622-621 BC (II Kings 22-23).

It is very likely that Zephaniah's warnings were heeded by Josiah and he turned the nation back to God temporarily. But it was too little, too late. God's judgment was on the way. God's judgment was coming and God's wrath would soon hit. **So we assume that this book was written somewhere near the year 625 BC.**

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of Zephaniah?

When you read chapter 1 of the book, it becomes quite apparent that because the world has become so corrupt there is a ferocious judgment of God that is going to remove and cut off humans from the earth; remove and cut off animals from the earth (1:2-3); remove and cut off Baal worshippers from the earth (1:4); God will bring a horrible type of judgment the likes of which this world has never seen (2:15-18). It is a declarative judgment (1:2, 3; 3:8). This is what God declares He is going to do. It is decreed and nothing will change it.

The theme of Zephaniah is the coming Day of the LORD judgment. In fact, the word "day" (yom) is used multiple times in the book (1:7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 14, 15, 15, 15, 15, 15, 16, 18; 2:2, 2, 3; 3:8, 11, 16). The phrase "day of the LORD" is used (1:7, 8; 14, 14, 18; 2:2, 3). Also the phrase "at that time" is used multiple times (1:12; 3:19, 20).

What Zephaniah says is that there is coming a specific time of ferocious judgment, called the Day of the LORD, in which God is going to pour out His wrath against the entire world and He invites people to humble themselves now and escape His ferocious judgment.

God is not going to tolerate this evil world or evil people forever. His wrath will come. Martin Luther said Jesus Christ is going to return and take over this world and this book of Zephaniah is a book against human religion, human righteousness and human reform. This book is one that says humble yourself to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved because other than that, you are the target of God's wrath.