

## **Zephaniah: Jesus the Victor in our Midst**

### **I. Chapters 1-3:8 A bad day**

### **II. Chapter 3:9-20 A good day**

Zephaniah speaks to Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity and was a contemporary of Jeremiah. He speaks of the “Day of the Lord” and the coming judgment of the nation but He also speaks of the day of Christ in chapter three. If you read most of the prophets they seem to all follow the same format of judgment then restoration and blessing. To us westerners the day begins with morning and a sun rise followed by a sunset and darkness. Ah but to the Jews the day begins at sunset and ends at sunrise. I like that as Zephaniah begins with the darkness of pending judgment he concludes with the brightness of the coming of Christ. Dear ones perhaps your life feels a little “In the dark” no worries that only means the sun is rising soon.

Zephaniah’s name means God hides or God is hidden and carries the idea “God has treasured” and in spite of this the nation choose to reject the One who had treasured them. Oh how many times we have done the same!

### **I. Chapters 1-3:8 A bad day**

**Chapter 1:** In 1:1 Zephaniah lists more of his ancestry than any other prophet tracing it back to the “Hezekiah”, which would make him his great, great grandson; this would also mean that he was the cousin to Josiah. This fact combined with the knowledge that he spoke in the days of Josiah and that his prophecies speak of coming judgment suggest that Zephaniah’s words were most likely responsible for the reforms of Josiah. It is interesting to compare Zephaniah’s words with that of Jeremiah who wrote at the same time as Jeremiah seems to weep with each stroke of his pen where as Zephaniah tends to

beat them with a hammer. I find strangely comfort in this as the Lord would by far rather me hum the tune of repentance but will get my attention even if He has to pound it into me.

According to 1:2-3 God will not only judge Judah He will “*utterly consume everything...man and beast...the birds of the heavens...the fish of the sea*”. That doesn’t seem fair people say but it’s not God’s fault because God gave Adam dominion over all His creation so when Adam and Eve fell they affected all of creation. In Romans 8:20-22 Paul spoke of this saying, “*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*” That is why after the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ we are told in Isaiah 11:6-7 that “*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*”

In verses 1:4-6 we are told the reason for such judgment being that God’s priests worshipped at Baal’s temples, and were into astrology and the worship of all sorts of carnal pleasures. All of this was going to bring them into the “day of the Lord” or the day of judgment as they were in the day of man where they were calling the shots without any real sense of accountability. In verses 10-11 God indicted all the classes of Judah saying the upper class was too material, the middle class too vocational and the lower class to

carnal. In 1:12 God says through Zephaniah I will “*punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.'*” Because of this according to 1:13 “*their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation; they shall build houses, but not inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.*” Saints this may not be popular in our state of things in our nation but if you go back a few generations you will see that when our nation becomes indifferent towards God we have an economic down fall. Ah but when we set God back over our checkbooks things turn around!

Zeph. 1:14 Is an interesting verse and much more then it appears in our Bibles. You see it reads “*The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.*” You see some Hebrew scholars have notes that the phrase “*there the mighty men shall cry out*” can be rendered more accurately “The mighty Man is the Nazarene” and it is this interpretation that has caused many to believe that this is was a Messianic prophecy spoken of in Matthew 2:23 where we are told that Jesus “*dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'*” Verses 15-18 speak to both the day of the Lord being a day of: trouble, distress, devastation, desolation, darkness and gloominess as well as a day in which a mans wealth will not elevate his judgment.

**Chapter 2:** This chapter starts out with a call to repentance in 2:3 where Zephaniah says, “*Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.*” The rest of the chapter Zephaniah pronounces God’s judgment upon the

surrounding nations in all four directions but he starts with Jerusalem in the first 7 verses. Judgment indeed starts with the House of God!

**Chapter 3:** The third chapter opens up against Judah saying in 3:2 of Jerusalem that

- She has not obeyed His voice,
- She has not received correction;
- She has not trusted in the Lord,
- She has not drawn near to her God.

The official slogan of the 1973, 25 year anniversary of the rebirth of the Nation of Israel was “*Science shall bring peace to the land*” 12 months later Israel was attacked by all her neighbors. Saint’s our “hope” is an audacity “arrogant disregard” if it is in politics, science or any other human activity. Let us say as the psalmist in Psalm 42:5 “*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.*” Zephaniah goes on to say in 3:5 “*The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, but the unjust knows no shame.*”

## **II. Chapter 3:9-20 A good day**

**Chapter 3:9-20:** After speaking on the judgment of all nations Zephaniah speaks of the blessings of coming to the Lord as God will regather, redeem and restore so that the people will rejoice in their Redeemer! God will restore their language in verse 9 as well as their boundaries. But More importantly in 3:12-13 God will “*leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make*

*them afraid.” In 3:14-15 Zephaniah pronounces God’s blessings saying, “Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.”*

Then in 3:17 we read a most amazing statement as it says, *“The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”* This is the only verse in the Bible where we directly read of God singing (Matt. 26:30 Jesus sings a Hymn). And what are we told that God sings? Well sings a song of rejoicing over us! Oh dear one we ought all to be acquainted with this song of God for us as it is His song of Love! The 20<sup>th</sup> verse concludes with God’s promise to bring back, to gather from among the peoples His people before their eyes; which began in 1948.