



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

HABAKKUK,
ZEPHANIAH & ESTHER

Week 2



*“The Sovereign
Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet
like the feet of a
deer, he enables me
to go on the
heights. ”*

Habakkuk 3:19

When Not Seeing Is Still Believing

DAY 8

Habakkuk 3:16-19

Can you remember a time when you believed God was going to do something for you, even though everything indicated that he wouldn't? Did God answer the way you thought he would?

1. What kind of physical and emotional reaction did news of the coming Babylonian invasion have on Habakkuk (v. 16)?
2. Habakkuk promised God that he would do what, until the day calamity struck (v. 16)? (a) pray diligently, (b) sacrifice continually, (c) sing worshipfully, (d) wait patiently.
3. The prophet promised God he would rejoice in God even if four things did not occur (v. 18). What are those four things and what do you think they symbolized (v. 17)?
4. Habakkuk likens God's strengthening of him to what image in the animal kingdom (v. 19)? What do you think this image was meant to convey?
5. What evidence is there that Habakkuk was not only a prophet, but also a musician (v. 19)?

1. What are some promises that God has made to you that are still hard for you to believe? Why?
2. When was the last time you trusted God to do something for you that you knew you couldn't accomplish on your own?
3. List three things that God promised in his word to do for you that he has already done.

Fig trees, grape vines, olive crops, sheep, cattle and fields (v. 17) were what the nation depended on for food. Here Habakkuk is outlining the worst possible scenario for an agrarian culture. The loss of sheep and cattle would usher in terrible famine, all of which occurred during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (La 2:12, 20; 4:4, 9-10).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Introduction to Zephaniah

Authorship: *Zephaniah*, a name held by three other men in Scripture, means “Yahweh hides,” “Yahweh has hidden” or “Yahweh treasured.” Some think this may refer to God’s protection of his people during the difficult days in which Zephaniah prophesied, or God’s protection of Zephaniah in his childhood during the reign of Manasseh, the evil king of Judah (2Ki 21:16).

While little is known about this prophet, Zephaniah is unique among the Minor Prophets because his ancestry is traced back four generations, implying that he was a man of some importance. The great-great-great grandson of King Hezekiah, Zephaniah was the only prophet with such credentials. He was a distant relative of King Josiah, during whose reign he prophesied. His reference to Jerusalem as “this place” (1:4) and his familiarity with the city suggest that it was his home.

Date: Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). There is some question as to whether he prophesied after Josiah’s great religious revival, or before.

Setting and purpose: At this time in history, Judah was benefiting from a power vacuum. Assyria, which had conquered the northern ten tribes a century earlier, was being eclipsed by the rising neo-Babylonian empire. The Medes were retreating from Assyrian authority. This allowed for the removal of many Assyrian religious practices from Judah with little fear of retribution. Unfortunately, these reforms did not go deep into the heart of the people. The worship of Yahweh was re-established and idolatry was greatly curtailed, but not completely removed.

The dominant theme of Zephaniah is the *Day of the Lord*. He uses this expression more frequently than any other prophet. Imminent judgment was in store for Judah.

Reading outline:

I. LOOKING WITHIN, 1

A. Sweeping Punishment, 1:1-13

B. The Day of the Lord, 1:14-18

II. LOOKING AROUND, 2

A. One Last Chance, 2:1-3

B. Don't Laugh—You're Next, 2:4-15

III. LOOKING BEYOND, 3

A. The Before-and-After Picture, 3:1-13

B. One Fine Day, 3:14-20



“The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah.”

Zephaniah 1:1

Sweeping Punishment

DAY 9

Zephaniah 1:1-13

As you consider the community, culture and society in which you live, what practices and behaviors do you believe God will eventually sweep away?

1. God promised to sweep away four things in a future worldwide judgment—what were they (vs. 2-3)?
2. From reading verses 4-9, how far had the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem turned from worshipping God alone?
3. Where would loud cries of despair be heard when God sent the Babylonians to punish Judah (vs. 10-11)? What would they be lamenting?
4. For whom was God going to search Jerusalem (v. 12)? What would happen to them and why?

Jesus told us to take the “plank” out of our own eye so that we could see clearly to remove the speck from someone else’s. It is usually easier to identify our national sins than it is our personal ones. What makes you want to hold on to some of your personal sinful behaviors and what makes you want to sweep them away? Do you think these conflicting desires are strange? Read Romans 7:14-8:9.

Molech (v. 5) was the main god of the Ammonites. Some in Jerusalem were apparently trying to combine the worship of Molech with the worship of Yahweh. **Wine left on its dregs** (v. 12) was allowed to ferment too long, forming a hard crust, becoming thick and bitter. Judah had allowed spiritual idolatry to harden their heart toward God, making them distasteful to him.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word



*“That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish, a
day of trouble and ruin, a day of
darkness and gloom, a day of
clouds and blackness.”*

Zephaniah 1:15

The Day of the Lord

DAY 10

Zephaniah 1:14-18

When you hear the phrase *day of the Lord*, what do you think of—something good or something bad?

1. What did Zephaniah warn was near and becoming even more imminent (v. 14)?
2. How did the prophet characterize that coming day (vs. 15-16)? (a) a day of rejoicing, (b) a day of contemplation, (c) a day of wrath, (d) a day of sadness.
3. What did Zephaniah say was the cause for these imminent events on the horizon (v. 17)?
4. Normally a country trusts in its great armies to save it from destruction, but what false hope did Zephaniah say the people of Judah were trusting in (v. 18)?

1. When you hear of God judging people, what do you imagine? Do you think that God is punishing someone or that someone is experiencing the consequences of their own behavior?

2. What does the Bible teach Christians about being condemned and judged by God (Ro 8:1)?

While it appears that the phrase “day of the Lord” (v. 14) refers here primarily to the Babylonian invasion, it is possible that Zephaniah is also looking ahead to one or more apocalyptic catastrophes (Isa 2:12; Jer 46:10; Mal 4:5).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

One Last Chance

Zephaniah 2:1-3

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever given someone who has offended you or not met your expectations a chance to straighten up and “fly right”?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Who was the “shameful nation” to which Zephaniah was referring here (v. 1)—Judah or Babylon?
2. Zephaniah used three phrases to describe the same coming catastrophe. What were they (v. 2)?
3. Who did Zephaniah suggest should seek the Lord at this time (v. 3)? (a) the proud, (b) the timid, (c) the unruly, (d) the humble.
4. Zephaniah further clarified who the humble are, and how they can be identified. What activity sets them apart from the rest of the people (v. 3)?
5. Even though suffering was to come, what hope did Zephaniah hold out for those who were faithful to God (v. 3)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a one-last-chance ultimatum? What was the situation?
2. Did you make the most of your opportunity, or did you squander it?

Don't Laugh— You're Next

DAY 12

Zephaniah 2:4-15

No one escapes justice. Do you think that's true or false? Do you know of someone who seemingly has? Do you believe you completely understand what justice is and isn't?

1. The land of the Kerethites would be taken from them, God decreed (vs. 6-7), but how was that good news for Judah?

2. God clearly stated the reason for the future catastrophes that would befall Ammon and Moab. What were they accused of (v. 8)?

3. The description of Nineveh after she experienced the inevitable consequences of her behavior reminds us of what (vs. 13-14)? (a) a resort, (b) a ghost town, (c) a zoo.

4. What was Nineveh's great boast (v. 15)?

1. Why do you think that it seems that God often waits so long to judge those who commit evil?

2. Are you ever tempted to take on God's role as judge? Have you ever gone so far as to act as the jury for someone you felt deserved punishment?

3. Why do you think God has directed us not to return evil for evil (Ro 12:17)? How does God tell us to respond to evil (Ro 12:18-21)?

Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron (v. 4) were Philistine cities steeped in idolatry. **Moab and Ammon** (v. 8) were the descendants of Lot and had always been enemies of Israel (Jdg 3:12-14; 10:7-9; 11:4-6). **Nineveh** (v. 13) was the capital city of Assyria. Its boast "there is none beside me," was well founded. The city was considered impregnable and for 200 years was the strongest city of its time. Through a natural disaster (flood), some trickery, and carelessness on her behalf, the city fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

“Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning.”

Zephaniah 3:3



Photo by H. Armstrong Roberts

The Before-and-After Picture

DAY 13

Zephaniah 3:1-13

Do you have any before-and-after pictures of yourself where you look dramatically different in some way? Is the “after” picture flattering or depressing?

1. What four things was Jerusalem guilty of before God (v. 2)?
2. Zephaniah characterized Jerusalem’s rulers as “roaring lions” and “evening wolves who leave nothing for the morning” (v. 3). How do you think the citizens of the city would have been affected by these exploitive and oppressive government officials?
3. Even Jerusalem’s religious leaders were immoral. What does the prophet accuse them of (v. 4)? Do you know of any religious leaders that might fit this description today?
4. While Judah was evil, God foresaw a future day when she would be different. What did God promise one day to do to the people of Israel? (v. 9)?
5. Read verse 2 and contrast it with verse 13. What differences between these two descriptions stand out to you the most?

1. If you were to take a spiritual before-and-after picture of your life before Christ and your life today, what would be the most striking difference?
2. What change has Christ made in your life that you are most pleased with?
3. Take a journey into the future. Would you like to be dramatically different spiritually five years from now? Write a description of how you’d like to change, and then begin to ask God to help you with this change.

“Beyond the rivers of Cush” (v. 10) signified the southern boundary of the known world to Zephaniah and encompassed the upper Nile region—southern Egypt, Sudan and northern Ethiopia.

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word

WINDOW
on the Word

One Fine Day

Zephaniah 3:14-20

OPENING
up to the Word

When things aren't going well for you, and you are getting discouraged with your life, how do you dream things will be different in the future?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. When do you think this wonderful day of forgiveness and restoration would occur (vs. 14-15)?
2. Study all the positive statements God makes about the future in verse 17. How many of those could you apply to the way God loves us today?
3. When we, as Christ-followers, read of returning to a home land (v. 18), do we think of that as a piece of real estate?
4. From judgment and destruction to blessing—read verse 20 and ask yourself which parable of Jesus this situation most resembles (Lk 15:11-31).

LIVING
out the Word

1. If you could change just three things in your life, what would they be?
2. Do those changes involve circumstances alone, or character improvements?
3. In these passages, God gave Israel a picture of a glorious future, not only eternally in changed circumstances, but internally in changed hearts. Which would you most like to see in your life, and why?

WINDOW
on the Word

***“Sorrows for the appointed feasts”** (v. 18). Many Jewish people would be scattered from their homelands, and they would be sorrowful that they could not take part in the appointed feasts. God promised to remove their sorrow by gathering them back to their land.*

“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.”

Zephaniah 3:14-15



Artwork by Gustav Doré