

Tapes For Growing Christians

Study Guide for
ZEPHANIAH

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lesson 1

A Prophecy of God's Judgment Upon the Whole World Zephaniah 1:1-3

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. During the coming Tribulation Period the earth will suffer greatly.
2. During the coming Tribulation Period mankind will suffer greatly.

practical application

1. Don't give up hope for another great awakening.

questions

1. What is the theme of the book of Zephaniah?
2. Zephaniah is the only prophet of royal blood. What king was he related to?
3. Zephaniah prophesied during the days of King Josiah of Judah. Briefly describe Josiah's reign.
4. King Manasseh and King Ammon ruled before King Josiah. What did they do for the kingdom?
5. What role did Huldah the prophetess play in the Southern Kingdom of Judah?
6. There are two primary judgments in Zephaniah's prophecy. Explain.
7. What is the difference between a revival and an awakening?

answers

1. The day of the Lord.
2. Zephaniah's great-great grandfather was Hezekiah, who reigned over Judah at the end of the 8th century B.C.
3. Josiah reigned from 640 B.C. to 609 B.C. He was only eight years old when he came to the throne. He was a good king. During his reign, a great revival took place in Judah. Read about this in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35.
4. Both were wicked kings who practiced idolatry and led the kingdom of Judah down hill morally and spiritually. They even destroyed the available copies of Scripture.
5. In 622 B.C., a hidden copy of the law was found in the temple. It was brought to Huldah the prophetess, and she explained that God was going to bring judgment on Judah according to the curses of the law. This triggered a nationwide time of repentance, which resulted in a great revival in 621 B.C.
6. Zephaniah's prophecy of judgment looks forward to God's immediate judgment of Judah, and it looks on to God's worldwide judgment in the end times.
7. In a revival, God's people are spiritually revived; they return to worship the Lord. In an awakening, unbelievers are converted.

discuss / consider

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 concerning the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture of the Church is the next event on God's prophetic calendar. There are no prophecies that have to be fulfilled before the Rapture can take place. This event could happen at any time – even today. Are you ready for the Rapture?
2. The Tribulation Period will come after the Rapture of the Church. The earth will suffer greatly during this period. Read about this in Zephaniah 1:2-3; Isaiah 24:1-3; and Revelation 8:7-9.
3. Not only will the earth suffer during the coming Tribulation Period, but mankind will also suffer greatly. Regarding this, read Zephaniah 1:3; Isaiah 24:6; Matthew 24:21-22; and Revelation 9:13-18.

challenge

1. Don't give up hope for another awakening. In view of the coming Tribulation Period (which may be in the near future as we consider the current world situation) obvious questions come to the mind of the believer, "Is it too late for a change of heart in this nation?" "Is it too late to respond to God's wake-up call?" "Have we as a nation reached the point of no return?"

America has had two great spiritual awakenings in her history. Let's pray for a third. It could happen. Read the promises of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

memorize

"I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land," says the Lord. " - Zephaniah 1:2

"I will consume man and beast...I will cut off man from the face of the land," says the Lord. " - Zephaniah 1:3

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. " - 2 Chronicles 7:14

lesson 2

Zephaniah's Prophecy of Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem Zephaniah 1:4-18

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. There is a historical aspect to the day of the Lord.
2. There is an eschatological aspect to the day of the Lord.

practical application

1. Don't be brainwashed with the idea that God is indifferent.

questions

1. Zephaniah's prophecy of judgment in Zephaniah 1:1-3 was worldwide in scope. What is the scope of his prophecy in Zephaniah 1:4-18?
2. Have these prophecies been fulfilled, or do they wait to be fulfilled in the future?
3. How did the Babylonian invasion fit into Zephaniah's prophecies?
4. What is meant by "the day of the Lord"? When is the day of the Lord?
5. Why is the concept of the day of the Lord confusing to some Christians?
6. How close are we to the End Times?
7. Define "Eschatology".

answers

1. Zephaniah moves closer to home in this prophecy and pronounces God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.
2. Yes – to both parts of the question. Some of this prophecy against Judah and Jerusalem was already fulfilled in history. However, all that we read in this prophecy of judgment has not yet been fulfilled. There is an end-time aspect to this prophecy of judgment.
3. Thirty to fifty years after Zephaniah's prophecy, the Babylonian armies swept in from the north and conquered Judah and Jerusalem. The temple of the Lord was destroyed at that time and the people were taken into captivity.
4. The day of the Lord is any time that the Lord intervenes in the affairs of nations for judgment or for blessing. The Lord has already intervened and He will intervene in the future.
5. Because of the two aspects of the day of the Lord – the historical aspect and the future aspect. Any partial fulfillment or historical fulfillment of the day of the Lord prophecies illustrates or foreshadows the future fulfillment.
6. We can't say for sure. However, certainly recent events indicate that we are getting closer to the coming Tribulation.
7. Eschatology is the study of End Time events.

discuss / consider

1. Refer to Zephaniah 1:4-18 – “the day of the Lord is at hand...the day of the Lord is near and hastens quickly.” The day of the Lord was near for Jerusalem and Judah at that time because the Babylonian armies were right there on the horizon and were about to conquer Israel. God judged and punished Jerusalem and Judah because they had absorbed the pagan culture around them. Are we guilty of this sin? How much of the pagan culture have we absorbed?
2. God judged the sin of idolatry. When God allowed the Babylonians to conquer Judah and Jerusalem, the sin of idolatry was judged and removed. When the Jews went into captivity in Babylon there was no more idol worship. An idol is anything that takes the place of God as #1 in your life. What are some of your idols? What will it take to purge the worship of idols in our country today?

challenge

1. Don't be brainwashed with the idea that God is indifferent. In Zephaniah 1:12, we read that the people had settled into complacency, thinking that God was indifferent to all that was going on. Does this sound familiar? Don't be caught up into this kind of thinking. Start living your life in light of eternity.

memorize

“I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place...” - Zephaniah 1:4

“Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand.” - Zephaniah 1:7

“I will punish those who are settled in complacency...” - Zephaniah 1:12

“The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly...a day of wrath...” - Zephaniah 1:14-15

lesson 3

Zephaniah Announces the Judgment of the Lord Upon the Gentile Nations Surrounding Israel Zephaniah 2:1-15

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. God will judge those who mock and despise His people.
2. God will judge those who exalt themselves above others.

practical application

1. Are you hidden from the Lord's anger?

questions

1. What is the theme of Zephaniah?
2. What are the two aspects of this theme?
3. Were all of the prophecies of Zephaniah Chapter 1 fulfilled by the Babylonian invasion of Judah?
4. Who preserved the Scriptures during the Babylonian captivity?
5. Is Zephaniah 2:3 a reference to Christians who are raptured before the Tribulation?
6. God pronounces judgment on which group of people in Zephaniah 2:4-15?

answers

1. The day of the Lord
2. The historical aspect and the eschatological (future) aspect to the day of the Lord.
3. No. Some of the prophecies await fulfillment.
4. The Jews who were taken captive to Babylon preserved the scriptures and produced the godly remnant that came back to Jerusalem after the seventy-year captivity.
5. No. The godly remnant in this verse are future believers that God preserves and protects from His wrath during the time of the Tribulation.
6. The Gentile nations surrounding Judah.

discuss / consider

1. Look at a map of the Old Testament period. Locate the nations to the west and east of Judah that are mentioned in Zephaniah 2:4-11. Discuss the prophecies that were fulfilled concerning these nations. Discuss the prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Is there peace in Askelon today?
2. God pronounced judgment on the Gentile nations surrounding Judah because they were proud and arrogant and they mocked and despised the Jews. Does this have relevance today?

3. Take out your map again, and locate the places south and north and further east mentioned in Zephaniah 2:12-15. Nineveh was judged because it exalted itself above others. Consider the relevance of such judgment today, both in nations and in individuals.

challenge

1. In context, Zephaniah 2:3 refers to the godly remnant that God preserved during the Babylonian captivity and looks forward to the godly remnant that will be preserved during the coming Tribulation Period. This also has application for today. Are you hidden from the Lord's anger? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

memorize

"Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth...it may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." - Zephaniah 2:3

"...they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord...the Lord will be awesome to them...people shall worship Him..." - Zephaniah 2:10-11

"This is the city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, 'I am it, and there is none besides me.' How she has become a desolation..." - Zephaniah 2:15

lesson 4

**Zephaniah Continues His Prophecy of Judgment first Against Jerusalem (3:1-7)
and then Against the Nations of the World (3:8)
Zephaniah 3:1-8**

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. The past judgment of Jerusalem was justified.
2. The future judgment of the nations will be justified.

practical application

1. Take a closer look when you think everything is out of control.

questions

1. What makes the structure of Zephaniah's prophecy similar to a number of the Old Testament prophecies?
2. Give a brief outline by chapters of Zephaniah's prophecies.
3. What message do Zephaniah's prophecies of judgment have for us?
4. Who is the oppressing city of Zephaniah 3:3?
5. For what sins was this city judged?
6. How did the people of this city respond when they were warned by God through Zephaniah, and even disciplined?

answers

1. The prophecies contain both good news and bad news, with the bad news coming first.
2.
Chapter 1 – Zephaniah prophesies God’s judgment against the whole world, and then against Judah and Jerusalem

Chapter 2 – Zephaniah prophesies of God’s judgment against the foreign nations surrounding Israel

Chapter 3 – Zephaniah returns to prophecies of God’s judgment against Jerusalem, concluding with judgment against the whole world.
3. God hates sin and He must judge sin, then and today.
4. Jerusalem
5. The people of Jerusalem did not trust and obey the Lord, the civil leaders corrupted justice, the religious leaders twisted and distorted the word of the Lord for their own purposes; and the temple of the Lord was no longer a holy place.
6. They did not return to the Lord. In fact they rose early (were eager) to corrupt all their deeds. See Zephaniah 3:7.

discuss / consider

1. The past judgment of Jerusalem was justified. Because of her sins, not long after Zephaniah prophesied, God allowed the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Jerusalem and destroy the beautiful temple that Solomon had built. It was a sin when justice was corrupted by the civil leaders of Jerusalem. Do you know any corrupt politicians today that could be likened to lions and wolves (Zephaniah 3:3-4)? The religious leaders of Jerusalem were twisting and distorting the word of the Lord for their own purposes, and the temple of the Lord was no longer a holy place. Is there a parallel to this type of blasphemy and desecration today? What will it take to turn our own country around?
2. Read Joel 3:1-2; Zephaniah 3:8; Zechariah 14:2; Matthew 25:31-33; and Revelation 16:16. This is the time of the Battle of Armageddon. The future judgment of the nations will be justified. No one will dare question the Judge, the Lord Himself.
3. In Zephaniah 3:8, the Lord is addressing the godly remnant of the last days, the great number of believers coming out of the tribulation period. Read about this in Revelation 7:4-17.

challenge

1. In Zephaniah 3:5 we read, “Every morning the Lord brings His justice to light..” There is no excuse for unrighteous ways because God’s standards were known then and they are still known, even in the midst of moral and spiritual corruption. God is in control. Look around, and you will find something to indicate that God is still on the throne, and that His righteous standards are still standing. God has raised up godly leaders in the midst of our national time of crisis. Thank God for leaders who practice righteous standards.

memorize

“Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted...not obeying His voice nor receiving correction...” - Zephaniah 3:1

“The Lord is gracious in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light.” - Zephaniah 3:5

lesson 5

A Wonderful Description of the Future Blessings to Come When the Lord Returns and Sets Up His Kingdom on This Earth Zephaniah 3:9-20

background notes

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

doctrinal / teaching points

1. In the future there will be blessing on the remainder of Gentiles.
2. In the future there will be blessing on the remnant of Israel.

practical application

1. Let's not forget the other meaning of the joy of the Lord.

questions

1. What is the theme of the book of Zephaniah?
2. Name the two aspects of this theme.
3. In reference to this theme, there is a time of judgment and another time. What is this time?
4. When is the time of judgment?
5. When is the other time?
6. What is the subject of Zephaniah 3:8?
7. What is the Millennium? When will it take place?
8. Look at to Zephaniah 3:9. What is meant by "a pure language"?

answers

1. The day of the Lord.
2. There is an historical aspect to the day of the Lord as well as a future (eschatological) aspect to the day of the Lord.
3. A time of blessing.
4. The time of judgment is the coming Tribulation Period.
5. The time of blessing is the coming Kingdom of Christ on this earth.
6. The Battle of Armageddon which ends the coming Tribulation Period, the time of God's wrath on this earth.
7. The Millennium is the coming Kingdom of our Lord on this earth. This Kingdom is known as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, because it will last for 1,000 years. See Revelation 20:6.
8. There will no longer be defiled speech.

discuss / consider

1. After the judgments of the Tribulation Period, “then” (Zephaniah 3:9) the Lord will restore the nations. They will be composed of all the believers coming out of the Tribulation Period. They will be restored both morally and spiritually. Worshipers from around the world will come to the New Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Read about this in Zephaniah 3:10; Isaiah 66:18; and Psalm 68:31.

2. The people coming up to the New Jerusalem during the Millennial Kingdom will include the Jewish believers who were scattered among the nations. Just think about the rejoicing of Israel after a long history of fear, disasters, and persecution. Why will Israel rejoice? Because Jesus Christ, the Lord Himself will be in the midst of Israel, God’s chosen people. Read about this Romans 11:25-27. There will be blessing on the remnant of Israel!

3. The regathering of Israel, described in Zephaniah 3:10-17 is not to be spiritualized to mean people becoming Christians and being gathered into the Church today. Instead, it refers to the Jewish people being gathered back to the land of Israel. See 2 Timothy 2:15.

challenge

1. Let’s not forget the other meaning of the joy of the Lord. There are two meanings in this phrase – the joy that the Lord gives us and the joy that we give to the Lord. Review daily the joy that the Lord gives to you. Don’t mix up joy and happiness. There are times when we’re not happy, but we can still have the joy of the Lord because we know that He is in control of all circumstances. In fact, it’s the joy of the Lord that can keep us going when times are tough. See Nehemiah 8:10. Do you have the joy of the Lord?

As believers, we can bring joy to the heart of the Lord as we worship Him and serve Him. That’s the joy in view in Zephaniah 3:17. Although in this context it refers to the joy of the Lord when His people Israel return to Him, it has application for us today. What are you doing to bring joy to the heart of the Lord?

memorize

“...then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord.” - Zephaniah 3:9

“I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.” - Zephaniah 3:12

“Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.” - Zephaniah 3:14

“The Lord your God is 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.” - Zephaniah 3:17