

WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



LESSON 10 – ZEPHANIAH

FACILITATOR'S

Note

In this lesson we will explore the prophecy of Zephaniah, whose ministry occurred during the reign of Josiah, circa 640-609 B.C. Josiah, who came to the throne at the age of eight, inherited a legacy of moral and religious degeneration from the prior reigns of Manasseh and Amon. In the eighth year of his reign, Josiah began to seek after God with all his heart, and in the twelfth year, began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry. In his eighteenth year, a copy of the Law (which had been so neglected that it was lost) was discovered by Hilkiah the priest, motivating Josiah to carry out sweeping reforms unlike any ever seen in Judah (2 Kings 23:25). Even so, the effort proved vain. Judah's stubborn sinfulness and spiritual stagnation were too great to overcome, and following Josiah's death in 609 B.C., Judah spiraled to its death under the reigns of its final four kings – all wicked. Zephaniah's prophecy, delivered during the reign of Josiah, is one of judgment and punishment, first for Judah but also for its surrounding nations. The approaching calamity is to be delivered during a period referred to as the day of the Lord – the major theme of Zephaniah. There is no general call to repentance that can stem the announced calamity. The sinful actions of Judah and her neighbors seem to have exceeded God's period of grace; doom now awaits them with no hope of averting the disaster that will come on the day of the Lord. As always with God, however, there remains yet hope, as God promises to preserve a remnant of people during the day of the Lord who will be purified and made holy for service to Him -- people not only from Israel but also from the surrounding nations.

Through this lesson we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

HEAD  **→ HEART**  **→ HANDS** 

We hope that by this study your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the "Living Word" to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this "Living Word" concept.

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for this lesson by digging into the Word and reading through the book of **Zephaniah**. We also encourage you to read/scan through **2 Kings 22:1-23:30, 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27** as background to the book. As you move through **Zephaniah**, jot down*

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any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.

PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS



- Presentation of introductory material on the prophecy of Zephaniah.
- Understand that while God is patient, He will not ignore sin but will, in just judgment, pour out His wrath.
- Understand that the day of the Lord, a term found in many OT books, refers to a period of time filled with both terror, from the outpouring of God's wrath, and hope, from God's promise to preserve and purify a remnant.

DISCUSSION STARTERS



- Can God ignore sin? Discuss.
- God is called a God of Justice. What does that mean?
- When you hear the term "Day of the Lord" what feelings do you have and what do you think of? Did people in the OT have the same feelings and thoughts concerning the Day of the Lord that we do today? Explain.

KNOWLEDGE HEAD



From God's Word through Zephaniah

- OVERVIEW
 - Author
 - The author is precisely identified as Zephaniah, whose ancestry is traced back four generations: Zephaniah, son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah

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- Zephaniah is the only prophet to trace his ancestry back so far, and while the reason is unknown, it may be because his great grandfather Hezekiah was the Hezekiah who was king of Judah. If so, there is a separation of about 100 years between Hezekiah and the prophet.
- There are three, possibly four, distinct Zephaniahs in the OT:
 - A Kohathite descendant of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:36)
 - A priest, and son of Maaseiah, who served during the time when Seraiah was chief priest (2 Kings 25:18, Jeremiah 21:1, 29:25,29, 37:3, 52:24)
 - The prophet (Zephaniah 1:1)
 - An ancestor of exiles mentioned by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 6:10, 14). This Zephaniah may also be the prophet but it is unclear.
- The name Zephaniah means, "Whom the Lord hides (or protects)."
- **Date**
 - Zephaniah dates his oracle in the days of Josiah, King of Judah, who reigned circa 641/640-610/609 B.C.
 - Zephaniah was likely a contemporary of Jeremiah and Huldah, the prophetess, though whether he was older or younger is impossible to determine.
 - There is debate regarding whether the prophecy of Zephaniah precedes or follows the major reforms of Josiah which were initiated circa 621 B.C. but no clear conclusion can be reached.
 - Josiah's reforms involved the suppression of idolatrous worship and religious syncretism which had grown increasingly in Judah under the reign of Manasseh, no doubt due to Assyrian influence.
 - Zephaniah's message denounces worship of the starry hosts and religious syncretism, so some argue that this implies the oracle was given before the reforms began. On the other hand, because Josiah's reforms did not remove idolatry completely, sweeping though they were, others argue that the oracle was delivered after the reforms began and because they had failed.
- **Key Theme**
 - The Day of the Lord – Zephaniah writes/preaches more than any other prophet about an approaching period of terror and awe, near at hand, when:
 - God will pour out His wrath in judgment on all people who have lived in sinful rebellion against Him, including people from Judah's neighboring nations (Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Cushites, Assyrians) and Judah herself.
 - God will bring about the blessing of restoration, changing the hearts of people in the surrounding nations and people in the remnant of Israel that He preserves for future honor/glory.

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- **ASK:**
 - Does this theme still speak/apply to us today?
- **Metadata about the Book of Zephaniah**
 - Zephaniah is not directly quoted by any NT book but the theme of the Day of the Lord, especially the verses which seem to imply the end of the world and a final judgment day (e.g. 1:2-3, 17-18), bring to mind the tribulations and judgments described in Revelation.
 - Zephaniah does not describe or allude to the Messiah
- **Historical Background**
 - Zephaniah's oracles were received from God (per 1:1) during the reign of King Josiah, which occurred circa 641/640 – 610/609 B.C.
 - The Assyrian Empire, which had earlier dismantled the 10 northern tribes (circa 721 B.C.) by exiling many Israelites to Assyria and importing foreigners from other nations to populate the land and intermix with the people (from which emerged the dreaded NT Samaritans), was fading in power
 - The Neo-Babylonian Empire was on the rise and under Nabopolassar, established its independence from Assyria in 626 B.C. Likewise, the Median Empire under Cyaxares II had wrested itself from Assyrian authority in 625 B.C.
 - The collapse of the Assyrian Empire was delayed by an alliance with Egypt and Pharaoh Psamtik I (who reigned circa 664-610 B.C.) though ultimately, a coalition of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians destroyed Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, in 612 B.C.
 - The struggles between these super powers of the day had created a power vacuum from which Judah benefited (being left alone while the super powers fought with one another)
 - Prior to Josiah taking the throne, Judah had descended into idolatry and wickedness during the reigns of Manasseh (circa 697/696-643/642 B.C.) and Amon (circa 643/642-641/640 B.C.)
 - Manasseh, though the son of the pious King Hezekiah, rebuilt the high places (places of idolatrous worship) that his father Hezekiah had destroyed (2 Kings 21:3)
 - Manasseh built altars to Baal, an Asherah pole (image of the goddess Asherah), worshipped the stars, built altars to these stellar objects and placed these altars in the Lord's Temple! (2 Kings 21:3-7)
 - Manasseh also participated in child sacrifice, fortune-telling and made use of mediums and necromancers (2 Kings 21:6), activities expressly forbidden by God (Leviticus 19:31, Leviticus 20:1-6)
 - Due to Manasseh's influence, child sacrifice and astrology increased in Judah (2 Kings 21:9, 2 Kings 23:10-14)

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- Amon, son of Manasseh (perhaps named after the Egyptian deity Amon/Amun), continued his father's wicked policies until his assassination (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)
 - Josiah succeeded Amon, circa 641/640 B.C., at the age of eight. At the age of 16, he began to seek after the God of his forefather David, and at about age 20, in the twelfth year of his reign, he began to purge Judah/Jerusalem of idolatry, removing the high places, the Asherim, the carved and metal images, and altars to Baal (2 Chronicles 34:1-7).
 - At roughly the same time, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (circa 627 B.C.), Jeremiah began his ministry in Jerusalem.
 - In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, circa 622 B.C., a copy of the Law – which had apparently been lost -- was discovered by Hilkiah the priest (2 Kings 22:8-20). The find spurred further religious revival including enthusiasm for celebrating the Passover (2 Kings 23:1-25; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19).
 - Unfortunately, the revival could not overcome the wicked practices that had become ingrained in Judah during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, nor could it quell God's anger against them (2 Kings 22:15-20)
 - In 609 B.C., Josiah was killed in battle on the plains of Megiddo in a futile effort to prevent the Egyptians, under Pharaoh Necho II, from reaching Assyria to aid them in their dying struggle against the Babylonians and Medes
 - Historians are unclear as to why Josiah went out to engage Necho
 - Necho attempted to dissuade Josiah from interfering, insisting his struggle was only with the Babylonians and not Judah, but Josiah refused to listen (2 Chronicles 35:20-22) and was killed in a fierce battle
 - It is assumed that Josiah was seeking the favor of Babylon, the nation whose power was clearly on the rise while Assyria was clearly in its death throes
 - The next four kings to rule in Judah following Josiah's death – Jehoahaz (aka Shallum), Jehoiakim (aka Eliakim), Jehoiachin (aka Jeconiah), and Zedekiah (aka Mattaniah) -- did not follow in Josiah's ways and Judah met its God-appointed destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36:1-21; 2 Kings 23:31-25:12)
- **THE TEXT**
 - The text of Zephaniah can be divided into the following major sections:
 - Section 1 – The Coming Judgment on Judah (1:1-18)
 - Section 2 – The Coming Judgment on the Surrounding Nations (2:1-15)
 - Section 3 – The Coming Judgment on Jerusalem and the Nations (3:1-8)
 - Section 4 – The Restoration of the Surrounding Nations and Israel (3:9-20)

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- **1:1-18 (Section 1) The Coming Judgment on Judah**
 - 1-3 – The harshness of the coming judgment on Judah
 - 1: The opening verse identifies the prophet as Zephaniah and the time of his ministry as during the reign of Josiah, King of Judah
 - 2-3: The book opens by describing the coming judgment on Judah in terms that are so harsh that one can't help but think that the prophet is talking about a final day when judgment on all mankind is effected and the world is brought to an end
 - God says He will sweep away everything: man, beast, birds and fish; the order is interesting as it is opposite to their order of creation (see Genesis 1:20-26)
 - The close of this section, 1:17-18, also repeats the threat of bringing an end to all inhabitants on earth
 - That the remainder of the book includes the promise of hope/restoration, not only of Judah, but also of the surrounding nations, suggests that the harsh language here may be hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness/harshness of God's wrath and punishment that will be poured out
 - There are interpreters that believe this passage (and the other equally global passages, e.g. 1:17-18) has dual application – as hyperbole to describe Judah's impending punishment, and as a literal prediction of a final period of tribulation on earth prior to Christ's return and the final Judgment Day
 - 4-6: – Punishment for Judah's idolatry and religious syncretism
 - 4: God promises to punish and remove the remnant of Baal, i.e., those in Judah, including the idolatrous priests, who, in spite of Josiah's reforms, were holding to the worship of Baal
 - The term for idolatrous priests (Cheremim) means "black priests" and was used only of pagan priests, never Jewish priests
 - The term Baal was a title used for the gods of the Canaanites, perhaps their storm god, Hadad, in particular, and the Assyrian god, Bel
 - 5: God promises to punish and remove those engaged in the worship of the stars in heaven, and in religious syncretism
 - The Assyrians and Canaanites worshipped astral deities
 - Manasseh, a King of Judah before Josiah's time, engaged in and promoted the practice in Judah, no doubt due to the influence of the Assyrians (see Historical Background notes above)
 - The Law of Moses forbade this practice (Deuteronomy 4:19)

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- God had Jeremiah preach the same message of judgment for astral worship (Jeremiah 19:13)
- God condemns those who try to worship both Him and also Milcom (the chief Ammonite god), blending the beliefs/practices of Jews and Ammonites (an example of religious syncretism)
 - Milcom is rendered from the Hebrew Malkam, a variant spelling of Molech (1 Kings 11:5), the chief god of the Ammonites
 - Many in Judah were practicing the Ammonite rite of sacrificing their children to Molech (see Jeremiah 32:35)
- 6: God also condemns those who completely abandoned faith in Him
- 7-9: – Punishment for Judah’s adoption of foreign practices and violence
 - 7: Zephaniah warns that the Day of the Lord is near and on that day (whenever it occurs), God’s punishment of Judah is likened to a sacrifice that God Himself makes
 - 8a: On that day, the officials (civil leaders of Judah) and the King’s sons will be punished, held accountable for the nations sins
 - King Josiah’s sons were certainly judged/punished
 - Jehoahaz reigned only 3 months following Josiah’s death and then was captured and taken captive to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho II (2 Kings 23:31-33)
 - Josiah’s wicked son, Jehoiakim, reigned for 11 years and was subjugated and ultimately killed by Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 Kings 23:34 – 24:6; Jeremiah 22:18-19; 36:30)
 - Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin reigned only 3 months in 597 B.C. before being taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-16)
 - Josiah’s son, Zedekiah – made king after Jehoichin was taken to Babylon – reigned for 11 years until Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.; Zedekiah was blinded by Nebuchadnezzar and then taken captive to Babylon
 - At the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar executed Jerusalem’s officials/nobles, King Zedekiah’s sons – forcing Zedekiah to watch their deaths – and then put out Zedekiah’s eyes, taking him captive and blind to Babylon.
 - 8b: Those who dress in foreign attire are condemned
 - The Lord had made stipulations about clothing the Israelites were to wear (Numbers 15:37-39; Deuteronomy 22:11-12)

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- The condemnation of their adoption of foreign attire (their outward focus) likely means that these Judeans had adopted foreign values and practices (their inward focus)
- 9: Those who practice violence, fraud and leaping over the threshold are condemned
 - The Hebrew word for fraud (mirmah) can also mean deceit, and clearly violence and fraud/deceit are evil (ungodly) acts
 - “leap over the threshold”: a Philistine superstition of not stepping on the threshold that arose because the head and hands of Dagon (a Philistine god) were broken off on the threshold before the ark (1 Samuel 5:1-5). The threshold came to be viewed as an abode of demons, and allegedly, the expression of this superstition in Roman times lead to the practice of carrying a bride across the threshold (per [2]).
- 10-13: – Punishment for those who are complacent in their faith
 - 10: Distress is decreed for those living in specific neighborhoods in Jerusalem – the Fish Gate and Second Quarter.
 - 12: “... I will punish the men who are *thickening on the dregs*”
 - the phrase refers to the process by which hard, useless sediment collects at the bottom of undisturbed wine and if left alone too long, can allow the wine to become syrupy and unpalatable (Jeremiah 48:11); i.e., the people are lethargic/complacent in their faith, spiritually stagnant, and unable/unwilling to change – becoming worthless.
 - “The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.” -- They seem to think that God has done nothing yet to either bless or punish them, and He probably never will.
 - Complacency characterized the church at Laodicea and Christ rebuked them sternly for it: *I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.* (Revelation 3:15-16)
 - 13: Their punishment is complete devastation – loss of wealth, goods, property and reward for their hard labor.
- 14-18: – The Day of the Lord is near, disaster is imminent
 - Zephaniah describes the impending day in the harshest of terms
 - It is near; the Hebrew sentence stresses the word *near* which is first

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- It should be noted that given God's patience, slowness to anger, and usual habit of warning His people many years in advance of punishment, the time of Judah's punishment really was near.
- Within only 34 years after Josiah initiated sweeping reforms, Nebuchadnezzar had raked Judah, exiled her people, killed one of her kings, blinded and imprisoned another, and razed Jerusalem and her Temple
- Its sound is bitter, people cry out, it is a day of wrath, of distress and anguish, of darkness and gloom, of war (trumpet blast and battle cry) (vv14-16)
- The people will be in such distress that they will feel completely lost with no one to guide them ("they shall walk like the blind") and life will seem worthless (blood poured out like dust, flesh like dung) (v17)
- Nothing can save them from God's wrath (v18)
- Zephaniah concludes the chapter, just as he began it -- with language that sounds like the Day of the Lord is one on which God brings all life on earth to an end
 - such language may be hyperbole, which would be needed if there were to be any hope of rousing the Judeans from their spiritual stupor (see v12)
 - see the comments on verses 2-3 above
 - this language also emphasizes the global aspect of His judgment and punishment; that it will be poured out not only on Israel (the focus of this chapter) but on all the surrounding nations (as declared in Chapters 2 and 3)
- **ASK:**
 - Is the Day of the Lord a specific day/period in history? Is it several distinct days/periods in which God effects punishment during each? Discuss.
 - God declares clearly in 1:12 that a primary cause for the harsh punishment that He will effect on the Day of the Lord is the complacency of people who believe that He is indifferent to the human condition, and that He will not act, either for good or for ill.
 - Is this problem unique to the times of Zephaniah?
 - Can Christians develop this same attitude of complacency?
 - How does this come about, and what can you do to prevent it?
- **2:1-15 (Section 2) The Coming Judgment on the Surrounding Nations**
 - In this section, Zephaniah issues a call to Judah to repent, in the hope that the harsh judgment/punishment he proclaimed in Chapter 1 might be avoided, and then follows with the proclamation of judgment/punishment for Israel's neighbors

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– the Philistines to the west, Moabites and Ammonites to the east, Ethiopians (Cushites) to the south, and Assyrians to the north.

- 1-3: Zephaniah issues a final call to Judah to repent of her shameful actions (v1), before the dreaded Day of the Lord (v2), and seek righteousness and humility (v2) in the hope that perhaps the harsh punishment God has already warned them of (Chapter 1) can still be avoided (v3).
- 4-7: God warns the Philistines of their impending punishment/destruction
 - 4: Four of the five Philistine city-states are marked for destruction – Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron (in south-to-north order). The fifth city-state, Gath, had already been destroyed by the Assyrian king, Sargon II, in 711B.C.
 - 5: The Cherethites were a people that came from Caphtor, a region thought by some scholars to be the island of Crete, while others equate it to Cilicia, Cyprus or a region within Egypt. In any case, the Cherethites were migrants that came to be known as Philistines, who lived to the southwest of Judah along the sea coast (see Deuteronomy 2:23, Jeremiah 47:4, Amos 9:7)
 - 7: A remnant of Judah will in fact receive the seacoast region, including Ashkelon, after God destroys its Philistine inhabitants and restores the fortunes of Judah
 - The promise of a remnant implies that Judah will not cease to exist, but will persist, though in reduced numbers as God’s judgment against sin will be severe (as promised) leaving only a few survivors.
 - Today, Ashkelon is a major city in the southern district of Israel on the Mediterranean coast, about 31 miles south of Tel Aviv.
- 8-10: God warns the Ammonites and Moabites of their impending punishment/destruction
 - The Ammonites and Moabites were descendants of Lot via his incestuous relationship with his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38)
 - Both peoples frequently opposed Israel. Some examples include:
 - Moab: Numbers 22-24; 25:1-9; Judges 3:12-29; 2 Kings 3:4-27; 2 Chronicles 20:1-27
 - Ammon: Judges 11:4-33; 1 Samuel 11:1-11; 2 Samuel 10:1-14; 2 Chronicles 20:1-27; Nehemiah 2:10,19; 4:3-23; Jeremiah 40:13-41:3
 - 8, 10: They will be destroyed because in their pride, they taunted God’s people and boasted against (threatened) their territory. Their words against God’s people are in effect spoken against the Lord.

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- “Therefore, as I live, ...” : God essentially takes an oath, swearing by His own existence, that He will completely destroy the Moabites and Ammonites, just as He did Sodom and Gomorrah (v9)
- As with the Philistines, God promises that a remnant of His people will take possession of Moab and Ammon (v9)
- 11: The LORD’s actions extend beyond the peoples named thus far (Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites); He promises that He will “famish all the gods of the earth”, meaning, His actions will be so awesome that the nations who worship these “gods” will turn away from them (causing them to waste away) and turn instead to the one true God.
- 12: God promises the Cushites that He will slay them with the sword (war)
 - The Cushites were the Ethiopians -- the descendants of Cush (Genesis 10:6) – and included eastern Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, etc.
 - Ethiopia had been a great nation, ruling Egypt, circa 720-654 B.C.
 - They had at times threatened the well-being of Judah (e.g. 2 Chronicles 14:9-13)
 - In the 38th year of his reign (circa 568 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt, and in 525 B.C., Egypt and Ethiopia fell to the Persians under Cambyses; either of these may have been the fulfillment of God’s promised sword.
- 13-15: God warns the Assyrians of their impending punishment/destruction
 - Nineveh will be utterly destroyed and become nothing but a ghost town of ruins where wild animals dwell.
 - 14: “even the owl and the hedgehog ...” : the Hebrew for the first term, qa’ath (owl in the ESV), is translated differently among the various Bible translations, but the word is found in a list of unclean birds in Leviticus 11:18 and Deuteronomy 14:17; the Hebrew for the second term, qippod, is uncertain.
 - 15: Nineveh and her people were full of pride. “This is the exultant city ... that said in her heart, I am, and there is no one else.”
 - (Proverbs 11:2) *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.*
 - (Proverbs 16:18) *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*
 - (Proverbs 6:16-17) *There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, ...*
 - (Isaiah 45:5a) *I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; ... (compare with 2:15)*

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- God also delivered a stern message of Nineveh's imminent, irreversible destruction through the prophet Nahum, a contemporary of Zephaniah. (The entire book of Nahum is dedicated to the fall of Nineveh.)
- Nineveh was destroyed, circa 612 B.C., by a coalition of several nations including the Babylonians (under Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father) and Medes (under Cyaxares). Given that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (circa, 641/640 – 610/609), there were few years between Zephaniah's warning and Nineveh's fall.
- **ASK:**
 - What do you think is the primary offense for which Nineveh is denounced in 2:13-15? Discuss.
- **3:1-8 (Section 3) The Coming Judgment on Jerusalem and the Nations**
 - In this final section, Zephaniah warns of the coming Day of the Lord during which God will pour out His wrath on all the nations, Judah included, but after which He promises restoration/salvation to all.
 - 1-8: Judgment on Jerusalem and the nations
 - 1-5: Zephaniah bemoans the sins of Jerusalem/Judah. Her people have abandoned the Lord and refuse to listen to His rebukes (vv1-2), her officials do not lead rightly but instead are like wild beasts with insatiable appetites who treat the people as their prey (v3). Her prophets and priests are unholy, neither teaching nor abiding by the law (v4). Sadly, there is no feeling of shame among the unjust (v5).
 - 6-7: God condemns Jerusalem for her refusal/failure to learn. She witnessed God cutoff many nations/cities for the same sinful behavior that she exercises yet she has no fear of Him and refuses to change.
 - Had Jerusalem listened, learned and repented, she would have been spared ("Then your dwelling would not be cut off...")
 - 8: The LORD warns that His decision to punish stands. But it is not just a day of wrath against Jerusalem; God will gather many nations together and pour out His wrath and indignation on all
 - "for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed": this is hyperbole to emphasize the outpouring of judgment on all nations, but there will be survivors as is made clear in vv9-20)
 - This day is clearly future to the time of Zephaniah
 - **ASK:**
 - In 3:4, Zephaniah condemns the priests for doing "violence to the law." What does this mean? (Consider Ezekiel 22:26)
 - Can Christians be guilty of doing "violence to the law?" Explain.

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- **3:9-20 (Section 4) The Restoration of the Surrounding Nations and Israel**
 - 9-10: God will bring salvation to the nations
 - God's message through Zephaniah, turns from the terror of judgment to the hope of salvation
 - God will bring about the purification of the nations who had formerly been opposed to Him and His people Israel ("I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech") so that they can serve Him (v9).
 - "For at that time ..." : emphasizes that the Day of the Lord, though it brings punishment on all the nations, will also bring the blessing of deliverance (v9).
 - 10: From beyond the rivers of Cush refers to Ethiopia. The worshipers in question seem to be Israelite exiles (the daughter of my dispersed ones). They shall bring God's offering, which seems to imply that they will be restored to their place, that is, brought back to Jerusalem
 - Some interpreters believe that this is being fulfilled in modern times; since the mid 1930s, waves of Ethiopian Jews have migrated to Israel. Two of the largest waves occurred in very short periods of time as a result of covert military operations: Operation Moses, which transported 8000+ Ethiopian Jews over a seven week period, and Operation Solomon, which transported 14,325 Ethiopian Jews within 36 hours.
 - 11-13: The Day of the Lord brings about Israel's restoration
 - God promises that a remnant of Israel – the remnant already mentioned by Zephaniah in 2:7,9 – will be preserved, a people who are humble and lowly (vv11-12), who value and practice justice and truthful speech (v13), in stark contrast to the Israelites described in 1:7-13; 3:1-7
 - Lying and deceitful speech was rampant in Judah, in particular, among the prophets – see Ezekiel 13:6-9, Jeremiah 5:30-31; 14:14-16
 - 11: "On that day ..." : the rise of the remnant is future to the time of Zephaniah, and occurs as part of the Day of the Lord, following the judgment and punishment also associated with the Day of the Lord
 - 14-20: Israel will rejoice in the God's salvation
 - Zephaniah calls for Israel to rejoice with shouts and singing because God has removed her enemies and her judgments; salvation has come and He is once again in their midst as their king (vv14-15)
 - 17: Beautiful imagery is invoked to describe God's love for His people; He is a valiant warrior who saves, who rejoices over His people with loud singing, and in whom His people rest quietly and securely

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- 18-20: During the Day of the Lord (“at that time” in vv19, 20), God promises to deal with His people’s enemies, to care for the lame and outcast, to bring them renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth.
- **ASK:**
 - What brings about the better age in vv 9-10, in which the nations turn to the LORD? Is it social reforms on the part of the nations?
 - What brings about the restoration of Israel’s fortunes in vv14-20? Was it Israel’s repentance to God’s repeated rebukes through the prophets?
 - Who is doing all the work to redeem Israel and the nations?
- **REFERENCES**
 - [1] Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, Baker Book House, 1988. ISBN: 0-8010-5509-1
 - [2] Chuck Missler, *The Prophets to the Southern Kingdom, A Commentary*, Koinonia House, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-57821-501-0

UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- What do the times of Zephaniah have in common with our own times?
- What are some of the modern-day messages that we have heard through Zephaniah today?
- Do you look forward to the Day of the Lord and does it cause you anxiety/fear? Explain.

WISDOM ✎ HANDS

- What messages did you hear in this lesson that need to be shared with people you know?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY? Think specifically.
- Commit to each other that you will have the courage to share the message. Pray NOW and then pray for each other through the week to have the boldness to share.

PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to help you in sharing His Gospel message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | *from the* | MINOR PROPHETS



SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAH (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)