

Sunday School Lesson for May 3, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Prayer: Most Holy Father, thank you for this day that you have given us to study your word. Thank you for your mercies and goodness. You have told us that your word is a lamp unto our feet, to guide, and show us the way. Lord, we ask that you help us understand your will, as you guide us and protect us. We confess our need for you and we ask that you renew our hearts, minds, and lives, for the days ahead. Jesus, keep us focused on what is pure and right and give us the power to be obedient to your word. Almighty God, you are the only source of health and healing. In all pain, weariness and anxiety teach us to yield ourselves to your never failing care, knowing that your love and power surrounds us, trusting in your wisdom to give us health, strength and peace when your time is best. Lord, we ask that you bring healing mercies to our church families, our friends and neighbors that are going through sickness and battling ailments. Only you Lord, know our burdens and we ask for your help, so we can overcome them. We pray that you, will protect all personnel in the medical community as they continue to care for the sick. We pray for our national, state, and civic leaders, asking that you give them the wisdom to handle each situation as they lead our country. God, forgive us of our sins and open our hearts and minds as we seek to live a life pleasing and glorifying you. We ask these things in our Lord and Savior's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lesson for May 3, 2020 is "A Vision of Restoration" Scripture passage is from Zephaniah chapter 3:14-20.

Sources used for this lesson: The Bible, The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, Exploring The Minor Prophets by John Phillips, Sermon by Kathryn Schifferdecker, Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary and Pastor, Rev. Ray Stedman Ministries, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.

When was the last time you have heard a sermon preached from the book of Zephaniah? How about the last time you had a Sunday school lesson about Zephaniah? I had some notes from 2016.

If history teaches us anything, it is that people often do not take the warnings they are given seriously. We see this as parents warning our children, we see it when the meteorologists warn about approaching storms, and we see it when people are living out the consequences of failing to listen to those warnings. It is true in our day and it was certainly true in Zephaniah's day. God is faithful to remind people at every time in history there is a judgment coming but there is also the hope of one who is mighty to save.

Zephaniah is divided into two primary sections. The first section demonstrates God's commitment to judge both His people (Judah and more specifically Jerusalem) and the people of the nations (all the earth, surrounding nations) for false worship and a lack of acknowledging the one true God. This is seen in chapters 1:2 to 3:8.

The second section explains that the "day of the Lord" is not just about the judgement of God but also the hope and blessing of God both for the people of the world and the remnant of Judah (3:9-20).

The name Zephaniah is borne by three other men in the Old Testament means "Yahweh hides", or "Yahweh has hidden." Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah king of Judah (640-609 B.C.). The other Zephaniahs, an ancestor of the prophet Samuel (1 Chronicles 6:36), the father of the priest living in Jerusalem when King Darius declared the temple should be rebuilt. (Zechariah 6:10), and the second priest in the reign of Zedekiah; the son of Manasseh who was put to death by the king of Babylon with some of the other captive Jews. (2 Kings 25:21; Jeremiah 21; Jeremiah 29; Jeremiah 37; Jeremiah 52).

Josiah followed God, and during his reign the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple. After reading it, Josiah began a great religious revival in Judah (2 Kings 22:1-23:25). Josiah was the last good king in Judah. Zephaniah helped fan the revival by warning the people that judgment would come if they did not turn from their sins. Although this great revival turned the nation back to God, it did not fully eliminate idolatry and lasted only a short time. Twelve years after Josiah's death, Judah was invaded by Babylon and a number of people were sent into exile.

Beyond the information given in Zephaniah 1:1, "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, little is known about the prophet.

The northern kingdom of Israel was already in captivity, and Babylon was gaining in power and prestige. God had determined that the Babylonians would be His instrument to punish the nation of Judah. Zephaniah and his contemporaries, Jeremiah and Habakkuk, were some of the prophets God used to pronounce this warning message.

Zephaniah's introductory words, "the word of the LORD that came", were also used by Hosea, Joel, and Micah at the beginnings of their books. "The day of the LORD" occurs seven times in this little prophecy. All of the prophets refer to it; and now Zephaniah, the last of the writing prophets, before the Captivity, brings it to our attention again. He uses it more than any of the other prophets. The actual phrase occurs seven times, but there are other references to it. This expression has particular application to the Great Tribulation period, which precedes the Kingdom; but the Day of the Lord also includes the time of the Kingdom. The Great Tribulation period is ended by the coming of Christ personally to the earth to establish the millennial Kingdom—and all that is included in the Day of the Lord.

The emphasis in the Book of Zephaniah is upon judgment. Joel also opens his prophecy with a description of a great locust plague, which he likens to the Day of the Lord that is coming in the future. Joel says that the Day of the Lord is not light; it is darkness.

"Jealousy" occurs twice in this book. God's jealousy is on a little different from that of yours and mine. In our jealousy, we seek to do evil. God is jealous of those who are His own. He is jealous of mankind. He created him, and He has purchased a redemption for him, and made it possible for him to be saved. It is not His will that any should perish; He wants them saved—He is jealous for mankind. But when they don't turn to Him, He is going to judge them. The thing which the Book of Zephaniah makes clear is that God is glorified in judging as well as He is glorified in saving.

Through the prophet Zephaniah, we are taught that God uses various catastrophes to punish and humble nations. In the book of Revelation, this punishment is called the wrath of God (Revelation 14:10), which occurs during the initial part of the Day of the Lord. Here are a few examples of this time of punishment from the book of Zephaniah:

- "Therefore wait for me, declares the LORD, for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them – all

my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger. Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder. On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble who trust in the name of the LORD." (Zephaniah 3:8-12)

- "For the day of the LORD is at hand. ... At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing either good, or bad.'" (1:7, 12)
- "The great day of the LORD is near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter. The shouting of the warrior there". 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, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD." (1:14-17)
- "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath." (1:18)
- "I had left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left – no one at all." (3:6)

We may read these passages and conclude that God is harsh and unforgiving. But these dire punishments would not have to occur if the nations would only respond to God's instructions and pleas for repentance and a change of heart.

Jesus's heartfelt words demonstrate this: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

Nations and people will bring these troubles on themselves! People shouldn't blame God, but rather themselves.

Little can be said about the political conditions in Judah during the reign of Josiah, because the Biblical books are silent concerning them. Josiah seems to have remained loyal to his Assyrian lord to the very end, even when the latter's prestige had begun to wane, and this loyalty cost him his life

(2 Kings 23:29). The advance of the Scythians furnished the occasion of the prophecy. The prophet looked upon the Scythians as the executioners of the divine judgment upon his sinful countrymen and upon the surrounding nations; and he saw in the coming of the mysterious host the harbinger of the day of Yahweh.

The Book of Zephaniah, the early discourses of Jeremiah, and 2Kings 21-23 furnish a vivid picture of the social, moral, and religious conditions in Judah at the time Zephaniah prophesied. Social injustice and moral corruption were widespread (3:1 and 3:7). Luxury and extravagance might be seen on every hand; fortunes were heaped up by oppressing the poor (1:8,9). The religious situation was equally bad. The reaction under Manasseh came near making an end of Yahweh-worship (2 Kings 21). Amon followed in the footsteps of his father, and the outlook was exceedingly dark when Josiah came to the throne.

Earlier prophets had spoken of the day of Yahweh; Amos (5:18-20) had described it in language similar to that employed by Zephaniah; but the latter surpasses all his predecessors in the emphasis he places upon this terrible manifestation of Yahweh.

In chapter 3, Zephaniah summarized and explained why God will destroy His chosen people but after that, the new Kingdom of Israel will rise. Zephaniah 3:1-5 details the sins of His people and the prophet used many adjectives to describe them. Verse 1 speaks of oppressive, rebellious and defiled, verse 2 disobedient, accepts no correction, unfaithful, refusing to draw near to God, verse 3 her officials are brutal like lions and wolves, verse 4 her prophets are arrogant and treacherous, her priests are wicked and violent to the Law and verse 5 her people are unrighteous and shameless.

Verses 6 and 7 are about God's wrath not simply destroying the nations but to purify Israel and every people that are called by His name to make them repentant and come back to God. And yet His people still refused to obey.

In verse 8, it talks about the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will gather all nations in one place to testify to them and right there, all those who refuse to obey will be consumed. This will be the Battle of Armageddon. All those who endured and waited for the Lord's coming will be rewarded and will also be gathered back to the original Promised Land through the Great Exodus. Then all the nations will be in one place. This is the last and final act of God against His enemies and it will happen in the very last day prior to the start of the Millennium. By then, the earth will be empty of sinners.

Zion, sing a song of joy (Zeph. 3:14-15). After nearly two and a half chapters of judgment, it is only fitting that Zephaniah would pen this song of

joy and invite the Children of Israel to sing and rejoice. Five verses prior, the prophecies of judgment turned into a message of hope. God will give the people clean lips, and all of God's scattered children will worship and serve God on one accord. There will be peace, and they will have nothing to fear. This vision of unity and serenity invites the Children of Israel to praise the Lord because God acts on their behalf. God has removed any judgments against them. God has removed their enemies from oppressing them. And that same God is among them.

God's love restores the soul and spirit of the Children of Israel. In these verses, Zephaniah declares that there is a new day. This day is the day God will be a warrior who brings victory. This day brings God's rejoicing and renewal of God's people. Previously, the Israelites had undergone distress, anguish, and bitter cries (Zephaniah 1:14-15); now is the day of God singing. How great must this day be if it causes God to bring forth a song? He promises to lovingly gather the mournful and remove their disgrace with His love.

In these final verses 19 and 20, we are reminded that God's restoration is complete. While the previous verses deal with the remnant's spiritual, emotional, and mental wellness, these verses address their social location. They have been oppressed, cast away, and robbed of their fortune. They did not get to experience whatever goodness came with their identity. Instead they were mocked and shamed for it. Due to their social location, they were treated as inferior. God promises to do more than remove their oppressors. God promises to bring the remnant together, give them a good name, and restore their fortunes. In this final vision, there is no lack in the remnant. Because God loves them. They have an identity, and they have a community of gathered people. They are fully socially because those who were not able to help themselves are in God's care, and they have full access to their fortunes.

Zephaniah was very firm and direct in warning us today. He also declared that the Day of the Lord is coming near and quickly ([Zeph. 1:14](#)). Let us all be prepared to receive all the promises of God. If we belong to Him, there will be nothing that can harm us, we shall fear nothing if we are on the side of the Lord. The coming wrath of God may be frightening but today, let us not be motivated by fear but by our love for God.

The book of Zephaniah reminds that God's warnings always come with a message of grace and that these prophetic warnings about His judgment are actually gracious in and of themselves. He loves us enough to remind us that we cannot continue on our sinful path without consequences but if we will

trust Him, He is mighty to save (3:17), we will not be put to shame (3:11), we will not fear (3:16), and He will gather us to Himself (3:19). From stepping into the world – God will ultimately bring an end to our pain and suffering, giving us joy in return. The good news is a promise of the restoration of creation, but it is also a promise of restoration to the right relationships, with God and with one another. When God promises that we will be praised throughout the world, the promise is based on who we are as God's children and not on our own might or strength.

Prophets say what no one wants to hear. Prophets point in directions no one wants to look. They hear God when everyone else has concluded that God is silent. They see God where nobody else would guess that God is present. Prophets feel God's compassion for us, God's anger with us, and God's joy in us. They dream, God's dreams and deliver wake-up calls; they hope God's hopes and announce a new future; they will God's will and live it against all odds. Prophets sing God's song and sometimes interrupt the program with a change of tune.

The book of Zephaniah ends where it began with a scene of the reversal of the whole world order. It began with devastating overthrow. It ended with the blessings of God's people being returned to the land. God's restoration of the nation in chapter three is as complete as His destruction of the world in chapter one. He is now a judge who pardons. The promise of Zephaniah will find its immediate fulfillment in the return from the seventy years of exile. At that time the people will be rescued, and their reputation restored. In some sense, however, the fulfillment better describes the glorious promise of the Messianic age when the Lord promised through His Son to "take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, and rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

Zephaniah concluded his book with the words, "says the LORD!"

It was Charles Spurgeon who noticed a weather vane that a farmer had on his barn. It was an unusual weather vane, for on it the farmer had the words, GOD IS LOVE. Mr. Spurgeon asked him, "Do you mean by this that God's love is as changeable as the wind?" The farmer shook his head. "No," he said, "I do not mean that God's love changes like that. I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is love."

Today it may be the soft wind from the south that He brings to blow across your life, for He loves you. But tomorrow He may let the cold blasts from the north blow over your life—and if He does, He still loves you.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson May 10, 2020 "Peace and Justice Reign" from Zechariah chapter 8. May 10, 2020 is Mother's Day.