

LEADER GUIDE

An Expositional Study Through

Feb 8
-
Apr 12



ZEPHANIAH

AN EXPOSITIONAL STUDY

Through the Book of Zephaniah

February 8 - April 12

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Written by TJ Johnson

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LEADER GUIDE

Feb 8

Cosmic Judgment

Zephaniah 1:1-6



Sermon Series Overview

For the next nine weeks, we will work our way through the book of Zephaniah. In the time it takes you to finish your morning coffee or tea, you can read the entire book. Therefore, it is my prayer that each of us read through this book on our own as a way of preparing for corporate worship. One of my favorite Bible reading strategies is the COMA method: Context, Observation, Meaning, Application. I imagine not many of you have heard sermons on Zephaniah. In fact, many of you have probably never even read the book, and some of you might not be able to locate it in the Bible. Therefore, to help you get the most out of your time in Zephaniah, I will be providing a brief overview of the book (Context).

AUTHOR

Zephaniah (“Yahweh has hidden/protected”), a descendant of Hezekiah (Zeph 1:1), placing him in the royal lineage and making him a relative of the current King of Judah, Josiah.

DATE

Circa 640–621 BC (early reign of Josiah). The prophecy against Nineveh (2:13–15) requires it to be before 612 BC, when Nineveh fell.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Around 930 BC, following the death of King Solomon, Israel experienced a civil war and divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The Northern Kingdom quickly fell into idolatry, and in 722 BC, after refusing to listen to the prophets, God sent the nation of Assyria to destroy it and send the people into exile (see the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

Over the next 100 years, the Southern Kingdom slowly forsook the LORD, even losing the Law of God (literally! The Book of the Law was rediscovered by the high priest Hilkiah during repairs to the Temple—see 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35). After decades of wicked kings (see 2 Kings 18–25) who introduced and encouraged pagan worship, God sends Zephaniah as a prophet to the Southern Kingdom to remind them to return to covenant faithfulness or face the same covenant curses that fell on the Northern Kingdom nearly 100 years earlier.

Zephaniah comes during the reign of King Josiah, who became king at the age of 8 after the assassination of his father, King Amon. Josiah, a righteous king in a long line of wicked kings, sought to bring the nation back to God by destroying all idolatrous worship sites and reinstating the covenant of Moses, with Jerusalem's Temple as the center of worship. It appears that God is drawing His people back to Himself through a prophet who preaches repentance and a king who enacts laws that create an environment for people to turn wholeheartedly to the LORD.

KEY VERSE AND THEME:

Zephaniah 1:14

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast...

Zephaniah's message could be summarized in the phrase, "The Day of the LORD." Many prophets used this language (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Malachi). It spoke of a time when God Himself would visit His people. For some, this visit would be a time of great joy; for others, it would be a time of great terror. For the Day of the LORD is a time of judgment and salvation that reveals God's justice and mercy.

As you read this book, be aware that the Day of the LORD is a present event (Judah, Cush, etc., will be judged now) that ultimately points to a future event (Christ's second advent). For example, the Day of the LORD came to the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC when Assyria carried them into exile; the Day of the LORD came for the Southern Kingdom in 587/6 BC when Babylon carried them into exile; the Day of the LORD came to Israel in 70 AD when General Titus destroyed the city and burned the Temple.

These events are small pictures foreshadowing the ultimate Day of the LORD when Jesus comes back to judge the living and the dead. Keeping this in mind as we read Zephaniah should help us make connections with the original hearers, with us today, and ultimately with the second coming of Christ.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Zephaniah writes to:

- 1. Announce the coming “Day of the LORD”—both a blessing and a curse.**
- 2. Call Judah to repent before judgment falls.**
- 3. Warn the nations that Yahweh judges all peoples, not just Israel.**
- 4. Offer hope of a purified people and restored relationship with God.**
- 5. Reaffirm God’s covenant faithfulness—He judges sin but preserves His remnant.**
- 6. Foreshadow the ultimate Day of the LORD, which the church refers to as Christ’s second advent.**

WHERE ZEPHANIAH FITS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

- A pre-exilic prophet warning of the coming Babylonian devastation.**
- Reinforces Deuteronomy’s covenant blessings/curses (Notice how often Zephaniah quotes whole phrases from Deuteronomy).**
- Anticipates the global salvation promised to Abraham (“all nations”).**
- Looks forward to a purified people, a restored Zion, and Yahweh dwelling among His own (3:9–20).**

NEW TESTAMENT USAGE & ECHOES

- Day of the LORD: 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10**
- Judgment of nations → Matthew 25; Rev 6:15–17**
- Seek the Lord: Matthew 5:3, 5; James 4:6–10**
- Purified speech & universal worship: Acts 2; Rom 15:9–12; Rev 7:9–10**
- Yahweh’s presence among His people: John 1:14; Rev 21:3**
- Remnant Rejoicing: Rom 9–11; Rev 21:3–4**
- Yahweh as warrior-king: Rev 19**

May the Spirit enable you to read this book with spiritual eyes, that you might better learn to love God and neighbor.

Reading with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Sermon Series Overview

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| February 8, 2026 | Zephaniah 1:1-6 | Cosmic Judgment |
| February 15, 2026 | Zephaniah 1:7-13 | Personal Judgment |
| February 22, 2026 | Zephaniah 1:14-18 | Eternal Judgment |
| March 1, 2026 | Zephaniah 2:1-4 | Escaped Judgment |
| March 8, 2026 | Zephaniah 2:5-15 | Exalted Judgment: God Glorified |
| March 15, 2026 | Zephaniah 3:1-5 | The Unjust's Judgment |
| March 22, 2026 | Zephaniah 3:6-8 | Merciful Judgment |
| March 29, 2026 | Zephaniah 3:9-13 | After Judgment |
| April 5, 2026 | Acts 2:22–36 | The Judge Who Was Judged |
| April 12, 2026 | Zephaniah 3:14-20 | Celebrating Judgment |

Cosmic Judgment

At City Church, we are a people empowered by the Spirit to proclaim Christ so that, even in great opposition, the Gospel might reach all peoples in all places, thereby bringing all who believe into God's family—visibly represented through local churches.

This Sunday, we begin a new series studying one of the books of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament: the Book of Zephaniah. In many ways, this series is a continuation of our 2026 Vision, as it reveals the *why* of evangelism.

Zephaniah was a nobleman in the 7th century BC to whom God spoke concerning judgment for the sins of the people. He faithfully wrote down this prophecy and delivered God's message to the people of Judah. That same message is one God has entrusted to us: to share with those around us that He loves them and sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins (John 3:16). We are His messengers, called to proclaim this Good News to all people.

Proclaiming the Gospel with you,

Pastor Stas



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Discussion Questions

1. According to this passage, why was God's judgment directed against Judah and the whole earth?

According to this passage, God's judgment was directed against Judah and the whole earth because of widespread sin and rebellion against Him. Like many nations of the world, Judah had sinned greatly and opposed God. Judah had already witnessed the destruction and exile of Israel (the northern kingdom) two generations earlier, yet it failed to learn from that judgment.

Despite having Jerusalem as its capital and possessing knowledge of the LORD, Judah did not repent or turn back to God. Instead, the people continued in idolatry. Verses 4–6 explain that Judah worshiped Baal, and even the priests were spiritually compromised—claiming loyalty to the LORD while also swearing by Milcom (1:5). The people neither sought the LORD nor inquired of Him (1:6).

In summary, God's judgment came upon Judah because of persistent idolatry, spiritual compromise, and refusal to repent, and it extended to the whole earth because humanity as a whole had rebelled against God.

2. In the face of such a serious warning, what should our response be?

In the face of such a serious warning, our response should be repentance, personal purification, and complete devotion to God. This includes turning away from sin, refusing to worship other gods, and choosing to follow the LORD wholeheartedly by living according to His law.

3. Does this passage (think holistically: Book, Prophets, Old Testament, New Testament) offer any hope, if so, what?

Yes, this passage does offer hope when considered holistically within the Book of Zephaniah, the Prophets, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Although God judges the whole earth, He is a covenant-keeping God. Throughout salvation history, God promises to bless His people when they wholeheartedly return to Him.



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Discussion Questions

This hope extends beyond Israel alone. God's purpose has always been to bless all the nations of the world through Israel. In the Minor Prophets, we see that God repeatedly warns His people before judgment comes, giving them time to reflect, repent, and return to Him. Judgment is never His first response.

Furthermore, God promises to preserve a faithful remnant. On the day of judgment, He will separate the faithful from the unfaithful, restoring the faithful to their inheritance and using them to bring the knowledge of God to all peoples.

4. If you were in Zephaniah's position, would you choose to deliver this harsh warning—knowing you might be rejected or blamed—or would you remain silent? Why?

In Zephaniah's position, the faithful response would be to deliver the warning despite the likelihood of rejection or blame. Although little is known about Zephaniah personally, he may have come from royal lineage as a descendant of Hezekiah. This suggests that his family lived through the spiritually dark period of idolatry under King Manasseh, shaping a deep awareness of the consequences of unfaithfulness.

Even though Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, a time marked by significant religious reforms, many people in Judah still refused to return fully to the worship of Yahweh. This made the prophetic task especially difficult, as the message of judgment and repentance was certain to be resisted by a large portion of the population.

Judah's historical situation further hardened hearts. While the people had witnessed the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel, they had not yet seen Babylon's full military power. This may have led to pride and false security, with many assuming that God was permanently on their side. Zephaniah's message directly confronted this misplaced confidence.



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Discussion Questions

Leaders might be tempted to remain silent due to fear of people, desire for acceptance, preference for peace, or even pride. However, these motivations are short-term and cannot outweigh the eternal responsibility of faithfulness to God. True leadership requires courage to speak God's truth, even when the message is unpopular.

5. In our lives today, how should we respond when God convicts us of our sin or wrongdoing?

Regardless of the time or culture in which a person lives, when God brings conviction of sin or wrongdoing, the proper response is confession and repentance. This involves honestly acknowledging sin, turning away from it, and intentionally changing direction. True repentance is not only running from sin but also turning toward God in obedience, worship, and renewed faithfulness.



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

LEADER GUIDE

Feb 15

personal Judgment

Zephaniah 1:7-13



Personal Judgment

Church Family,

How did we get where we are? Have you ever asked that either personally or for a collective group such as a work colleagues, friendships, a marriage, or a relationship with a child or sibling? Often this question can be asked when we had this idea that something was going just fine and then one day all of a sudden we wake up and it's not; things aren't going well or things haven't been well for quite some time. That's a very personal question that I think the book of Zephaniah causes us to reflect on. However, Zephaniah's proclamation is most clearly directed at the community of Israel. In remembering our 2025 study of the Book of Joshua, isn't it sobering to think that Israel was a recipient of such blessing, of such promise, and of such inheritance? Yet, now, they find themselves under the all consuming wrath and judgment of the Lord declaring that ALL of those very blessings in the promised land will be stripped away.

What ultimately happened during the reigns of both good and bad kings to bring Israel to a place where the Lord sends a messenger to pronounce a day of doom? The minor prophet certainly answers this question. It's clear from the very beginning of the book that Israel was at least guilty of serving false gods, of intermingling their own worship of Yahweh with pagan practices, and of complacency. While this is clearly laid out and charged to Israel by Zephaniah, we too should hear this warning of the coming Day of the Lord. We too should be reflecting on our relationships with the Lord and our neighbors and asking if our current circumstances are related in any way to specific disobedience in our lives. This coming Lord's Day we will look at the truths recorded in Zephaniah 1:7-13.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to a public assembly of worship for the one true and living God. I hope you will join part of God's visible covenant community this Lord's Day.

Sincerely,
Elder Grant Jones



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Discussion Questions

1. In Zephaniah 1:7, the Israelites are given a charge to "be silent" in the presence of the Lord. A gut reaction to this might be "make sure you have quiet time with God," BUT that doesn't really fit the larger context. The all-consuming wrath of God is being declared over Israel, specifically the southern tribe of Judah. The context is that Israel is being told to hear this charge laid on them through the prophet Zephaniah. They are being told to be quiet because of who God is and because there is nothing they could say to justify their sin. Are there areas in your life (e.g., relationships, entertainment, speech) that you refuse to be corrected by God's word because you tune out "those verses"? Past or present, has there ever been a situation where, in your own sin and rebellion, you were too quick to speak in an effort to justify yourself rather than listen to a genuine concern from an elder, a spouse, or a close friend? Are there faithful Christians you're avoiding because you don't want to hear a rightful rebuke?

There are different types of sin: visible and hidden. Sometimes it is easier to avoid obvious and public sins, such as stealing or engaging in publicly immoral behavior. However, there is also sin that is not immediately visible or outward, but hidden in our hearts and revealed through our attitudes, motivations, and responses.

However, God sees our hearts and knows everything about us. He calls us not only to avoid obvious sin but to be changed and sanctified from the inside out. No matter how carefully we try to hide our sin, it eventually reveals itself in our words, relationships, or actions.

It is also easy to justify our sinful behavior—telling ourselves that change is too difficult, that we deserve it, or that we want to avoid guilt and discomfort. In those moments, we are often too quick to speak in self-defense rather than being silent before the Lord and listening to correction.



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Discussion Questions

Being lovingly rebuked by an elder, spouse, or close friend is one of the hardest and most humbling experiences in the Christian life. Yet, if we believe we do not need correction, we are deceiving ourselves. Scripture reminds us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and therefore all believers need humility, repentance, and accountability.

2. From Zephaniah 1:7 — The Lord tells His own chosen nation that He is preparing them to be the sacrifice (not goats) on which He will pour out His judgment. What does this teach us about the Lord's character both as Judge and Father?

In the Old Testament context, a sacrifice functioned as a propitiation for sin, meaning that sin required judgment and bloodshed. When God tells His own chosen nation that they themselves will become the sacrifice, it reveals important truths about His character.

First, this teaches us that God is a perfectly just Judge. No sin is overlooked or ignored. It is inherent to God's character to bring justice against evil and unrighteousness. If God were to allow sin to go unpunished, He would no longer be just. This truth should both sober and reassure us—all sin in the world will be judged by God, whether in history or ultimately at the final judgment when Christ returns.

Second, this passage also reveals God's character as a loving Father. Because He loves His people, He disciplines them. His judgment of His own nation is not arbitrary or cruel, but purposeful—to correct, refine, and call them back to Himself. Discipline is not meant to destroy but to train and restore, producing "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" in those who are shaped by it (Hebrews 12:11).

Together, Zephaniah 1:7 shows us that God's judgment and fatherly love are not in conflict. He judges because He is holy, and He disciplines because He loves.



"The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast..."

Discussion Questions

3. From Zephaniah 3:10–11 — It's clear that the Lord's judgment will also strike where many have placed their trust...in the marketplace. To draw that into modern terms, we could say the Lord's judgment would destroy their economy and their bank accounts. Have there been seasons of your life, or are you currently disobeying the Lord's commands because your financial stability has been elevated to having an idolatrous hold on your heart?

Financial stability can become elevated to an idolatrous place in many ways. One common example is when people choose not to tithe or give generously because it affects their monthly budget or competes with other priorities, such as sending money home, saving excessively, or spending on personal interests. In these moments, finances subtly begin to dictate obedience.

Financial stewardship plays a significant role in our obedience to the Lord. While it may not seem like a major issue, how we handle money often reveals where our trust truly lies. When a person refuses to submit their finances and spending habits to God, it may point to areas of ongoing rebellion and a heart that is not fully surrendered.

In practical terms, this idolatry can take different forms. For example, someone may consistently choose to work overtime instead of participating in Christian community, such as a weekly small group, believing that career advancement and income are more important at this stage of life.

For husbands, this can look like becoming a workaholic, prioritizing job security and income over spiritual leadership and family discipleship. Some may choose work in another city or country, spending weeks or months away from their family in order to provide financially. While provision is important, these decisions can reveal misplaced priorities when financial stability outweighs presence, discipleship, and spiritual formation at home. In many cases, families could live with lower standards of comfort but choose instead to sacrifice spiritual health for material security.



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Discussion Questions

For wives, financial idolatry may appear as overspending on items that are helpful but not necessary, particularly for children, driven by fear, comparison, or a desire for control rather than trust in God.

Zephaniah reminds us that the Lord's judgment reaches even the marketplace. This challenges us to examine whether our finances serve God—or whether they have quietly taken His place in our hearts.

4. Zephaniah forces us to draw our eyes to the wrath of the God we profess to serve. We ourselves are subject to the complete wrath of the Lord apart from Christ. Many of us know people who have been turned away from Christianity because of a perception of the wrath of God. The Lord's righteous judgment is certainly a topic worthy of discussion. The Lord's wrath is terrifying. Having a proper view of the wrath of God drives us to the cross and helps us realize the hopeless condition we face without Jesus. So, if we don't have a biblical conception of God's wrath and judgment, we also might have misconceptions about Christ's work, humiliation, and exaltation. Knowing that, what distortions have you heard taught about God's wrath within Christian circles that need to be clarified by God's word?

One common distortion taught within Christian circles is the idea that God's wrath belongs only to the Old Testament, while the New Testament reveals a God who is only loving and gentle. This view wrongly separates God's character, as Scripture teaches that God is unchanging. The same God who judges sin in the Old Testament is the God who lovingly sends His Son in the New Testament, and His wrath against sin remains real and righteous.

Another distortion is the belief that God's wrath is uncontrolled anger or emotional outbursts, similar to human rage. In contrast, the Bible presents God's wrath as holy, measured, and just—His settled opposition to sin and evil. God does not lose control; He acts deliberately and righteously.



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Discussion Questions

Some also teach, implicitly or explicitly, that God's love cancels out His wrath, as if the cross removes the need to speak about judgment at all. However, Scripture shows that the cross does not deny God's wrath—it satisfies it. Jesus does not save us from a God who stopped being wrathful, but from God's wrath itself, which He bore on our behalf.

Finally, there is a distortion that frames God's wrath as incompatible with His fatherly love. Yet Scripture teaches that God's judgment and discipline flow from His holiness and His love. A God who does not care about sin or justice would not truly be loving.

God's Word clarifies that a right understanding of His wrath deepens our understanding of the cross, magnifies Christ's work, and humbles us before His mercy. Without a biblical view of God's judgment, we risk minimizing both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of our salvation.

5. In the sermon, we discussed how we can become like the "dregs" (Zephaniah 1:12). Discuss current or past seasons of your life where you were lukewarm in your faith. This complacency is something that Zephaniah is addressing. Notice the way he's addressing it—by warning the people of their coming doom, which will be brought to them by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It may seem like a strange concept to meditate upon the righteous wrath of the Lord. Make no mistake, the prophet Zephaniah is presenting this warning because it WILL happen (the Babylonian captivity). However, there is a hope that his charge will draw out some of those who have become lukewarm and complacent in their obedience to the Lord. Through this proclamation, he is calling those who will truly listen to repent and to be restored. Could it be that you need a season of being reminded of the wrath of God to spur you out of being like the dregs? And in case you missed it, the dregs are the undesirable portion, the portion thrown out.



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Discussion Questions

Being a "dreg" can describe a season of resisting the sanctification process—refusing to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in our hearts. It often shows itself in an unwillingness to receive correction, whether through God's Word or through loving rebuke from a brother or sister in Christ. In these moments, we refuse to acknowledge our sin and resist genuine repentance.

This lukewarmness often develops when the things of the world begin to take control of our hearts. Comfort, success, entertainment, or security slowly replace devotion to God. Being lukewarm is ultimately a form of idolatry—setting something up in our hearts that takes the place of what belongs to God alone.

Zephaniah's warning reminds us that complacency is not neutral; it is dangerous. The Lord's righteous wrath is meant to awaken those who have grown spiritually dull, calling them to repentance and restoration. Being reminded of God's holiness and judgment can be the very means God uses to stir us out of complacency and back into faithful obedience.



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Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports