

LEADER GUIDE

An Expository
Study Through

Feb 8
-
Apr 12



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

Cosmic
Judgment

Zephaniah 1:1-6

Feb 8



ZEPHANIAH

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.



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

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

Personal
Judgment

Zephaniah 1:7-13

Feb 15



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 it 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.



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

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.



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

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.



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

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

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.



"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

Eternal
Judgment

Zephaniah 1:14-18

Feb 22



Eternal Judgment

In Zephaniah 1:14–18, God tell the nation of Judah that His coming judgment on sin will be soon, severe, and inescapable. These were not empty words. Within fifty years, Babylon had invaded Judah, destroyed the temple, and carried thousands off into exile as slaves—where they would remain for the next seventy years. And yet, at the time, Zephaniah’s words seemed unbelievable. Would God really judge sin? Would God, who is love, really destroy those made in His image?

There are many today, even in the church, who cannot imagine Jesus executing judgment against sinners. That lie—that a loving God would never punish people for their sin—is as old as the Garden of Eden, when Satan told Eve, “You will not surely die.” But Eve did die. And Judah did go into exile. In other words, God keeps His promise to judge sin.

Nearly three thousand years later, we are confronted with the same message Judah heard. The Great and Awesome Day of the Lord is coming—soon. It will be a day of terror and darkness, when sin is exposed and finally and fully dealt with.

The warning of Zephaniah is for all humanity to take note and respond: to believe that Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead. While this is not a popular message, it is a needed one. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Hearing and Responding with You,

Elder TJ Johnson



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

Sermon Outline

Title: Immanent Judgment

Text: Zephaniah 1:14–18

Prop: The coming day of Christ's judgment is so soon, severe, and unescapable, that it demands our urgent repentance and compels us to point others to the only safe refuge: the cross where Jesus bore that day for us.

Sermon Outline

1. The Day is Soon.
2. The Day is Severe.
3. The Day is Unstoppable.

Sermon Notes



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

Discussion Questions

1. Read Zephaniah 1:14–18. How does the Bible use the phrase “The Day of the Lord” in both the Old and New Testaments? Have you ever struggled to reconcile the idea of a loving God with the reality that He judges sinners? Explain.

In the Old Testament, “the Day of the Lord” refers to a time of God’s decisive judgment, marked by His powerful intervention in human history. It is often described as a day of darkness, judgment, and accountability for sin. Examples of this usage can be found in Isaiah 2:12, Joel 1:15, and Amos 5:18–20.

In the New Testament, the phrase continues to carry the same meaning but is applied more clearly to the final judgment and the return of Christ. Both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter describe the Day of the Lord as coming like a thief, meaning that no one knows the exact time or hour of its arrival (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

Many people struggle to reconcile the idea of a loving God with the reality that He judges sinners. It can be difficult to accept that many will not stand in the judgment and will face eternal separation from God. Often, this struggle comes from an incomplete or distorted understanding of love. If love is defined as God giving us everything we want or allowing us to live however we choose, then God’s judgment will seem incompatible with love.

However, Scripture presents God as a loving Father and righteous Creator who knows what is best for His creation. Because He is holy and just, He must judge sin. To ignore sin would be to deny His own character. A God who selectively judges or overlooks evil would not be truly just.

Therefore, God’s love and judgment are not opposites. His judgment flows from His righteousness, and His love is most clearly seen in that He provides a way of salvation through Christ before the Day of the Lord arrives.



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

2. Read Zephaniah 1:17 and Romans 1:24–32. What specific sins are described in these passages? Ultimately, against whom is sin committed? Why does it matter that we understand the true object of sin?

In Zephaniah 1:17, God describes a people who have sinned directly against Him. Their sin is shown in spiritual blindness—they no longer seek the Lord, listen to His guidance, or walk according to His ways. As a result, they stumble like the blind because they have rejected God’s authority and presence in their lives.

In Romans 1:24–32, the apostle Paul describes specific sins that flow from this rejection of God. Humanity exchanges the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving created things rather than the Creator. This leads to moral corruption, disordered desires, and a breakdown of relationships and society. These sins are not random behaviors but the result of deliberately turning away from God.

Ultimately, both passages teach that all sin is committed against God Himself. While sin affects other people and the world around us, its primary offense is against God as our Creator, Lawgiver, and rightful King. At its core, sin is a rejection of God’s authority and a refusal to live according to His design.

Understanding the true object of sin matters because it clarifies why sin is so serious. If sin is merely breaking social rules or harming others, it can be minimized or excused. But if sin is against a holy and righteous God, then it requires judgment—and it also highlights our desperate need for grace and redemption through Christ.



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

3. Read Zephaniah 1:14; Romans 13:11–12; James 5:8–9; 1 Peter 4:7; and Revelation 22:12. How is the timing of God’s judgment against Judah described, and how soon after Zephaniah’s prophecy did that Day come? In light of this, how should we think about and respond — practically — to the repeated New Testament language that Jesus’ return is “near” or “soon”?

The “Day of the Lord” in Zephaniah 1:14 is described as near, urgent, and terrifying—a day of decisive judgment from God. For the kingdom of Judah, this day came through the Babylonian invasion, when Jerusalem was besieged and the people were taken into exile.

Historically, Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (around 640–609 BC), and the fall of Jerusalem occurred in 586 BC. This means the Day of the Lord for Judah came roughly 40–50 years after Zephaniah’s prophecy—soon enough that the warning was real, pressing, and unavoidable for those who heard it.

In the New Testament, passages such as Romans 13:11–12, James 5:8–9, 1 Peter 4:7, and Revelation 22:12 repeatedly describe Jesus’ return as “near” or “soon.” This language does not primarily give a timeline but communicates certainty, urgency, and readiness. Just as Judah could not ignore Zephaniah’s warning, believers today are not meant to delay repentance or obedience.

Practically, this means that what we do today matters. Every day is lived in light of Christ’s return. The nearness of the Day of the Lord should move us toward holiness, repentance, faithfulness, and urgency in sharing the gospel—not speculation about dates, but active obedience and watchfulness.



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

4. Read Zephaniah 1:15-16. How do you feel reading about “God’s wrath”? How does this compare with how often and openly the Old and New Testament discusses the wrath of God (yes, even Jesus – John 3:36)? Do you think the church today overemphasizes or underemphasizes wrath? Explain.

Reading Zephaniah 1:15–16 presents God’s wrath as terrifying, overwhelming, and unavoidable. The language is meant to unsettle us, showing the seriousness of sin and the certainty of God’s judgment.

When we compare this with how often and openly the Old and New Testaments speak about God’s wrath, it becomes clear that Scripture does not shy away from this topic. God’s wrath is addressed throughout the Old Testament, and even Jesus speaks directly about it, for example in John 3:36. Wrath is not a minor or fringe doctrine but a consistent biblical theme.

In contrast, the church today often underemphasizes the wrath of God. Part of this may be due to historical excesses, when public preaching focused heavily on judgment without clearly pointing to grace and redemption. Additionally, modern humanistic culture tends to reject the idea of divine wrath altogether, viewing people as essentially good and denying the reality of sin. If there is no sin, then judgment appears unnecessary or unjust.

However, it is crucial that the church understands and teaches the wrath of God rightly. God’s wrath is real, holy, and just—and it is essential to the gospel. Without understanding God’s wrath, we cannot fully understand salvation, because salvation means being rescued from something. The cross makes sense only when we grasp the seriousness of the judgment Christ bore on our behalf.



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

5. Read Zephaniah 1:15–16. How does each phrase (the synonymous parallelism) describe what The Day of the Lord would be like for Judah? How does that compare with the New Testament's description of Jesus' second coming?

In Zephaniah 1:15–16, the Day of the Lord is described through repeated phrases that intensify the same reality—wrath, distress, darkness, battle, and fear. Together, this synonymous parallelism shows the Day as terrifying and overwhelming for Judah, a complete unraveling under God's judgment.

In the New Testament, Jesus' second coming is described as glorious and triumphant, the return of the rightful King. The difference is not the event itself, but the response to Christ: judgment for the unrepentant and joy for the redeemed.

6. What were the ways in which Judah was hoping to prevent The Day of the Lord from happening and why did they ultimately fail? What are some ways people today - consciously or unconsciously - try to avoid or dismiss the reality of God's final judgment?

Judah hoped to prevent the Day of the Lord by relying on religious ritual, political security, and material prosperity rather than genuine repentance. They assumed that outward worship, the temple, or their status as God's chosen people would protect them. Some also believed God would neither bless nor judge (Zephaniah 1:12), treating Him as distant or inactive. These strategies failed because God desires obedient hearts, not empty religion, and He cannot be manipulated or ignored.

Today, people similarly avoid God's final judgment by denying sin, redefining God as only loving, trusting moral behavior, success, or religion, or distracting themselves with comfort and busyness. Like Judah, these efforts fail because judgment is rooted in God's holy character, not human perception or avoidance.



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

Discussion Questions

7. Though no one can stop The Day of the Lord from coming, how can a person be sheltered from God's coming judgment against sin? How would you explain this clearly and simply to a non-Christian?

God's judgment is coming for everyone who has ever lived or will live, because God is perfectly just and cannot ignore sin. No one can stop or escape the Day of the Lord by their own efforts.

The only way to be sheltered from God's judgment is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the life we could not live and took God's judgment for sin upon Himself on the cross. When someone turns from their sin and trusts in Jesus, God forgives them and counts Jesus' righteousness as theirs.

Simply put: we are saved from God's judgment by trusting the One who took that judgment for us.

8. In what specific ways should The Day of the Lord encourage and strengthen Christians?

The Day of the Lord encourages Christians to pursue sanctification, to become more like Jesus, and to practice daily repentance from sin. Knowing that Christ will return motivates believers to live holy and faithful lives. It also strengthens us because the process of sanctification is not easy. Daily denying the flesh and resisting sin can be difficult, but the Day of the Lord reminds us of the purpose and hope behind our obedience. We endure and persevere because we know where history is heading and that Christ's return will bring final restoration and reward.

9. How should the reality of The Day of the Lord move us toward greater seriousness in evangelism? What would that look like in real life?

The reality of the Day of the Lord gives urgency to evangelism because it reminds us that judgment is real and every person will stand before God. In real life, this moves us to intentionally pray for unbelievers, speak about Christ with love and courage, and prioritize gospel conversations over personal comfort.



"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

Escaped
Judgment

Zephaniah 2:1-4

Mar 1



Escaped Judgment

Join us this Sunday as we explore Zephaniah 2:1-4 and God's loving "early warning system" for our lives. In the busyness of work, family, and life overseas, it is easy to stay active yet spiritually asleep.

This message is a timely call to wake up, seek the Lord with humility and urgency, and rediscover the mercy we have in Jesus before the day comes.

Come and be encouraged to pause, refocus, and take the next step back toward God.

Elder Ling Lai



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

Sermon Outline

Title: Escaped Judgment: Gather together and repent

Text: Zephaniah 2:1-4

Prop: God's judgment invites urgent repentance — humility is the path to refuge.

Sermon Outline

1. Wake up (Alarm) – Zephaniah 2:1
2. Before (Urgency) – Zephaniah 2:2
3. Seek (Response) – Zephaniah 2:3
4. Hide (Gospel) – Zephaniah 2:3

Sermon Notes



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

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does “gathering together” help bring about spiritual renewal? Reflecting on your current rhythms in Beijing, are you using the opportunities to gather (church, small group, etc.) in a way that actually leads to honesty and change, or merely routine attendance? Explain.

Gathering together—not only on Sundays but also in smaller settings—helps believers be edified, encouraged, and strengthened in their faith. Fellowship with other Christians renews both the mind and heart, as we hear God’s Word, pray together, and speak truth into one another’s lives. Regular community outside of Sunday services encourages intentional spiritual growth and provides accountability in areas of sin.

However, gathering can become routine if we attend passively. For spiritual renewal to happen, we must come with honesty, openness to correction, and a willingness to change—not merely to fulfill an obligation, but to pursue transformation

2. What sins or compromises have you seen become quietly normalized in your workplace, social circle, church, or even your own heart?

There can be many sins or compromises that quietly become normalized, especially in a fast-paced and international city like Beijing. It is important to encourage one another to look honestly at our own hearts and consider where we may have slowly adjusted our standards to fit the surrounding culture.

These compromises might relate to sexuality, idolizing work and career success, or engaging in unethical behavior within social or professional circles. In the church context, it could include overlooking cohabitation outside of marriage, avoiding accountability, or tolerating ongoing sin—particularly among leaders—without loving confrontation.

Because normalization happens gradually, we need humility and courage to examine ourselves and invite others to speak into our lives. Spiritual health requires both personal repentance and community accountability.



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

Discussion Questions

3. What is one area of obedience—a conversation you need to have, a habit you need to break, a step of faith you need to take—that you have been telling yourself you will deal with "later" (after this contract, after this season, after things settle down) and what would help you to move forward in obedience?

It is easy to convince ourselves that a particular sin is "not that serious" and can be dealt with later—perhaps when we feel spiritually stronger or when life becomes less busy. We postpone difficult conversations, delay breaking unhealthy habits, or avoid steps of obedience because the timing never feels ideal.

However, Scripture reminds us that sin is never harmless. Left unaddressed, it slowly hardens the heart and weakens our spiritual vitality. If we are not intentional about confronting and cutting off sin, it will eventually bear destructive fruit in our lives.

What helps us move forward in obedience is remembering the seriousness of sin, inviting accountability, and trusting that God's grace is sufficient now—not later. Obedience delayed is often obedience denied.

4. In a city where so much of our energy is spent on navigating visas, career moves, and family stability, how can we tell the difference between seeking God's hand (what he can do for us) and seeking God's face (who He is)? Practically, what would change in your daily routine this week if your primary goal was to seek Him, not just manage your life?

In a busy city like Beijing, it is easy to seek God's hand—asking Him to solve problems—rather than seeking His face and desiring to know Him. Seeking His face means grounding our hearts in who He is, not merely in what He provides. It shifts our focus from outcomes to worship, trust, and obedience. Practically, this week it would mean prioritizing unhurried time in Scripture and prayer, surrendering our plans, and making decisions that honor Him above personal stability.



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

Discussion Questions

5. What areas of your life do you find it most tempting to be proud or self-promoting? What would it look like for you to "seek humility" in that specific environment this week?

The areas where we are most tempted to be proud or self-promoting often reveal our weaknesses or the things we idolize most—such as career success, reputation, intelligence, spiritual maturity, or influence. Pride usually surfaces where we most want recognition or control.

To seek humility in those environments means being willing to let go of perceived rights, privileges, or the recognition we think we deserve. Practically, this could look like giving credit to others, listening more than speaking, serving quietly, accepting correction without defensiveness, or choosing faithfulness over visibility. Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but placing ourselves under God's authority and seeking His glory rather than our own.

6. Who is one person in your network (a colleague, a neighbor, a parent at your child's school) that God is prompting you to have a more intentional spiritual conversation with, and what is one little thing you could do this week to take a step toward that person?



"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

Exalted Judgment: God Glorified

Zephaniah 2:5-15



Mar 8

ZEPHANIAH

Exalted Judgment: God Glorified

This week in our study of Zephaniah, the prophet widens the lens and speaks of God's judgment against the proud and boastful nations surrounding Judah and against the gods they worship.

Our situation today has changed, but human hearts have not - the nations still rage, and the people still plot vain things. This word from Zephaniah reminds us that God is exalted above all nations and all gods, and He will preserve and restore a remnant of His people. In light of this, we must be willing to sound the warning and stay hopeful and faithful.

Exalting the Lord with you,
Elder Ben Whitmore



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

Sermon Outline

Title: Exalted Judgment: God Glorified

Text: Zephaniah 2:5-15

Proposition: God is exalted in judgment above all nations and their gods, and He will preserve and restore a remnant of His people, therefore we must be willing to sound the warning, stay hopeful and faithful.

Sermon Outline

- 1. God will be exalted over all nations**
 - So sound the alarm to all people
- 2. God will be exalted over all gods**
 - So stay faithful to Jesus and starve the gods
- 3. God will preserve a remnant of His people**
 - So hold on to hope

Sermon Notes



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

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard someone say that Christianity is a Western religion, or 'the white man's religion'? How might you respond to that, and how does this passage apply?

I have heard this many times, especially from people outside the Western world. I understand why some people say this, because many teachings in the Bible confront cultural traditions and personal values in every society, not just in theirs. The Bible challenges both cultures and individuals because it is the Word of God, which sets the true standard for life. However, Christianity did not begin in the West. It began in the Middle East, and many early church fathers were from North Africa, such as Augustine of Hippo and Athanasius of Alexandria, whose writings shaped much of Christian theology. This shows that Christianity has always been a global faith, not tied to one culture or ethnicity.

2. Read Romans 1:18-32 and 2:12-16. Why is God bringing judgment against nations that did not receive His law?

God brings judgment against the nations because they have suppressed the truth about God (Romans 1:18). Even those who did not receive God's written law still have a knowledge of God and His moral law written on their hearts, as described in Romans 2:12–16. Their conscience also testifies to what is right and wrong. Because God is just, He must judge all people and all nations according to the truth they have received.

3. In this passage, God promises to humble proud and haughty nations. What examples can you think of from Scripture and history of proud rulers and nations being humbled?

There are many examples in both Scripture and history. In the Bible we see the pride of humanity at the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the humbling of Pharaoh of Egypt during the Exodus. Another example is Uzziah, who became proud and tried to burn incense in the temple, something only priests were allowed to do, and God struck him with leprosy. In the New Testament, Herod Agrippa I accepted worship as a god and was struck down by God and died. These examples show that God humbles rulers and nations who exalt themselves in pride.



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

Discussion Questions

4. How can we warn people of different faiths and backgrounds of the coming judgment?

Christians should warn people of the coming judgment by faithfully sharing the gospel with everyone, regardless of their nation, personal background, religion, or political views. Because God will judge all people, we are called to lovingly speak the truth and point others to repentance and faith in Jesus.

5 Read Zephaniah 2:11. What does the Lord mean when He says that He will 'famish the gods?'

The Lord means that He will destroy the power and influence of false gods and idols. The nations will see that these gods cannot save them, and they will turn to worship the one true God. Ultimately, this points to the second coming of Christ, when God alone will be recognized as Lord over all the earth

6. What are some of the gods (idols) that people turn to in Beijing, and how can we participate in the Lord's famishing those gods?

There are many idols in Beijing, just as in any place in the world. One major example is materialism, where people trust money and success more than God, often overworking or prioritizing career and income over family and spiritual life. There are also literal idols, since the city has many Buddhist temples and some people keep altars in their homes or shops. Within international communities, another common idol can be self-centeredness, where personal identity, desires, or sexuality are elevated above God's authority. We participate in the Lord's "famishing" of these idols by faithfully proclaiming the truth of the gospel, living according to God's Word, sharing the gospel with others, and inviting people into Christian community.



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

Discussion Questions

7. What does it look like to live as God's faithful remnant in this world that is often still ruled by the proud and wicked, and how can we hold onto hope?

To live as God's faithful remnant in a world often ruled by the proud and wicked, we must continue to trust the Lord and remain hopeful in His promises. Practically, this means creating things that reflect God's goodness and beauty, investing intentionally in relationships with people, and living generously toward others. These actions show that our hope is not in the world's systems but in God's coming kingdom. Even when the world seems dominated by evil, we hold onto hope by remembering that God is sovereign and His final justice and restoration are certain.



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

Prayer & Praise

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

LEADER GUIDE

The Unjust's
Judgment: Woe to the
Oppressive City
Zephaniah 3:1-5

Mar 15



ZEPHANIAH



The Unjusts' Judgment: Woe to the Oppressive City

This week, as we continue our series in Zephaniah, God confronts us with a sobering reality: His own holy city has become defiled—not by outside enemies, but by her own leaders. Both civil and religious officials, entrusted with upholding God's law, have abandoned their posts. And when those called to lead abandon God's truth, human flourishing collapses—not only for God's people, but for the watching world.

Israel, after all, was to be a light to the gentiles...revealing God's truth to the world. This is why the New Testament calls the church the pillar and buttress of truth. But when that pillar crumbles, when truth is neglected by the church's leaders, is there hope for the world?

Fortunately, the text does not leave us in despair. Though her leaders are faithless, God remains faithful. Though the city is defiled, God has not departed. His presence still dwells in her midst. God has retained His remnant. God will restore His people. Truth will reign. Justice will come. Flourishing will return.

This is our ultimate hope: no human system—no government, no institution, no leader—can build the utopia we desperately long for. Only God, through Christ, will restore this broken world and make all things new.

In Him,

Elder TJ Johnson



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

Sermon Outline

Title: The Unjusts' Judgment: Woe to the Oppressive City

Text: Zephaniah 3:1–5

Theme: God's law, rightly applied through godly leaders, creates human flourishing; therefore, in every sphere of influence (church, workplace, school, home, community), we must seek to be a people who live under, reflect, and implement His righteous law, as we await the return of our Savior who will once and for all make all things new.

Sermon Outline

1. A Defiled City

- A. Priests
- B. Prophets
- C. Officials
- D. Judges

2. A Holy City

- A. God is Present
- B. God is Righteous
- C. God is Just
- D. God is Faithful

Sermon Notes



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

Discussion Questions

1. Rewrite Zephaniah 3:2 to be stated in the positive (as a means of repentance) and then discuss what each of these four practices would look like in your daily life this week.

Rewriting Book of Zephaniah 3:2 in the positive could be: “She listens to the voice of God, accepts correction, trusts in the Lord, and draws near to her God.” These practices reflect what true repentance should have looked like for Israel.

In our daily lives, this can take different forms depending on the person. Listening to God’s voice may mean committing to regular reading of Scripture and allowing God’s Word to speak into our hearts. Accepting correction could involve humbly receiving feedback from family members, supervisors, pastors, elders, or fellow believers. Trusting the Lord may require letting go of control and relying on God in difficult circumstances. Drawing closer to God could look like intentionally creating time to pray, meditate on Scripture during daily routines like commuting, studying the Bible with someone, or practicing regular family devotions. Ultimately, drawing near to God means intentionally seeking time with Him through His Word and through fellowship with other believers.

2. Name and define the four position mentioned in Zephaniah 3:3–4. How did each group fail in their God-given responsibility? What are some modern parallels to these failures in the church today?

1. Officials (princes) – They were responsible for governing the nation according to God’s justice and protecting the people. Instead, they abused their power and acted like predators, seeking their own gain rather than the good of the people.

2. Judges – Their role was to settle disputes and give fair judgments according to God’s law. However, they became corrupt and used their authority to oppress others rather than uphold justice.

3. Prophets – Prophets were meant to faithfully speak God’s Word to the people. Instead, they became reckless and unfaithful, speaking falsely or misleading the people rather than proclaiming God’s truth.



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

Discussion Questions

4. *Priests – Priests were called to teach God's law and lead the people in worship, sacrifices, and prayer. Instead, they profaned what was holy and distorted God's law.*

Modern parallels can be seen when church leaders or teachers distort Scripture, promote false teachings such as the prosperity gospel, or compromise biblical ethics to fit cultural pressures. Similar failures also appear when leaders—whether in churches or society—use their authority for personal power or influence rather than serving people with justice and integrity.

3. In what spheres of influence has God placed you (family, workplace, church, community)? What would it look like for you to "rightly apply God's law" in that role this week?

God places each of us in different spheres of influence—family, workplace or school, church, and community. Applying God's law rightly means seeking to live according to His commands and reflecting His character in each of these areas.

For the head of a family, this could mean prioritizing spiritual leadership at home, such as leading family devotions rather than always choosing extra work hours. For mothers, it may involve intentionally teaching and training their children in God's ways, not only prioritizing household responsibilities. For students, it could mean studying faithfully and with integrity rather than becoming distracted by other activities. In the church and community, it may look like committing to serve others and spending time building relationships that encourage spiritual growth.

4. The sermon claims that the world has secular creeds seeking to catacize humanity. Where do you see this "secular catechesis" taking place in Beijing? As believers, how can we speak a faithful counter-narrative in our spheres of influence? What might that look like in a practical conversation with a colleague, neighbor, HR, or family member this week?



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

Discussion Questions

One example of secular catechesis in Beijing can appear in workplace policies or cultural expectations that promote certain views on identity, sexuality, or personal autonomy as unquestionable truths. These ideas are often reinforced through HR trainings, media, education, or social pressure, shaping how people think about morality and identity. As believers, we can respond with a faithful counter-narrative by speaking about our convictions with humility and clarity. In practical conversations with colleagues or friends, this may mean explaining why our values come from our faith in God and Scripture, while still showing respect and kindness. Faithfulness may involve gentle but honest conversations when workplace expectations challenge our beliefs.

5. In what ways is Zephaniah 3:5 an indictment and an encouragement to you personally?

It reminds us that God is perfectly righteous, while we often fail to live according to His standards. At the same time, it is an encouragement because the Lord Himself is righteous and faithful, and He continually shows us what true righteousness looks like. By looking to Him and trusting His guidance, we can learn how to walk in righteousness and grow in obedience.

6. How is God described in Zephaniah 3:5? How have you personally experienced these attributes of God?

In Book of Zephaniah 3:5, God is described as righteous, present among His people, faithful, and just. The verse emphasizes that the Lord does no wrong and that His justice is revealed day after day.

Believers often experience these attributes by seeing God’s faithfulness in guiding them, correcting them when they go astray, and sustaining them through difficult circumstances. His righteousness reminds us that His ways are always right, even when we do not fully understand them. At the same time, His nearness encourages us, because God is not distant—He is present with His people and actively working in their lives.



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

Prayer & Praise

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports