

Zephaniah Study Notes:



One of the least known books of the Old Testament and yet the phrase 'the Day of the Lord' which we do know is used a lot by Zephaniah. The reason it's not that well known or preached upon is that it can initially feel somewhat obscure, and two out of the three chapters are pretty relentless in warning us of God's judgement. We would rather not focus on that in secular Western Europe today.

Yet, we learn in this book what God's judgement is for and how it walks hand in hand with his love. The imagery in this book is some of the richest in scripture and as we sit with it, I believe God will speak to us through it. So, let's pray and get to grips with this part of God's Word.

Keep in mind – some of his prophecy was fulfilled when the Babylonians invaded, and some looks way ahead to when Jesus will return. To get some background and an understanding of the whole book have a watch of the Bible Project:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFZknKPNvz8>

The study questions are kept fairly short during these COVID times to allow time for friendship, prayer and deeper discussions during this pandemic. It would also be lovely to plan social times in your groups during these next few weeks when that is possible and safe to do so! Group leaders may also want to make use of the reflection resources in the enews letter and also take a session to recap what you will take away with you from the Joshua series.

Zephaniah Chapter 1:

Read the chapter together and watch the bible project video on Zephaniah – link above.

What is a prophet and what do they do?

Why does Zephaniah tell us some of his background? Does his pedigree matter to you? Why or why not?

Zephaniah's opening words of prophecy tells of a terrible judgment to come: "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth" (1:2). It closes on the "day of the Lord" when God "will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth" (1:18). This just might be the harshest, most universal judgment announcement in the Bible. How does this make you feel? How does this make you feel about God?

There's a double fulfilment to Zephaniah's prophecy – much of it was fulfilled almost immediately as the Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem. Can you see any of that in this first chapter?

God is clearly a little upset with Judah. What has Judah done wrong? (see 1:4-6)

Do you have any other GODS? Who or what is most important to you?

How do we make sure we don't fall into the traps of 'complacency' or in some translations 'self-satisfied and confident' verse 12?

Why is this book relevant to Christians today? What stood out from the talks on Sunday?

Suggested Memory Verse: Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. 1:7

Zephaniah Chapter 2:

What imagery is being used in this passage and what effect should it have on us?

How will God's judgment upon the nations affect His own people (2:7,9)? Write the key verses down.

List the nations mentioned. What judgments has God given to them (2:4-15). Is there any hope for them?

What warnings should we heed?

How can we take God's judgement seriously today?

What things stop us thinking about or talking about God's judgement?

How can we think and talk about a God who hands out both judgment and blessings and does so because he loves us; how can the book of Zephaniah help us with this?

Suggested Memory Verse: Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD'S anger. 2:3

Zephaniah Chapter 3:

This book teaches us that God's judgement and blessings are handed out due to his love. There are vivid images of judgement but also of blessings. Spend some time really delving into the images of blessings and favour that God showers on his people in this passage.

Looking at verses 1-7 list all the sins and consider how they were sins against God. Consider what relevance these verses have for us: a) as a church and b) as individuals.

Verses 8-20 – looking at these verses, discuss which of these prophecies has been fulfilled by Christ and which are still to come.

What is God's overall purpose for judging His people (3:9)?

Verses 8-20 – how many times does God say 'I will?' talk through each of these and consider the relevance for us today.

Explain the different usages and contexts of the word 'gather' 2:1; 3:8; 3:18,20.

Write down the two verses where it says that God is in their midst? List at least two direct results of Him living in their presence?

What do the NT scriptures say about God living in the midst of His people? Do we sometimes see the same results as above when His people know God is in their midst? Does God's presence affect us in the same way? Why or why not? As you

read through verses 3:14–20, list the NT teachings that are linked to these themes.

Suggested Memory Verse: The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. 3:17