

Zephaniah

“Lies We Have Believed”

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Bible Studies

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Here are Three Lies We Have Believed:

1. "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad."
(He is kind and loving and overlooks evil. He hasn't done anything so far, has he?)
2. "All we need is self-confidence".
(The LORD wants us to believe in ourselves.)
3. "The future is what we make it".
(The LORD helps those who help themselves. Our actions determine our happiness.)

Zephaniah may not have had our century in mind when he wrote this book, but the LORD did....

The LORD Will Do Nothing, Either Good or Bad

Zephaniah Chapter 1 – Questions

1. (:1) Do you see a familiar name in this list of Zephaniah’s forefathers? What is special about Zephaniah’s lineage? Zephaniah’s short introduction gives us his pedigree and the time in which he writes. Look at the following table and see if you can pinpoint the time Zephaniah wrote, and anything interesting about his pedigree:

Year B.C.	Kings of Judah	Kings of Israel	Notes
933	1 Rehoboam	1 Jeroboam I	Division after Solomon
915	2 Abijah		
912	3 Asa		
911		2 Nadab	
910		3 Baasha	
887		4 Elah	
886		5 Zimri	
886		6 Omri Elijah	
875		7 Ahab Elijah Elisha	
874	4 Jehoshaphat		
855		8 Ahaziah Elisha	
854		9 Joram Elisha	
850	5 Jehoram		
843	6 Ahaziah	10 Jehu Elisha Amos	
843	7 Athaliah		The only female ruler
843	8 Joash		
820		11 Jehoahaz Amos	
806		12 Joash Amos	

803	9 Amaziah		
790		13 Jeroboam II Amos Hosea Jonah	
787	10 Uzziah Isaiah Joel?		
749	11 Jotham Isaiah Micah		
748		14 Zechariah Hosea	
748		15 Shallum Hosea	
748		16 Menahem Hosea	
741	12 Ahaz Isaiah Micah		
738		17 Pekahiah Hosea	
738		18 Pekah Hosea	
730		19 Hoshea Hosea	
726	13 Hezekiah Isaiah Micah		
721			End of the northern kingdom.
697	14 Manasseh Isaiah		
641	15 Amon		
639	16 Josiah Jeremiah Zephaniah Nahum		
608	17 Jehoahaz Jeremiah		
608	18 Jehoiakim Jeremiah Obadiah		



	Habakkuk		
597	19 Jehoiachin Jeremiah Obadiah Habakkuk		
597	20 Zedekiah Jeremiah Obadiah Ezekiel		
586	Ezekiel Daniel		End of the southern kingdom. 70 years exile in Babylon
538	Daniel Zechariah Haggai		First group returns under Zerubbabel
458			Second group returns under Ezra
432	Malachi		Last group returns under Nehemiah
0			400 years of silence

So he prophesied during the reign of the good King, Josiah. Josiah's story is an interesting one (II Kings 22:1 – 23:30), beginning with the fact that he became king at age 8. At age 26 he instituted one of the most sweeping revivals in Jewish history – and there are some who wonder whether Zephaniah's prophecy was instrumental in setting that fire in Josiah's heart. We are going to find that his prophecy is a sort-of "summary" of what many previous prophets had said...how sweet that would be – that a "boring" review of others' passionate messages would bring the life-changing decisions God desired. A reminder, perhaps, that our words don't change anyone. God's words do.

It is significant that Zephaniah was himself a descendent of a king. He understood the "royal" point of view, and would have known how to speak to the powerful and the power-hungry world of Jerusalem.



The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been taken into captivity to Assyria by the time Zephaniah appeared. His ministry is in Judah, at the time of King Josiah. He gathered together the highlights of what other prophets had said...and in so doing, changed the heart of a young king.

2. (:2&3) Zephaniah is speaking a warning from God about a time to come in the future...what are some of the things which will happen during this time?

The coming destruction he describes is world-wide, and will affect not only people, but nature, too. I heard this morning on FoxNews that Time Magazine is considering choosing "Mother Nature" as their "Person of the Year" for 2005. If you think about it, that's wonderful! Since no one actually thinks there is a real person named "Mother Nature"...that it isn't "Mother Nature" who rolls a hurricane across warm gulf waters...but God.... I am struck with wonder to see that Time Magazine is actually nominating HIM for "Person of the Year"!

"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth., declares the LORD. I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea...." (Zephaniah 1:2&3)

3. (:4-13) Zephaniah speaks in these verses specifically of the things which will happen in Jerusalem during this time. What are some of them?:

a. (:4-6) Foreign Gods will be eradicated forever

If, as I think, Zephaniah writes this before the reforms instituted by Josiah, there are plenty of idols throughout Judah. These are the idols which are smashed by Josiah, putting off the wrath of God for a time. But they return. And we have them today. And the time is still coming when they shall be forever destroyed.

b. (:8) Royal lineage will not benefit anyone

An interesting comment from one who is of a royal lineage.

c. (:9) (see I Samuel 5:5 for a clue to what he means by "stepping on the threshold") Superstitions will be worthless.

Step on a crack and break your mother's back. Friday the 13th. Crossing your fingers. Knocking on wood. A Four-leaf-clover. Blowing out the candles on a birthday cake. Superstitions are worthless. There is no such thing as good luck or bad luck. There will be no doubt about that someday.

d. (:10&11) Economy will be shattered.

e. (:12) Those who tell and believe lies will be sought out

f. (:13) Wealth will be gone

g. (:13) Harvests will never come to pass

4. (:12) What is the lie which was being told and believed in Jerusalem?

Here is the theme for this chapter. There are those who say: God will never do the things the Bible says He will do. Those frightening things are just in the Bible to get us to live better lives today. Basically, God just wants us to live good lives – He really doesn't want us to relate to Him personally – He's too far away for that. Just be a good person. He's not going to do bad things...and He's not going to do good things. If He's there at all, He is watching, hoping you will make good choices. But...Zephaniah says...don't be a fool and believe that lie...the time is coming when no one will believe that lie.

5. (:14-18) Make a list of the other things Zephaniah mentions which will happen in this coming time:

a. wrath
b. distress
c. darkness
d. shouting
e. death

6. (:14) How can Zephaniah honestly say this great Day of the LORD is coming quickly? We know, in retrospect, that it has not happened yet, 2,600 years later. (II Peter 3:8&9)

In the II Peter passage above, look back a few verses at 3:3-4. Here, 600 years after Zephaniah, Peter is saying there are people in his time who are saying "The LORD will do nothing..." They are saying that things have always been the same, since the beginning of time. But Peter knows, as did Zephaniah, that "With the LORD a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." Of course the Day of the LORD is coming quickly. It's only been 2 ½ days since Zephaniah spoke those words.

7. "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad" – is that lie still being told today?

In times of great tragedy people often wonder if it is God reaching into our world. A good example of that in America was 9-11. Many, many people asked themselves if God had anything to do with that. But it didn't take very long at all after 9-11 for the tide of conversations to turn away from God – for belief in a personal God would require a personal response of repentance and faith from us...and that was a step many had no desire to take.

8. What is the result of believing that lie?

Faith in me. If God is doing nothing...then I have to have faith in me. I am all I have.

Questions you can use for your own devotional time, or for group discussion:

1. (:1) Do you see a familiar name in this list of Zephaniah's forefathers? What is special about Zephaniah's lineage?
2. (:2&3) Zephaniah is speaking a warning from God about a time to come in the future...what are some of the things which will happen during this time?
3. (:4-13) Zephaniah speaks in these verses specifically of the things which will happen in Jerusalem during this time. What are some of them?:
 - a. (:4-6)
 - b. (:8)
 - c. (:9) (see I Samuel 5:5 for a clue to what he means by "stepping on the threshold")
 - d. (:10&11)

- e. (:12)
- f. (:13)
- g. (:13)
- 4. (:12) What is the lie which was being told and believed in Jerusalem?
- 5. (:14-18) Make a list of the other things Zephaniah mentions which will happen in this coming time:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
- 6. (:14) How can Zephaniah honestly say this great Day of the LORD is coming quickly? We know, in retrospect, that it has not happened yet, 2,600 years later. (II Peter 3:8&9)
- 7. "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad" – is that lie still being told today?
- 8. What is the result of believing that lie?

All You Need is Self-Confidence

Zephaniah Chapter 2

In the last chapter, we saw that the people of Israel were believing a lie: **"The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad"**.

The end result of believing that lie was this: If God is doing nothing... then I have to have faith in me. I am all I have. Thus, in Chapter 2 we see the second lie Israel was believing: **"All you need is self-confidence"**.

1. (:1-3) What does Zephaniah recommend the people of Israel do?

Seek the Lord. He knows the lie they are believing...that all they need is confidence in themselves. He is strongly warning them to quit believing in themselves and start believing in God. Seek Him. Don't just sit there and wait for Him to show up. Seek Him. Intentionally. Make it your life's purpose to enter His presence. To know Him. To know Him better. Pray. Read the scriptures. Repent of sin you know you are holding on to. Seek...seek...seek.

Six hundred years after Zephaniah the LORD spoke the same words again..."But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

The message from God has always been the same. Never trust in yourself. Don't let God be your last resort. Seek Him. Seek to know His ways. And do it now. Don't wait.

2. (:3) Why do you think he uses the word "perhaps" here?
This isn't a magic potion. Seeking God is the right thing to do. It's the only thing to do. Finding Him is worth more than anything. But just because you seek and find doesn't mean "Santa Claus is coming to town". It doesn't mean, in other words, that you will then get all the peace and happiness and security you have been longing for. It may be that the bad times will be put off for a while longer...but it may also be that they will stay, or come soon. Seeking and finding God is worth it even if the pain of life doesn't go away. It must be God you

are seeking, not your own pleasure, your own peace, your own comfort.

3. (:4-7) The countries listed in these verses are all the enemies of Israel, which live surrounding her. What will happen to the land of these enemies?

Gaza. Ashkelon. Ashdod. Ekron. Kerethites. Philistines. All the enemies of Israel will some day be no more. Totally wiped out. And the people of God will inherit their empty lands. The people of God, who have been treated as outcasts, will have their fortunes restored in the very place their enemies used to prosper.

What are your "enemies"? Are they people? Problems? Personal weaknesses?

Some day they will be totally gone. Focus on that day. Live for that day. That day comes not because you have finally become strong enough or smart enough or lovely enough to make it happen. That day comes because the LORD brings it. Period.

4. (:8-11) Moab and Ammon are especially singled out for judgment by God because they had over and over again insulted and terrorized Israel. What ancient judgment is used as an illustration of what will happen to them?

Sodom and Gommorah. Those two cities were wealthy and filled with every pleasure man could imagine. There seemed to be no limit to the sin the people of Sodom and Gommorah could get away with. They taunted God with their actions...they harassed Lot, a man who was repulsed by their sin. (I know most of us think of Lot as a weak man who chose to live in a sinful city, and that is true...but II Peter tells us a little more: "...Lot, a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard..." (II Peter 2:7&8).)

Sodom and Gomorrah are gone. They disappeared overnite in a flash of fire and brimstone so complete they were actually obliterated. That is what self-confidence and pride will get you.

5. (:11) What will be the end result of all of this judgment? Everyone, everywhere will be worshipping God. It's obvious Zephaniah is seeing a time yet future for him and yet future for us. For there has never, ever been a time when all the nations worship the One, True God. When the LORD someday pours His wrath on the world, in the end times, the end result will be a few people here, and a

few people there, left in the world...worshippers of God. No one else will live through it. Read about the time of God's Wrath in Revelation chapters 8 through 11, and then read in Revelation 19 and 20 the end result...the amazing time Zephaniah is describing here in verse 11...when all people everywhere will worship the King of Kings.

6. (:12) What other country is singled out for judgment?
Cush.

7. (:13-15) What was the attitude of Assyria?
They were the ones who were the most accomplished at the lie. "All I need is self-confidence". Assyria repeated again and again to herself: "I am, and there is none beside me." That is the logical end-result of self-confidence. After awhile, you begin to think you are the only one who matters in the world.

8. All of these enemies of Israel had every reason in the world to believe they would never, ever have to fear Israel as a world power. They were stronger. They were more victorious. They were more prosperous. They had extreme self-confidence. How valuable was that self-confidence going to be once the LORD decided to judge?
Of course, not valuable at all.

9. Is the attitude: "All I Need is Self-confidence" prevalent today? Everywhere you look. Television commercials. Speakers. Books. The way we dress. The way we eat. The way we lose weight. The way we exercise. The way we build churches, even.

10 What is the result of that attitude?
We slowly but surely stop believing in God. We stop believing that God cares. We stop believing that God is in control. We stop worshipping Him...and we begin to worship ourselves.

11 The person who believes God will never do either good or evil begins to trust only in themselves. When they do, they reach passionately for self-confidence. Is self-confidence always wrong? That's the question for today, isn't it? Should I try to think of myself as worthless? Should I set myself up for abusive situations, because, after all, I'm nothing? When is self-confidence wrong? How much should I teach it, counsel it, desire it for myself?

Here's my hope for you: That you will trust God more than you trust yourself. That you will obey God when obedience doesn't necessarily

look like the best thing for you. That you will tearfully ask God for forgiveness when you have wronged Him. And that you will have self-confidence when you are submitted to God's ways. That is true self-confidence.

Questions you can use for your own devotional time, or for group discussion:

1. (:1-3) What does Zephaniah recommend the people of Israel do?
2. (:3) Why do you think he uses the word "perhaps" here?
3. (:4-7) The countries listed in these verses are all the enemies of Israel, which live surrounding her. What will happen to the land of these enemies?
4. (:8-11) Moab and Ammon are especially singled out for judgment by God because they had over and over again insulted and terrorized Israel. What ancient judgment is used as an illustration of what will happen to them?
5. (:11) What will be the end result of all of this judgment?
6. (:12) What other country is singled out for judgment?
7. (:13-15) What was the attitude of Assyria?
8. All of these enemies of Israel had every reason in the world to believe they would never, ever have to fear Israel as a world power. They were stronger. They were more victorious. They were more prosperous. They had extreme self-confidence. How valuable was that self-confidence going to be once the LORD decided to judge?
9. Is the attitude: "All I Need is Self-confidence" prevalent today?
- 10 What is the result of that attitude?
- 11 The person who believes God will never do either good or evil begins to trust only in themselves. When they do, they reach passionately for self-confidence. Is self-confidence always wrong?

The Future is What We Make it Zephaniah Chapter 3 – Discussion Notes

1. (:1-4) These first 4 verses describe a nation, or a city, which is in opposition to God. What are some of the things Zephaniah says about such a city?
 - a. (:1) Oppressors – they use other people in order to gain their own ends. They keep people from doing and being all that God wants them to do and be.
 - b. (:1) Rebellious – not submissive to authority
 - c. (:1) Defiled – Sin has dirtied them.
 - d. (:2) Obey no one – always wants their own way
 - e. (:2) Accepts no correction – will not respond to anyone pointing out faults
 - f. (:2) Does not trust God – but will trust others, or themselves
 - g. (:2) Does not draw near to God – doesn't even try to know God. Wants nothing to do with God.
 - h. (:3) Leaders are dangerous – will kill people if necessary
 - i. (:4) Those who should be teaching truth are not
 - j. (:4) Those who should be leading people to God are actually leading them away from God

2. (:5) But Zephaniah says that the LORD is within such a city!
How can that be?

The LORD is everywhere...even the very worst of places. Why? Because He is calling people out of evil. To Himself. He chooses to be where the worst of the worst are, in order to show them Who He is, and offer salvation. John 3:16

3. Does this "city" remind you of anyplace in the world today?
Obvious answer here. It reminds me of Greenwood. America.
Anywhere in the world today.

4. (:6&7) Zephaniah describes here cities which have had a chance to repent and have not. Why would the LORD give them such a second chance? And why would they decide to run eagerly away from God's mercy?

Those who run away from God do not want to admit they need God. Oh, they might want God to save them from whatever mess they are in. Or they might want God to give them all the things they need and

want. But they do not want to submit to God. To accept doing things His way. They run from admitting they have sinned and need a Savior.

For instance, look at the list of sins God has given us in Romans 1:21-32:

- i. Knowing about God but not glorifying Him
- ii. Sexual impurity, including homosexuality and sex outside of marriage
- iii. Envy
- iv. Murder
- v. Strife
- vi. Lying
- vii. Wanting to hurt another
- viii. Gossip
- ix. Slander
- x. Hating God
- xi. Insolent
- xii. Arrogant
- xiii. Boastful
- xiv. Creatively trying to be evil
- xv. Disobedient to parents
- xvi. Not faithful
- xvii. Heartless
- xviii. Ruthless
- xix. Senseless
- xx. Approve of others who do such things

How many of those things describe you in some way? Do you like to admit that? Do you grieve that you are that way? Most people fight against admitting such things...and really fight against wanting someone else to save them from such things.

But in order to be different, all of us must accept the mercy God offers. We don't like that idea, so we run from it.

5. (:8) Zephaniah describes a time yet to come when the LORD waits no longer. When love steps back and justice descends. That day was future for Zephaniah. Has it happened yet? No. This day is described as involving the whole world. That hasn't happened yet.

6. (:9-13) Who will be left after that day is over?

Those who trust in the name of the LORD. Whether they are Jews or Gentiles...Those who throw themselves before Him and ask for mercy. Not those who rebel against Him. Not those who trust in themselves. Not those who trust in someone else. And not those who will not admit they need a Savior.

7. (:14-15) Israel is told to rejoice here because the LORD Himself has rescued them. In fact, He has taken away their punishment. The punishment they deserved is no longer necessary. Why? Why is their punishment no longer necessary? Did someone take their punishment for them? Did someone suffer in their place?

When the LORD returns someday, He will come first to the grieving nation of Israel. They will be sobbing because they have realized they rejected Him 2,000 years ago. (Zechariah 11: 10&11, and 12:1). They will realize that the cleansing from sin they need has been provided in the blood of Jesus Christ. And they will trust Him again. The punishment they so richly deserve will no longer be necessary, because Someone did take it for them. Jesus Christ, the LORD of all. Isaiah 53.

8. (:16-20) What are some of the things the LORD will do for His people after that horrible day of wrath is over?

- a. (:16) Take away fear
- b. (:17) Save them
- c. (:18) Sorrows removed
- d. (:19) Deal with their enemies for them
- e. (:19) Gather the wounded
- f. (:20) Bring them all home to Israel
- g. (:20) Give them honor and praise
- h. (:20) Restore their fortunes

9. Has this time of God's great blessing on Israel happened yet? It's pretty obvious from reading through that list that none of those things has happened yet. But it is promised that it will.

Is there any doubt in your mind that the future for the people of Zephaniah's day was not in their hands, but in God's?

But there is one way Zephaniah, and you and I, can affect our future. We can speak God's truth. It may just change hearts.

Zephaniah's words could have been part of the reason King Josiah humbled himself before the LORD, and the LORD was able to put off for awhile longer the devastation that had to come.

What can you do today or this week to expose some of the lies we live with in our world? Do you think your words could make a difference?

Questions you can use for your own devotional time, or for group discussion:

1. (:1-4) These first 4 verses describe a nation, or a city, which is in opposition to God. What are some of the things Zephaniah says about such a city?
 - a. (:1)
 - b. (:1)
 - c. (:1)
 - d. (:2)
 - e. (:2)
 - f. (:2)
 - g. (:2)
 - h. (:3)
 - i. (:4)
 - j. (:4)
2. (:5) But Zephaniah says that the LORD is within such a city! How can that be?
3. Does this "city" remind you of anyplace in the world today?
4. (:6&7) Zephaniah describes here cities which have had a chance to repent and have not. Why would the LORD give them such a second chance? And why would they decide to run eagerly away from God's mercy?
5. (:8) Zephaniah describes a time yet to come when the LORD waits no longer. When love steps back and justice descends. That day was future for Zephaniah. Has it happened yet?
6. (:9-13) Who will be left after that day is over?
7. (:14-15) Israel is told to rejoice here because the LORD Himself has rescued them. In fact, He has taken away their punishment. The punishment they deserved is not longer necessary. Why? Why is their punishment no longer necessary? Did someone

- take their punishment for them? Did someone suffer in their place?
8. (:16-20) What are some of the things the LORD will do for His people after that horrible day of wrath is over?
 - a. (:16)
 - b. (:17)
 - c. (:18)
 - d. (:19)
 - e. (:19)
 - f. (:20)
 - g. (:20)
 - h. (:20)
 9. Has this time of God's great blessing on Israel happened yet?