

Date: 8.4.24 | Title: Zephaniah | Scripture: Zephaniah

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

Middle School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.

God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.

God wants us to live for His glory.

God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.

Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.

High School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.

God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.

God wants us to live for His glory.

God is a righteous judge.

God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.

Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.

Jesus gave His life for us on the cross and He is the only way for salvation.



MEMORY VERSE

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways,
God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in
these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

Hebrews 1:1-2a

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Even though Josiah was only sixteen, he read the law to the people, confirmed their covenant with God, cleansed the temple in Jerusalem of idols, and destroyed all the altars of Baal in Samaria and Judah. Josiah's six-year reformation project was completed in 622 BC (2 Chronicles 34). Though this project was meant to bring about spiritual revival, many Jews remained stuck in their sinful ways, continuing the practices of idolatry (Baal worship) and injustice in the land of Judah. Zephaniah's book addressed the moral decay of Judah and her neighbors (1:4-6), pointing to and warning them of the coming "day of the Lord" and His wrath upon the nations, including Israel (1:7-3:20).

Zephaniah frequently mentions the coming of "the great day of the Lord" (1:7, 10, 14-16, 18). This is a phrase used by many Old Testament prophets to describe a catastrophic time of God's judgement- through His direct intervention in human affairs. Typically, this term is used for speaking of the end times, but like here, sometimes it is used in a local, more immediate way. Zephaniah predicted a preview, in the near future, of what was to come in the end times. The coming judgement was described in terms that even exceed the judgment that took place under Noah (1:2-3). It includes not only all human beings, but also the fish of the sea and the birds of the air (1:18). Judah faces judgment for its violation of the covenant and for its idolatry, especially among the priests (1:4-5). Judah has turned from the Lord so that they do not follow him, "seek" him, or "inquire" of him (1:6). Zephaniah warns that the day will be one of punishment for those who reject Yahweh and indulge in sin (1:8-13, 17), and those who dismiss Yahweh from everyday life (1:12).

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

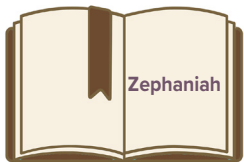
God is prepared to use Babylon against Judah. Zephaniah warned the people to look within themselves, to see their sin as a community and to repent of it. He told the people they should assemble before the day of Yahweh's wrath comes, and they should "seek the Lord" and "seek righteousness" and "humility," so that "perhaps you may be hidden in the day of the anger of the Lord" (2:3). The coming judgement will not only be for Judah, but the surrounding areas (2:4-15).

The Lord allowed Babylon- and before them, Assyria- to punish and correct His wayward children. The intent was to restore them to a right relationship with Him, so He wasn't pleased with the arrogant, godless way that these nations messed with His people, and He was going to punish them for what they had done. (2:11). Even though God used these nations to punish His people, none of them would escape His ultimate judgement. The judgement on these nations is connected with a promise of salvation for Israel (2:7, 9).

Zephaniah's name means "the Lord will hide." Zephaniah offered hope that in the day of the Lord's anger, the people might be hidden from the worst of it. It is God's character to shelter His own from the full brunt of His wrath. God preserved Noah's family in the flood and He preserved His people, hidden by lamb's blood on their doors, from the final plague in Egypt. God's desire was not to humiliate or obliterate Israel, but to restore them to a right relationship with Him.

Afterward, God called His people to look beyond the judgement of Jerusalem and the other nations to the blessing to come. (3:9) And, as a more definite prediction of the glory of the end times, Jesus Christ will be in the midst of God's people (3:15-17). Because God delights in His children, He made a way back to Him through Christ, and in the end, all children will celebrate His presence among them.

LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



Tell the story: Use the Background Info for Leaders and the summary below as you teach today's lesson.

**TELL
THE
STORY**



“When Zephaniah was the king of Judah, God gave a message to a prophet named Zephaniah. God said a day is coming called “the Day of the Lord.” On that day, God is going to punish people for their sin. “I will destroy everything on earth,” God said. “I will remove all people from the earth.” Zephaniah shared God’s message about the future with the people of Judah.

A few evil kings had been in power in Judah, and the people had turned away from God. God said, “I will get rid of all things and places My people used to worship false gods. I will punish the leaders and greedy salespeople. I will punish the people who think I just sit back and do nothing.”

Read directly from Scripture, use the message, or the summary provided in the lesson

Zephaniah told the people what an awful day the Day of the Lord will be: a day of wrath, a day of trouble, a day of destruction, a day of darkness, a day of clouds and blackness. The Lord will show His anger because everyone has sinned against Him.

This was terrible news! What were people to do? “Come together before it is too late,” Zephaniah said. “Change your ways. Turn to God and obey Him. Be humble. Maybe you will be safe from God’s anger.”

God would also judge the countries around Judah. Some people would lose their land. Others would be destroyed. Would anyone be safe from God’s anger? No, even the people in Jerusalem would be punished for their disobedience.

God told the people what was coming so that they would learn a lesson. “I want you to fear Me and respect Me,” God said.

Then Zephaniah gave the people hope. When all these terrible punishments happened because of sin, God would keep safe the people who trust in Him. God promised restoration; He will fix everything, making it like new.

Put the events in order, draw a comic strip, build it with blocks or playdough, act it out, etc...





THE PROPHETS

The day when God makes things right will be such a happy day for His people. God's people will be glad. "Sing and be happy! Shout for joy!" Zephaniah said. "The Lord will be with you, and you won't need to worry about anything bad happening.

"God will be with you," Zephaniah said. "He will save you and show you how much He loves you."

Attributes of God: Determine the characteristics of God that we see in today's story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true, change the way we live in Christ?

Share the GOSPEL:

Zephaniah's prediction of the kingdom age points to Christ as the Lord within Israel (3:5), the righteous Judge of all earth's nations (3:8) and the reigning "King of Israel, the Lord" (3:15). Zephaniah warned Judah that a day of the Lord, a more immediate and local series of judgements, was coming- first against the Jews for their idolatry, and then for the nations whom God would use to punish them. These judgements would serve as a preview of the ultimate day of the Lord, when God will judge the entire world in the end times. Mercy is as much a characteristic of God as justice is- displayed most obviously in the person of Jesus Christ- and we see this aspect of the Lord's character in the book of Zephaniah too.

God is merciful. He warned the people of Judah to repent and return to Him many times. God is also just. He must judge sin because sin is an act of rejecting God and His holy character. God sent the prophet Zephaniah to remind the people of Judah of both God's mercy and His justice. God's love leads Him to act for the good of people, which means sin must be punished because sin separates us from Him.

At the end of time, when all God's enemies are defeated and Jesus is dwelling as king among Israel, Zephaniah's words will be completely fulfilled: "The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (3:17). What a wonderful image of the crowning work of redemption!



THE PROPHETS

“Storying” Questions: As you ask these questions, have your students find the answers in the actual verses of scripture instead of recalling them from your re-telling of the story. We always want to encourage all of our students to go directly to God’s Word over a commentary or summary of scripture.

1. During who’s reign did Zephaniah serve?
2. To which kingdom did Zephaniah speak?
3. What sin did Zephaniah confront?
4. How does Zephaniah describe the “day of the Lord”?
5. What hope do we see offered in this book?
6. What does this story teach me about God?
7. What does this story teach me about the Gospel?
8. What does this story teach me about myself?
9. Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
10. Are there any promises in this story to remember? How can they help me trust and love God?
11. How does this story help me live for Christ?
12. How does this story show God’s mercy?
13. How does this story show God’s justice?
14. Why is God angry over sin?
15. How can we have hope in a sinful world?

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

COMPASSIONATE - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR - God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER - God rescues and saves his children.

ETERNAL - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL - God always keeps his promises.

GENEROUS - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS - God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

JEALOUS - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

JUST - god is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

MERCIFUL - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.



THE PROPHETS

PRAYER PROMPTS

God, You are just and merciful. Thank You for sending Jesus to take the punishment for our sin. Help us to be quick to repent! We love You!

IF TIME ALLOWS:

Help the students in your group practice memorizing the books of the Bible:

- Torah: Genesis-Deuteronomy
- History: Joshua-Esther
- Poetry: Job-Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets: Isaiah-Daniel
- Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi
- Gospels: Matthew-John
- Paul's Letters: Romans-Philemon
- General Letters: Hebrews-Revelation

MISSIONS EMPHASIS:

For the months of August, September and October we will be collecting money for the Connie Maxwell Children's Home. Please visit their website for pictures and descriptions of some of the services they offer that you can share with your group. A generous donor will match all of our donations. Encourage your class to collect money and donate it in the giving funnel in the upstairs lobby. Students can donate with their families as they arrive, or you can go together as a class on the way back to the Worship Center at the end of SS.

REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

Work on memorizing this weeks verse with the students in your group. You can use the first letter of each word in the verse to help with this. For example, the unit verse would look like this:



Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?



Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and in the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?