



Major Lessons From Minor Prophets Lesson 9 2Q 2013 The Day of the Lord (Zephaniah)

Before we get into the lesson, what is the context of Zephaniah's message?

Who is he speaking to?

The people of Judah and the nations surrounding them. What were the conditions in Judah at the time? Idolatrous nation...See 2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chron. 33-36.

How had the nation gotten to this point? After Hezekiah's death, Manasseh became king and led the country so far into idolatry so that "they did more evil than the nations" they had displaced in Canaan. (2 Chron. 33:9)

Who was king? Josiah. What was the king doing? Attempting reform. What was his reformation like? He destroyed the high places, "did away with" the false priests, broke down Asherah poles, tore down the shrines of the male prostitutes which were in the temple, desecrated sites and shrines and he tried to get rid of everything else that was dedicated to false gods. The Bible says during his lifetime, the people "did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their fathers" (2 Chron. 34:33.)

Was Josiah successful? Not really.

How do we know? As soon as he was gone, the people returned to their false gods.

What does this tell us about the state of their hearts even during the reformations of Josiah? They were heard-hearted...they conformed outwardly, but there was no real heart change.

With all this in mind, let's take a look at Sunday's lesson.

SUNDAY

First paragraph of Sunday's lesson: "The focal point of Zephaniah's message is the "day of the Lord" ([Zeph. 1:7](#)). For biblical prophets, the day of the Lord refers to a specific period of time in which God intervenes in human affairs in order both to save and to judge."

Is this, in fact, what the biblical prophets say the day of the Lord is? Let's look at some other texts that mention the day of the Lord:

Isaiah 2:6 (vs. 6-22 describe the Day of the Lord)

[The Day of the Lord] You, Lord, have abandoned your people, the descendants of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and embrace pagan customs.



What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

God has abandoned His people because they turned to other gods, silver, gold, idols made by men. Ultimately, the day of the Lord is a day when only the Lord will be exalted, and the idols will totally disappear. Those described in this passage who flee from God are those who bowed down to their idols.

Ezekiel 7:19-22

They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be treated as a thing unclean. Their silver and gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath. It will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs, for it has caused them to stumble into sin. They were proud of their beautiful jewelry and used it to make their detestable idols and vile images. Therefore I will turn these into an unclean thing for them. I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it. I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

Note verse 22, "I will turn my face away from them," which is how all the doom comes upon them. In the next chapter, God says, "do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary?" And what had they done? They had set up idols in God's temple.

Ezekiel 30:1-4

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy and say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Wail and say, Alas for that day! For the day is near, the day of the Lord is near—a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. A sword will come against Egypt, and anguish will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, her wealth will be carried away and her foundations torn down.'"

What is actually happening here? Is this God acting? Or is it an accurate prediction of the coming Babylonian army?



Joel 2:28

[The Day of the Lord] “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Joel 2:31

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

This section (Joel 2:28-32) speaks of events to happen before the coming of the great and dreadful (Hebrew word here can mean something to be feared OR revered). Verse 32: “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved...” This day of the Lord appears to be the second coming.

Joel 3:14

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

Interesting that here it refers to a decision, and moves on to talk again of “the Lord will be a refuge for his people.” What are the multitudes deciding?

Amos 5:18

[The Day of the Lord] Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.

Amos 5:20

Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light— pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

Who is God talking to here?

Those who have religious feast & assemblies and are sacrificing to Him...but what does He want...verse 24: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.” Justice and righteousness are here said to be the same, and this is what God wants...not an outward performing of the religious traditions, but heart change that actively seeks to put things right. So what is actually happening? What day is being predicted? See verse 27 “Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.”



Obadiah 1:15

“The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

This is part of a prophecy against Edom, citing how they stood by and watched and rejoiced over the calamity of their “brother.” Their own attitude, their own violence brings destruction back upon themselves.

Malachi 4:5

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

Again, here, the day of the Lord is a prediction of the second coming, when the wicked are consumed, but the righteous rejoice in the same light that consumes the wicked. Before that day, however, “Elijah” will come...and what was Elijah’s message? Worship the true God, leave the false gods behind...and the true God is a God of love...this message will, indeed, “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” because those who truly love the true God...will have their hearts transformed into HIS character of love.

Acts 2:20

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

Here, Paul is quoting from Joel 2:28-32...but instead of “dreadful” he calls the day glorious. Why the difference? Is it because the day IS glorious to those who know God?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-9

[The Day of the Lord] Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.



While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the day of the Lord like in this passage?

What action is God taking?

Referring to the second coming, describes the difference between those who are surprised and find destruction and those who “live in the light.” Very good description of WHY some receive that day with great joy.

There seems to be two different types of references here: 1) the day of the Lord meaning a day when God steps back and lets the natural consequences of their choices occur and 2) the day of the Lord meaning the day Christ returns to earth to take His people home.

Which do we have in Zephaniah? I think we have both...but let's look at the evidence:

Read Zeph. 1:1-3 Which type of reference does this sound like? What evidence in this passage brings us to that conclusion? Is there any room to see this passage both ways?

Read Zeph. 1:4-9 Which type of reference does this sound like? What is God saying he will remove? (see verses 4-6 & 9) What are these verses talking about...what were the people of Judah doing? Why does he point to “those clad in foreign clothes”? (v.8) Why does he mention “all who avoid stepping on the threshold”?

The word translated as “punish” is “paqad”...it means to inspect or look after. In the Young's Literal Translation it says, “laid a charge.” It's translated in the OT as “number” 110 times.

It could be a reference to the superstitious practice the Philistines developed after their god Dagon was broken into pieces with his hands on the threshold. It could also be referring to the pagan practice of having a shrine at the threshold, which had an indentation to receive the blood of the sacrificed animal...again, a pagan practice. (Source: Henry Clay Trumbull's The Threshold Covenant: <http://archive.org/details/thresholdcovenan00trum>)



Would you say that God is angered by idol worship?

Why? Because it changes his children. God made us with the ability to change ourselves based on our choices, habits, and worship. We become like the god (or God) we worship. If we worship the true God, whose very being and character is love, then we become more loving people.

The majority of the people of Judah at the time of Zephaniah appear to be worshipping idols. How were they treating others? (see Zeph 3:1-5)

What about the nations surrounding Judah...what kind of people were they? (Feared by the nations, cruel people, people of force and coercion.)

What kind of gods were they worshipping?

Philistines – primary god was Dagon, second only to El, (one of four sons), and father to Baal.

Moab – Chemosh was the national deity of the Moabites whose name most likely meant "destroyer," "subduer," or "fish god." Human sacrifice was included in the worship of Chemosh.

Ammon – Chemosh seems also to be the national deity of the Ammonites as well. Moabites and Ammonites were descended from the two sons of Lot. Ammonites eventually worshiped Molech, who seems to have derived from Chemosh. "Molech was a fire-god with the face of a calf; his images had arms outstretched to receive the babies who were sacrificed to him. Like their god, the Ammonites were cruel. When Nahash the Ammonite was asked for terms of a treaty (1 Samuel 11:2), he proposed gouging out the right eye of each Israelite man. Amos 1:13 says that the Ammonites would rip open pregnant women in the territories they conquered.

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/Ammonites.html#ixzz2T0dUP0dB>

Assyria – The chief god was Asshur. All other primary gods whom they worshiped were related to the objects of nature. Assyrians were known for their cruelty & ferocity...capital city was Ninevah.

When Judah abandoned and rejected God, and started worshipping the false gods of the nations around them, they became like those nations, and like their gods.

How would you describe our nation? Do you think we're moving faster towards being a peace-loving nation? Does this tell us anything about the gods we worship? Should we evaluate the information we receive via the media, society, or our churches to determine what kind of god is being promoted? How do we evaluate these things? What should be our standard?

MONDAY

Read the first two paragraphs.



In [Zephaniah 2:1-3](#), we see the prophet's call to repentance. Even though the destruction is imminent, there is still time to be sheltered from calamity, but only if the nation will repent. The wicked who refuse to repent will be consumed on the day of judgment like chaff.

With the words "Seek the Lord," Zephaniah is encouraging those who humble themselves before God to hold firm in their faith. The prophet teaches that to seek the Lord is the same as seeking righteousness and humility. This attitude of repentance is essential in order to escape the coming judgment.

What was the imminent destruction Judah was being warned of? Were the wicked "consumed like chaff"? What actually happened? Were those who were faithful to God "sheltered from calamity"? What evidence do we have that they weren't?

Why does Zephaniah address this command to "Seek the Lord" to the "humble of the land," "who do what he commands"? What does it mean to be humble?

The word translated "humble" in the NIV is *anav* (aw-nawv), and means "meek" The Strong's definition is poor, humble, afflicted, meek (a. poor, needy; b. poor and weak; c. poor, weak and afflicted; d. humble, lowly, meek)

Quotes regarding the meek:

He has set us an example in order that we may know how to walk in conformity with His will. Christ is a true Shepherd. His example, if followed, will lead us aright. How precious was His gentle spirit. He was meek and lowly in heart. No jealousy, no envy, no iniquity was found in Him. He passed over the same ground where Adam fell, thus showing us that it is possible for man to overcome. Those who follow Christ will be obedient; they will not trample on one of God's holy precepts (Manuscript Releases Volume Five [Nos. 260-346], Page 258).

All the disciples had serious faults when Jesus called them to His service. Even John, who came into closest association with the meek and lowly One, was not himself naturally meek and yielding. He and his brother were called "the sons of thunder." While they were with Jesus, any slight shown to Him aroused their indignation and combativeness. Evil temper, revenge, the spirit of criticism, were all in the beloved disciple. He was proud, and ambitious to be first in the kingdom of God. But day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. He opened his heart to the divine influence, and became not only a hearer but a doer of the Saviour's words. Self was hid in Christ. He learned to wear the yoke of Christ and to bear His burden.

Jesus reproved His disciples, He warned and cautioned them; but John and his brethren did not leave Him; they chose Jesus, notwithstanding the reproofs. The Saviour did not withdraw from them because of their weakness and errors. They continued to the end to share



His trials and to learn the lessons of His life. By beholding Christ, they became transformed in character... (Our Father Cares, page 191).

The soul that loves God, rises above the fog of doubt; he gains a bright, broad, deep, living experience, and becomes meek and Christlike. His soul is committed to God, hid with Christ in God. He will be able to stand the test of neglect, of abuse and contempt, because his Saviour has suffered all this. He will not become fretful and discouraged when difficulties press him, because Jesus did not fail or become discouraged. Every true Christian will be strong, not in the strength and merit of his good works, but in the righteousness of Christ, which through faith is imputed unto him. It is a great thing to be meek and lowly in heart, to be pure and undefiled, as was the Prince of heaven when He walked among men (God's Amazing Grace, page 109).

Daniel was among the captives when the Babylonians invaded...is there any evidence that he demonstrated meekness?

The lesson says in the third paragraph of Monday's lesson, "The humble are those people who have remained faithful to God and who are led and taught by Him. The psalmist says: "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way" ([Ps. 25: 8-9, NIV](#))." Why does God specifically guide and teach the humble? Because they are the ones *open* to His guidance!

Please read the quote in pink at the bottom of Monday's lesson:

"Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go."—[Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 182.](#)

Does this quote give us any insight into what being sheltered by God really means? Does this "sheltering" happen from or IN our circumstances? God's people throughout earth's history have been persecuted, abused, and misused...yet they were "sheltered" in God.

TUESDAY

Let's look at the middle, bold section on Tuesday's lesson: Read [Zephaniah 3:1-5](#). Who is being condemned, and why? Ask yourself, How could God's people, those given so much light and truth, end up so corrupted? How can we protect ourselves from having the same thing happen to us?

What had the people done that led them to this point? They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...Romans 1 tells us what happens when people do that. Would you say that's an accurate



description of the people of Judah at this point in their history? So...how *can* we protect ourselves from having the same thing happen to us?

Second paragraph: The capital city of Judah lies at the heart of Zephaniah's concern. He indicts its leaders concerning the city's moral degradation. The corruption stems directly from the failure of *its leaders to live up to their designated roles and responsibilities* (compare with [Jer. 18:18](#), [Ezek. 22:23-30](#)). The corrupt court run by officials is likened to "roaring lions," and the judges are characterized as "evening wolves." The temple is faring no better because *the priests do not teach God's Word, nor do the prophets speak the truth.* (emphasis mine)

WEDNESDAY

Read the verse at the top of Wednesday's lesson:

"The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." ([Zeph. 3:17, NIV](#)).

How does Zephaniah describe those over whom God is singing?

Zeph. 3:13 "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

What does this description sound like to you? These are people who know God, who have His love in their hearts, who have been healed by His truth! God rejoices over those who have been healed.

With this thought in mind, what is God's goal? To save as many as will allow Him to heal them. What then, is our role? (See Mark 13:10 and 2 Peter 3:12) How are we doing in that role?

Some suggestions for related passages:

Psalms 119:1-3 "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

Rev. 14:5 (description of the 144,000) "No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."

THURSDAY

The lesson suggests that we read Nahum to find God's answer to injustice...the first paragraph of Thursday's lesson says:



“The prophecy of Nahum is God’s Word against the kingdoms of this world as represented by Nineveh. As the prophet looked at his world, he saw the hand of God moving against the Assyrian Empire. He announced that its capital city, Nineveh, would soon fall, never to rise again. Nahum spoke with absolute confidence because he knew God’s character and, through the gift of prophecy ([Nah. 1:1](#)), he had been shown by the Lord what would happen. The Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished ([Nah. 1:3](#), [Exod. 34:6-7](#)).”

How does this idea make you feel about God? The KJV in both texts says that God will “by no means acquit the guilty.” Does this sound different to you? Why? God will certainly not declare the guilty innocent for that wouldn’t be true. Instead, he tells them, “nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal” (Nah. 3:19).

What caused the downfall of the Assyrians? Their own cruelty. Jesus said, “all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Matt. 26:50).

FRIDAY

Further Study:

“With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf.”—[Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 364](#).

“Before the worlds unfallen and the heavenly universe, the world will have to give an account to the Judge of the whole earth, the very One they condemned and crucified. What a reckoning day that will be! It is the great day of God's vengeance. Christ does not then stand at Pilate's bar. Pilate and Herod, and all that mocked, scourged, rejected, and crucified Him will then understand what it means to feel the wrath of the Lamb. Their deeds will appear before them in their true character.”—[Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 132](#).

So what exactly is the wrath of the Lamb? “Their deeds will appear before them in their true character.” The truth can no longer be avoided, it must be faced...they see themselves and all their actions in light of the truth, and see the awfulness of their own character.

More context previous quote (PH086 28.3-29.3):

When Christ looked down from the crest of Olivet, he saw this state of things existing in every church. The warnings come down to all that are following in the tread of the people of Jerusalem, who had such great light. This people is before us as a warning. By rejecting God’s warnings in this our day men are repeating the sin of Jerusalem. The Lord sees what the human agent does not see and will not see,—the outcome of all the human devising in Battle Creek.



He has done all that a God could do. He has flashed light before the eyes of the people, that their sins might not reach the boundary where repentance cannot be felt. But by a long process of departure from just and righteous principles, men have placed themselves where light and truth, justice and mercy are not discerned. This course has become part of their very nature.

I call upon all who have united in a course of action that is wrong in principle to make a decided reformation, and forever after walk humbly with God. The world is soon to be judged. A righteous God must avenge the death of his Son. Today men are choosing Barabbas, and saying, Crucify Christ. They will do this in the person of his saints. They will go over the same ground as the Jewish priests and rulers did in their treatment of Christ. He, the Son of God, and an innocent man, was murdered because he told men truths that it did not please them to hear. Yet he was the Son of the infinite God.

Those who today despise the law of Jehovah, showing no respect for his commandments, are taking sides with the great apostate. They proclaim to a sin-corrupted world that the law of God is null and void. Those who declare this as truth deceive the people, and have virtually nailed the law of Jehovah to the cross between two thieves. What a thought!

Before the worlds unfallen, and the heavenly universe, the world will have to give an account to the Judge of the whole earth, the very one they condemned and crucified. What a reckoning day that will be! It is the great day of God's vengeance. Christ does not then stand at Pilate's bar. Pilate and Herod, and all that mocked, scourged, rejected, and crucified him will then understand what it means to feel the wrath of the Lamb. Their deeds will appear before them in their true character.

--Special Testimony to Battle Creek Church, 1898

Discussion Questions:

- Some of the people in Zephaniah's time did terrible things against both the Lord and their fellow countrymen, while others were just complacent as such evils unfolded. Which of these two sins do you think is worse in God's eyes? Justify your answer.

Both sins sear the conscience and do damage to the sinner. How *should* we react to the sins/evils around us?

- Go back over the final question at the end of Monday's lesson, where these words were quoted: "Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour." What does it mean to rely "wholly on the merits of the Saviour"? How do these words reveal to us the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ alone, and why is that truth so central to all that we believe? If we do not rely on His merits, on whose merits can we rely?

How is this traditionally interpreted? His merits are applied to our account? God no longer sees us, but sees Jesus instead? What does it really mean? His merits are applied in our hearts, in our minds, transforming our characters, renewing us in His image!



- Why is it so easy, especially for those who live in wealth and comfort, to forget just how utterly dependent we are upon God for everything that we have? How can we protect ourselves from this fatal delusion?
What about merely being “busy”? Isn’t it possible to forget our dependence on God when we’re too busy? Is *anything* this world has to offer better than what God offers? Are we living our lives as if we believe that statement? Or do our lives tell a different story?
- Dwell more upon this idea of the Lord singing and rejoicing over His people. We tend to think of ourselves singing and rejoicing over God and what He has done for us. What does it mean that He sings and rejoices over us? How could that be, considering the rather pathetic state in which we all find ourselves?

God rejoices over the prodigals who return, who are healed. He eagerly waits for them to realize their pitiful state and return to Him. Do we have the same attitude/love for the lost? Do we have the same burden for their salvation?

Evangelism Page 282

Work for the salvation of souls as though you knew by sight that you were in full view of the whole universe of heaven. Every angel in glory is interested in the work being done for the salvation of souls. We are not awake as we should be. All the angelic host are our helpers. “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.” O cannot we then work with courage and faith. “In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.” Only have faith. Pray and believe, and ye shall see the salvation of God.—Letter 126, 1896. (Evangelism Page 282)

Testimonies for the Church Volume 5, Page 650

If you work for souls with humble, trustful dependence upon God, if the radiance of His Spirit is reflected from you in a Christlike character, if sympathy, kindness, forbearance, and love are abiding principles in your life, you will be a blessing to all around you. You will not criticize others or manifest a harsh, denunciatory spirit toward them; you will not feel that their ideas must be made to meet your standard; but the love of Jesus and the peaceable fruits of righteousness will be revealed in you.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.... And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another.”

The enemy will seek to intrude himself even amid your religious exercises. Every avenue will need to be faithfully guarded lest selfishness and pride become interwoven with



your work. If self has really been crucified, with the affections and lusts, the fruit will appear in good works to the glory of God. I entreat you, in the fear of God, not to let your works degenerate. Be consistent, symmetrical Christians. When the heart has given its affections to Christ, old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

Our religion must be intelligent. The wisdom from above must strengthen, establish, and settle us. We must go on and on, forward and upward, from light to still greater light, and God will still reveal His glory to us as He doth not unto the world. (Battle Creek, Michigan, January 6, 1889)