

## THE GREAT AND AWESOME DAY OF THE LORD (part #2) Zephaniah (selected Scriptures)

Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe raised an interesting question in his opening remarks regarding the book of Zephaniah. He asks, “When was the last time you sang a hymn about the future judgment of the world?” He goes on to say that you’ll not find any songs about judgment in most modern hymnals. And he’s exactly right. They are just not there. Now, there is a definite reason for this. First of all, we live in a world that doesn’t believe in the judgment of God. Like Wiersbe said, the only time you will hear anything from the world that smacks of God’s judgment is a disclaimer from an act of God in an insurance policy. And even that doesn’t speak of God’s judgment, but just His actions. So the world doesn’t believe in God’s judgment, and so they don’t talk about God’s judgment. But secondly, though we as Bible believing Christians do believe in the judgment of the wicked in eternity, it is still not a pleasant thought. And many of us are just like the world when it comes to judgment in this world. We’re not really convinced it happens, except in the book of Revelation. So we don’t talk about it and we don’t sing about the judgment of God, which the Bible calls “The Day of the Lord”.

But this is not the way it has always been. Listen to the words of a medieval Latin hymn that was based on Zephaniah 1:15:

Day of wrath, O day of mourning!  
See fulfilled the prophets warning,  
Heav’n and earth in ashes burning!

O what fear man’s bosom rendeth  
When from Heav’n the Judge descendeth  
On whose sentence all dependeth!

I wonder how many churches would use that song in their praise and worship medleys today?

But beloved, the Day of the Lord is not something that we should ignore. The prophet Joel whose book we studied last week is perhaps the oldest writing prophet. And we saw that the major theme of Joel is the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah wrote a little over 200 years after Joel, just 40 years or so before the Day of the Lord actually came upon Judah in 587 BC, when they were conquered by the Babylonians. And I find it interesting that Zephaniah uses the phrase “Day of the Lord” more than Joel, in fact, more than any other biblical writer. And between Joel and Zephaniah you have five of the remaining minor prophets

proclaiming the same message of judgment upon the Gentile nations and upon God's people unless they repent, and so you have Joel and Zephaniah as the bookends, both crying out the same words, "The Day of the Lord is coming".

But lest you think that this judgment motif passed away with the Old Testament, it was John the Baptist who said to the multitudes, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). And it was our Lord Jesus Christ who said to the Pharisees, "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of Hell?" (Matthew 23:33). Beloved, if we are silent about the Day of the Lord we are silent concerning one half of the message of the Bible. The Bible is a book of bad news and good news. The bad news is that all have sinned against a holy God and are guilty of punishment and death. But the good news is that this holy God is a God of infinite love and has made a way that we can be reconciled to Him and live with Him forever, through Jesus Christ His Son. But the Good News is only good news when we understand the bad news. So today we are going to look at Zephaniah's message about the Day of the Lord. And I pray that it will bring some of you to receive the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, and bring others to a more godly, holy walk with Him.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Zephaniah 1 as we read verses 1-6 and 12-14a. There are four things that I want us to see from Zephaniah concerning the Day of the Lord, and the first comes from the text we've just read, and that is the **cause** of the Day of the Lord. Actually we see two causes from these verses, and the first one is in verses 4-5. Begin reading with me in the middle of verse 4. The first cause of God's judgment on His people was **idolatry**. God's people were worshipping Him, but they were also worshipping at the shrine of Milcom, a god of the Ammonites.

When you stop and think about it, one of the most amazing facts of Israel's history is their enslavement to idolatry. They were idol worshipers before they left Egypt. And then Jehovah God came down and through Moses worked miracle after miracle among them and delivered them from bondage. You would think that after seeing the mighty hand of God in all of those plagues, plus His delivering them by parting the Red Sea, they would have known that Jehovah alone was God. But they never totally gave up their idolatry. They were worshipping idols when Moses came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments. They were still worshipping idols at the time of Joshua's final address to them before he died (Joshua 24:14). They worshipped idols intermittently all during the time of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). They worshipped idols during the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:3-4). At some point between Samuel and King David they put away their idols and were monotheists, but from the time of Solomon all the way to their captivity they struggled with idolatry. And after 800 years of Judah

playing the harlot God finally said, “That’s enough!”, and sent the Babylonians in to destroy His people in the Day of the Lord.

But idolatry was not Judah’s only problem. They also were filled with **complacency**. Look again at verse 12. This is another amazing fact about Judah. They could look back at their history and easily see how God had judged them in the past. How time and time again when they fell away from Him God sent neighboring nations in to defeat them and bring them into vassalage. They knew the pain and suffering their ancestors had experienced because of their idolatry in the past. And yet, they still were saying, “It can’t happen to us. God is not interested in our affairs. He will neither bless us nor curse us”. But how wrong they were! But this was one of the causes of the Day of the Lord.

But Judah was not only guilty of **idolatry**, and **complacency**, but also of **treachery**. Look at chapter 3:3-4. This cause for judgment lay at the feet of Judah’s leadership. Her politicians and her prophets and priests were scoundrels. They were hirelings, bilking the people of their taxes and tithes for their own personal gain, just like the sons of Eli. So the whole nation was to blame, from top to bottom. They were all living for the lusts of their flesh with no fear of God whatsoever.

Now, beloved, it’s not too difficult to draw some strong parallels between Judah and America, is it? We are a nation steeped in idolatry, for an idol is anything that takes priority in our lives above God. And that would be priority in our thoughts, in our time, and in our discretionary income. And all of us know that in our thoughts, our time, and our finances Jesus is not first place in most people’s lives, even genuine Christians. His throne has been usurped by a thousand things, from sinful pleasures to sinless pastimes to special people to seductive possessions. So before we become too condemning of God’s chosen people, I want to challenge you to ask yourself this question, “Is there anything in my life, sinful or not, that is more important to me than Jesus Christ?”

Furthermore, we are a nation that is steeped in **complacency**. The vast majority of Americans are carelessly plunging into hell, and the vast majority of those who aren’t don’t care. And then there is the matter of **treachery**. The politicians and preachers of this generation have largely failed in our calling. Many of us are in it for fame and fortune, and many of the rest of us are not leading by godly example nor preaching “thus says the Lord” like we should be preaching. And as we’ve all heard so many times, everything rises and falls on leadership.

So we see that the **cause** of the Day of the Lord for Judah was **idolatry**, **complacency**, and **treachery**. But now I want us to see the **calamity** of the Day of the Lord. Friend, the day of the Lord is an ugly picture. I want to break down God’s judgment to basically four descriptions, and we see them all in chapter 1:15. First of all, **distress**. Let me tell you about distress that comes from God’s

judgment. We read in 2 Kings 6 how during the ministry of Elisha that Syria besieged Samaria, the capital of Israel, with the intent of conquering her. And during the siege times got so bad that mothers were boiling their children and having them for supper. I'd say that is about as distressful as you can get. But the Day of the Lord is also a day of **devastation**. When God finally handed Jerusalem over to the Babylonians for ruin, 2 Kings 24-25 tells us that the temple and the king's house was plundered and all the treasures were taken away, and that 10,000 people were taken as POWs and deported to Babylon, and all of these were men of high military rank or skilled in the crafts. The nation was gutted of its people of influence, with only the poorest people left in the land. We also read that the temple, the king's house, and all the houses of the nobles were burned to the ground, and the walls of the city were leveled. This left the city vulnerable to whatever marauding band who wanted to attack them. It was totally devastated.

But God said that the day of the Lord would be a day of **darkness**. Chapter 1:17 says that men would walk around like blind men. Now, this is not talking about physical darkness. This is talking about mental darkness. The distress and the devastation will be so great that it will leave men in a stupor. They won't be able to see past their nose as far as what the future holds for them. I can picture in my mind a home that I walked past on April 28<sup>th</sup> last year in the Forest Lake area. Well, I should say, where a home once stood. For all that was left was a cement slab. Can you imagine how the homeowner felt when he first came back and fixed his eyes upon that barren, desolate place where he once lived? One minute he had a house, the next minute he didn't. I do not know his personal circumstances. But I assure you, many like him were enveloped in mental darkness. They didn't even know where they would spend the night. Now, I would never say April 27<sup>th</sup> was God's judgment upon every family that was affected by the tornado. But I am saying that the mental darkness that many of them experienced was just like the darkness that God's judgment brings.

So the Day of the Lord brings **distress, devastation, and darkness**. And all of this wrapped up together brings **despair**. Verse 15 calls it gloominess. But that's what it is – **despair**. The awful feeling of helplessness in the midst of horror. The awful feeling of "there's no way out of this hellish nightmare. I'm here forever". Friends, I do not paint this picture with delight. I paint it with a heavy heart, and I wish there was no such picture to paint. But we dare not think that we can live as we please and escape the awesome and terrible Day of the Lord. A day of distress, devastation, darkness, and despair. And **all** of us are vessels fit for such destruction, because God's Word says, "For all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God", And, "There is none righteous, no not one".

We've seen the **cause** of the Day of the Lord, which is idolatry, complacency, and treachery. And we've seen the **calamity** of the Day of the Lord. As surely as the sun arises there is a day of punishment for the wicked and a day of chastisement for the children of God. But now, praise God, we move from the bad news to the good news!! I want you to notice now the **calling** of the Day of the Lord. Look at chapter 2:1-3. In these verses God is calling His people to turn from their sin, to repent, while they still have time to avert His judgment.

Now, there is a truth found in Ezekiel that we must never, ever forget. God says in Ezekiel 33:11, "...'As I live', says the Lord, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'" Ezekiel was prophesying to the children and grandchildren of the people that Zephaniah was prophesying to. And they had progressed just a little bit further in their debauchery from grandpa and grandma. God calls them wicked, and if we were sitting as the judge at their trial, we'd all say, "Guilty as charged! Let them be punished to the fullest extent of the law."

But God is crying out through Ezekiel for these rebels to turn from their sin and live. Why? Because, beloved, next to His holiness, God is first and foremost a God of love! "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..." John writes in 1 John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God..." And the Greek words there means that God's love is a foreign kind of love, a love that heretofore had never been seen of or heard of upon the earth. 1 John 4:8, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love". "God is love" are the greatest three words of any language on earth. And because God loves us so much He has made a way that we can escape the punishment that we deserve. But there's only one way, and that is we must repent of our sin. Jesus said, "Except you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). We must turn **from** our sin, and as we turn, we must turn **to** Jesus.

You know, there are millions and millions of people in this world who've heard that God loves them but it does not faze them in the least. They think that God is obligated to love them, that loving them is one of the things that God should do, that it is their right for God to love them. And they trifle with God's love and count it a cheap thing. But friends, God's love is not cheap. It cost Him the life of His Son. And friends, do not be mistaken. God is not obligated to love you and me. We have rebelled against His holy, perfect plan for our lives by breaking His perfect law, and He has every right to pour out His wrath upon everyone of us. But for reasons that we will never know this side of Heaven, God has chosen to love us, we who deserve nothing but eternal punishment. And God never delights in punishment, but longs to spare us.

But beloved, even in God's infinite love, God's holiness will not let Him violate what is right, and it is right that sinners who refuse to repent are punished. And therefore God calls out to His people through Zephaniah to gather together that they may repent before the day of forgiveness passes and He pours out His wrath upon them. To gather together just like He called them to do through Joel two hundred years earlier when He said; "So rend your heart, and not your garments: return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, and He relents from doing harm....gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes..." (Joel 2:13, 16).

I want to ask you, have you ever heard God's call to repent? Repentance is not something that you do on your own. You repent when God's Holy Spirit convicts you of your need for repentance. Paul writes to Timothy that God's servant should patiently instruct sinners, "if perhaps God will grant them repentance" (2 Timothy 2:25). And Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). But Peter says that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). And if you are hearing God's call to repentance you need to respond today.

Well, we've seen the **cause**, the **calamity**, and the **call** of the Day of the Lord. And now I want us to look briefly at the **comfort** of the Day of the Lord. Friend, if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior there need be no fear in your heart of the judgment of God. Look at chapter 3:12-13. Zephaniah is writing here of the end times. God has restored in Israel a remnant of meek and humble Jews who have believed in their Messiah, our Lord Jesus. They live godly lives and they have rest from all of their wars. No one makes them afraid anymore. What a comfort the Jews will have in that day!

Beloved, we cannot imagine the underling fear that the Jews in Israel live with every single day. They are hated by all of their neighbors who would love to see them annihilated. Practically the entire world is throwing its support behind the Arabs that are seeking to take away the land that God gave them in the Abrahamic covenant 4000 years ago. When you read the newspaper you can even sense that most of the articles have a pro-Palestinian slant. And the scariest thing of all is that the United States is wavering in our support of Israel. But that's another sermon. But what I want you to see is in the Day of the Lord every fear of God's people will be gone forever. God will wipe away Israel's enemies as cleanly as you wipe a dish, and Israel will have comfort forevermore. And it will be a great day of rejoicing.

Look at chapter 3:14-17. The Bible tells us that in David's day when the ark was returned from captivity to Jerusalem that David danced with joy, and no doubt all Jerusalem danced with him. When Jesus rode into the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday they were singing with great joy. But friends, when King Jesus comes again to rescue His chosen people there will be dancing in the

streets of Israel like there has never been before! It will be a day of unprecedented joy and comfort.

But I want you to see one more thing before we close. Notice what Zephaniah says two times about the King of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ. He says in verse 15, "The King of Israel, the Lord, is **in your midst**." And in verse 17 he says, "The Lord your God **in your midst**, the Mighty One, will save." It is the Jesus Christ **in their midst** that gives them comfort, for He is the One Who saves. I ask you, are you a child of God? If you are, who is in your midst today? The very same Jesus! He lives within your heart. And no matter what comes your way, no matter the chaos and uncertainties that swirl around you like a tornado, you are as safe as saints in Heaven. For no man nor devil can touch you unless He first gains permission from your Father in Heaven.

Friend, are you ready for the Day of the Lord?