

**Major Messages from the Minor Prophets**  
**What is Necessary for Revival?**  
**The Book of Zephaniah**

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**Text Introduction:** The Prophets of the Old Testament are divided by scholars into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. More precisely, we call Isaiah, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel, Major Prophets. The remaining books of the Old Testament are called Minor Prophets. The terms major and minor refer to the size of these books, not the degree of their importance.<sup>1</sup>

Now let me remind you this morning of the role of the prophets in Scripture. We usually assume that the word prophecy has to do with predicting the future or foretelling of coming events. This understanding is only partially true. Strictly speaking, a prophet is one who speaks for God. I remember a professor in Seminary saying, "Prophecy is forth-telling, not fore-telling." The prophets were called to speak forth the message of God. However, the prophet's message usually told of some future doom if the receivers of the prophecy did not change their course of action.

There are 12 Minor Prophets. We are studying through the Minor Prophets devoting one Sunday (one sermon) to each of the twelve. Because all of the prophets are somewhat similar, our goal is to discover that central core message of the book. Today, we are studying the Book of Zephaniah.

**Text:** I have cut off nations;  
their corner towers are destroyed.  
I have laid waste their streets,  
with no one to pass through.  
Their cities lie devastated,  
without a person, without an inhabitant.  
<sup>7</sup>I thought: You will certainly fear Me  
and accept correction.  
Then her dwelling place  
would not be cut off  
based on all that I had allocated to her.  
However, they became more corrupt  
in all their actions.  
<sup>8</sup>Therefore, wait for Me—  
this is the LORD's declaration—  
until the day I rise up for plunder.  
For My decision is to gather nations,  
to assemble kingdoms,  
in order to pour out My indignation on them,  
all My burning anger;  
for the whole earth will be consumed  
by the fire of My jealousy.

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<sup>1</sup> Lamentations is considered with these books as a major prophet because it is written by Jeremiah.

<sup>9</sup> For I will then restore  
pure speech to the peoples  
so that all of them may call  
on the name of Yahweh  
and serve Him with a single purpose.

<sup>10</sup> From beyond the rivers of Cush  
My supplicants, My dispersed people,  
will bring an offering to Me.

<sup>11</sup> On that day you will not be put to shame  
because of everything you have done  
in rebelling against Me.  
For then I will remove  
your proud, arrogant people from among you,  
and you will never again be haughty  
on My holy mountain.

<sup>12</sup> I will leave  
a meek and humble people among you,  
and they will take refuge in the name of Yahweh.

<sup>13</sup> The remnant of Israel will no longer  
do wrong or tell lies;  
a deceitful tongue will not be found  
in their mouths.

But they will pasture and lie down,  
with nothing to make them afraid.

<sup>14</sup> Sing for joy, Daughter Zion;  
shout loudly, Israel!  
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
Daughter Jerusalem!

<sup>15</sup> The LORD has removed your punishment;  
He has turned back your enemy.  
The King of Israel, Yahweh, is among you;  
you need no longer fear harm.

<sup>16</sup> On that day it will be said to Jerusalem:  
“Do not fear;  
Zion, do not let your hands grow weak.

<sup>17</sup> Yahweh your God is among you,  
a warrior who saves.  
He will rejoice over you with gladness.  
He will bring you quietness with His love.  
He will delight in you with shouts of joy.”

<sup>18</sup> I will gather those who have been driven  
from the appointed festivals;  
they will be a tribute from you  
and a reproach on her.

<sup>19</sup> Yes, at that time  
I will deal with all who afflict you.  
I will save the lame and gather the scattered;  
I will make those who were disgraced

throughout the earth  
receive praise and fame.  
<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you back,  
yes, at the time I will gather you.  
I will give you fame and praise  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes before your eyes.  
Yahweh has spoken.

**Introduction:** Zephaniah 1:1 tells us that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah. That means something. It means that Zephaniah was born into one of the worst times in history, but he also lived to see a revival. In fact, I think we can assume that it is Zephaniah's preaching in part that God used to bring about this revival.

Let's talk a little about background to see the whole picture of Zephaniah's message. Josiah was the king of Judah that had one of the most unusual resumes ever for a king. He was 8 years old when he began to reign. His father was Amon. Amon was only 22 years old when he began to reign. He lasted only two years before he was assassinated. Amon's father was a king named Manasseh. He was only 12 years old when he began to reign, but he reigned for 55 years. Here is the first word we get about him in 2 Kings. "He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, imitating the abominations of the nations that the Lord had disposed before the Israelites." (2 Kings 21) Later in verse 16 of 2 Kings 21 we read, "Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it from one end to another. This was in addition to his sin he caused Judah to commit so that they did what was evil in the Lord's sight."

This is the world in which Zephaniah was born. Perhaps these times are the very reason that his parents named him Zephaniah. Zephaniah means, "the Lord hides." Scholars take this two ways. Some say it is that dismal feeling that the Lord has hidden His face from them. Others take it to mean their abiding faith that the Lord would hide them from the coming judgment if they would individually repent.

Fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign and the two years of Amon's reign had left Judah far away from God. We cannot assume that things were any better until about the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. This is the political, moral, and spiritual environment in which Zephaniah begins to speak. And his message is hard. The signature phrase of the book is "the day of the Lord." The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. Read just a few of these verses to get the idea of the whole book.

Read Zephaniah 1:2-4 and 1:12 and 1:18.

For a brief while through Zephaniah's prophecy and Josiah's leadership, revival does come. This context of Zephaniah's prophecy helps us to identify things necessary for revival.

Revival comes at the point of ...

- **Desperation**—Zephaniah was born to desperate times. It wasn't as Charles Dickens wrote: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." It was just the worst of times. And these times made Zephaniah desperate for revival. This begs several questions.
  - How desperate are we for revival to come?
  - What is the evidence in our lives that we are desperate for revival? In our praying? In our personal holiness?

- How difficult do things have to get before we get desperate?
- **Re-Discovery of God's Word**—We said that King Josiah became king at eight years old. Probably, others ruled for him during those years. The Bible doesn't give us much information about those early years. But, at 26 years old, Josiah commands some repairs to the house of God. The King sent some men with money to pay for the repairs. While there, the High Priest tells them that he had discovered the lost Book of the Law—the Torah—the first five books of our Bible. How they ever lost the Book of the Law is a different story! But, we assume it was lost because of the horrible reigns and leadership of Manasseh and Amon. The High Priest sends the Book back with the king's men to deliver to Josiah. Upon hearing the Book of the Law, things begin to change. Josiah's heart is changed. He begins to lead to reform. Revival comes.

There are all kinds of patterns for revival, but you will not find a model for revival that does not have surrender to the word of God as the final rule and authority over our lives.

- **Personal Repentance**—Zephaniah 2:3 is an important verse in this book. This verse brings out the personal responsibility of revival, but it also brings the personal hope of revival. America may not have revival, but I can. America may not have revival, but our church can. It is easy to wail against the sin of others, but what about our own sin?
- **Judgment of God**—Interestingly enough, in this book about the judgment of God, as most of the prophets do, Zephaniah ends with a word of hope. The kind of hope that even has God singing over His people. Here's what I want you to take away. The announcement of the judgment of God and even the actuality of the judgment of God may be the very thing necessary to bring about revival.

**And so as Zephaniah had hope, we have hope for ...**

- **Revival**
- **Repentance**
- **A Remnant**
- **Restoration**

About hope, someone said ....

- "Today, many people are adrift morally and spiritually, confused and fearful — not knowing who they are or where they are going. We live in a world dangerously torn by hate and violence and conflict, and yet we feel powerless to do anything about it.

Is there any answer? The Bible gives a resounding "Yes!" There can be **hope**, and there can be changed hearts and a changed society as we yield ourselves to Christ."

- Perhaps the greatest psychological, spiritual, and medical need that all people have is the need for **hope**."

- “Christ wants to give you **hope** for the future.”
- “For the believer, there is **hope** beyond the grave, because Jesus Christ has opened the door to heaven for us by His death and resurrection.”
- “Faith points us beyond our problems to the **hope** we have in Christ.”
- “My **hope** does not rest in the affairs of this world. It rests in Christ who is coming again.

The author of all of these last words is the Rev. Billy Graham. No wonder his last message to America has been called *My Hope for America*. It should be our hope for America and the whole world. Christ is the only hope for America. Christ is the only hope for you.