

**CCF Study Notes**  
**Tuesday 7 AM Study**  
**13 June 2006**  
**Zephaniah**

Before beginning to read from Zephaniah let's spend time in prayer, considering God's view and response to lukewarm love and divided hearts in His children. Let's ask God that He might:

1. Keep us from **idols**;
2. Keep us from becoming **complacent** in our relationship with God;
3. Keep us from creating or condoning **injustice**;
4. Keep us from becoming **proud**;
5. Keep us from having hearts that are **not right** before God;
6. Keep us from being **unfaithful** to God, and
7. Keep us from **escaping** his hand by restoring us again to our place with Him!

Zephaniah ministered in Jerusalem, in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern kingdom of Israel had long since been taken off to captivity by the Assyrian Empire. Jerusalem had been spared under the reign of the righteous king Hezekiah, who was Zephaniah's great-grandfather. There was only one good king after Hezekiah: Josiah. Zephaniah probably ministered during the reign of Josiah. Josiah brought in a spiritual revival in Judah, but it was too little too late. Most of the people didn't care about God any longer and weren't really influenced by the revival of temple worship. Zephaniah wrote to a generation much like ours: A time when a few were caught up in a revival while the majority really didn't want anything to do with God. What does God have to say to this generation? How should we respond?

In the first section of the book (1:1-7) God's discipline is promised against Judah. The issue is that though they worship God and take oaths in God's name, they are also involved in Astrology and the worship of idols. Does this sort of easy-going syncretism remind you of churches today? Divided hearts and hypocrisy lead inevitably to backsliding. The end result is that people simply stop seeking the Lord or inquiring of His word. Many people today live as if God's Word was irrelevant to their lives. God calls this generation to do three things: to be silent before God, to live always in His presence, and to be "consecrated" or "set apart" as His guest. How do these things contrast with what was going on in that generation? ...in this generation? How ought we to show reverence for God?

The second section of Zephaniah's prophecy deals with those blinded by complacency. These people span all strata of society and all economic classes. In their complacency these people say, "The Lord will not do good; Nor will He do evil." They see God as being weak and irrelevant to modern life. They live as if God really doesn't have any

interest in the world at present. Do you know Christians who are like this? Ever found yourself in this place? The call to these people is to gather before the Lord to seek righteousness and humility before the judgment comes. How would that work in our lives? Look again at this section. Could there be a future fulfillment of these words?

The third section (2:4-7) deals with God's judgment on Gaza. Gaza was the home of the Philistines. The Philistines were completely wiped out by the Babylonians. None exist today. Their land would be given to Judah. These verses took on new significance with the recent evacuation of Gaza by Israel. Is it likely that Gaza will remain in Palestinian hands? Consider the statement in verse 5: "The word of the LORD is against you." How could this come to be and what would be the implications?

The Moabites and Ammonites (2:8-11) would cause much pain for Judah during and after the Babylonian captivity. Their judgment would come. Already their land is pretty much barren. It will only get worse. Beware of touching God's children! God will bring down those people and those gods that cause trouble for His children. The issue is pride. What will happen to nations that stand against modern day Israel?

Judgment is spoken against the great empires of history and their capitals, with Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire, as the poster child. These empires set themselves against God and His people, saying, "I am it and there is none besides me." Empires will fall and their capitals will be reduced to habitats for wild animals – as they were in their heyday!

Now, in this context, the focus turns back to Jerusalem (3:1-7) as if to say, "Don't think yourself superior in any way to these cities, Jerusalem!" Notice the four basic charges (3:2). Notice that all classes of leaders are indicted: Political, Judicial, Educational (or Media...How are the prophets classified?) and Spiritual. Yet in the midst of this, the LORD is righteous. Jesus came, as Lord, and righteously filled all these roles at once: King, Judge, Prophet and Priest. And He is righteous in our midst.

But God's judgment is always corrective – never punitive. The end brings restoration, with God restoring His people to all they were meant to be. (3:14-20). We always need to look toward the end of God's work – when we are finally remade in His image! Joy replaces sorrow. Disasters will not fall on Judah ever again. Consider the wonderful promise made to them and us in 3:17. What does God's presence do for us?

As we close in prayer let's consider the sequence of verses about God: 1:7, 2:3, 2:7b, 2:11, 2:13a, 3:5, 3:17. God's presence and action on our behalf is so important!

P.S. Recordings of these studies in John and the Prophets and copies of these notes are now available on a new website at <http://www.jstoker.name>. A new podcast is also available there or at <http://feeds.feedburner.com/CCF-T-Podcast>.