



HG187 *Zephaniah*  
**The Day Of The Lord Is Coming**

Zephaniah 1:1-13

Home Group Study Notes

13 October 2019 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

Share one experience and/or event (whether on holiday;  
at home; or in a newspaper, magazine, book or on TV)  
which has had an impact on your Christian life over the  
summer.



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs  
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using  
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



# HG187 *Zephaniah* The Day Of The Lord Is Coming

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Home Group Sermon

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## Introduction

From time to time throughout history the Christian church has been jolted out of complacency into spiritual revival, sometimes because of a traumatic event, sometimes because someone recognised the voice and leading of God. One such revival began in 1904 when a young Welshman named Evan Roberts had been praying for 13 years for the Holy Spirit to control his life. He often awoke at 1:00 am and prayed until 5:00 am. That was the beginning of the Welsh Revival which swept the rest of Britain, Scandinavia, parts of Europe, North America, the mission fields of India and the Orient, Africa and Latin America. One of the great hymns of the Welsh Revival was 'Here is love, vast as the ocean' which we'll sing a little later.

By all accounts, the Welsh Revival drastically changed churches, homes, and even mines. People fell on their knees on the street in repentance. Coal miners wrote out Bible verses and fastened them on the doors of the mine underground. Blasphemy stopped. The horses in the coal mines became confused when the miners stopped kicking and cursing them. Employers noticed a great improvement in the work produced by their employees.

The Times observed: *"The whole population had been suddenly stirred by a common impulse. Even football matches were postponed ... quarrels between trade-union workmen and non-unionists had been made up. Many hardened sinners were converted."*

And prayer has been the foundation of practically every revival which has taken place across the world before and since. Apparently, there's been 43 revivals in the past 200 years which also includes the: Sunderland Revival (began by an Anglican priest in the early 1900's) which spread to Azusa Street, Los Angeles and the beginnings of the Pentecostal Movement. The Hebridean Revival; Argentinian Revival; Brownsville Revival in Pensacola, Florida; the Toronto Blessing and the list goes on. And revival, even today, is still the prayer of many people in our churches. Isn't it?

## 1. Josiah's Revival

The OT prophet Zephaniah was used by God to bring revival to God's people back in the 7th century BC. Remember the land of Israel was divided into two parts: the Northern and Southern Kingdom. By 722 BC the Northern Kingdom had been occupied and overtaken by the armies of Assyria. Only the Southern Kingdom was left standing. Zephaniah's message said that unless these people in the south repented and returned to God, the day was coming when they too would be lost. Just because they had survived Assyria's attacks on the North didn't mean they would be exempt from God's judgment.

One person who took Zephaniah's warning to heart was the king of Judah whose name was Josiah. He became king at the tender age of 8, but we read in 2 Kings 22 that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. He instituted reforms and called people back to obedience to God's law. In 2 Kings 23, we read this summary of his life: *"There was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and might."* Wouldn't you like to have that kind of an epitaph written about you?

What was it about Zephaniah's message that nudged Josiah toward spiritual revival? During this series we'll focus on Zephaniah's message not just for the Jews living in and around Jerusalem 7C BC, but also for the church today.

## 2. Zephaniah's Message

When you read those opening verses from chapter 1, you may have been startled by the harsh words of judgment, vs2: *"I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," says the Lord. "The humans, the animals, the birds, the fish."* The sinfulness of humans has dragged down the whole creation. That is not the kind of world God desires, so he is determined to rid the world of its evil. When we read stark language in the Bible like this, it is easy to kind of brush it aside as though it doesn't apply to us, but we shouldn't hurry past it too quickly, because it might be more relevant than we think. Why do you think God is so upset? Zephaniah records three reasons in vs 4-6.

**a) Worshipping other gods.** He says these people were worshipping other gods instead of the one true God. Remember after God delivered the Israelites from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where Moses received the 10 commandments, the people promised not to worship other gods just as the first commandment says: *"You shall have no other gods before me."* Like every culture and people who have been introduced to God, there is a temptation to diminish God in our minds and live as if there are no consequences for our behaviour. In Zephaniah's day, the people found themselves tempted by a host of things, such as comfort, wealth, and political influence. Sounds a lot like our contemporary culture, doesn't it? Today many people consult tarot cards and horoscopes as though their future depended on them? How many people allow the stock market to control their lives? Or the latest fashion? Or a constant preoccupation with their mobile phones? Do these things control your life?

In his book 'Counterfeit Gods' Tim Keller speaks about this temptation: *"The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the centre of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfilment, if we attain them."* The temptation to chase after the good things, though, had caused the people of Judah to abandon the best thing they could do, namely their pursuit of God.

**b) Confused.** We read in vs5 that they bowed down to the Lord on the one hand and gave allegiance to foreign gods on the other. That happens today as well. There is a lot of confusion in our world when people say Jesus is just one more great teacher alongside Buddha or Allah or some other god. Some people say they are spiritual, but not Christian. Some say they like Jesus, but not the church, and some talk about a churchless Christianity. But, let's not forget that Christ loved the church. He loved it so much he died for it.

There are some who say that what you worship doesn't really matter because all roads lead to heaven. But that is not what the Bible says. As Peter said in Acts 4:12, when he was talking about Jesus: *"There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."* God wanted the confusion about Himself to stop then; He wants it to stop now. So, let's not be confused about the object of our worship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**c) Indifference.** Vs6 speaks of those who are just plainly indifferent to God. These are people for whom the story of their ancestors, and the Bible, no longer seems important. They don't think about God and they miss Sunday worship/House groups more than they attend. And it no longer matters if they stop praying. They have watered down His commands, and their first love has become no love at all. In short, they have backslidden. Vs12 says these people were saying: *"The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm."* And that's a dangerous position to hold. John Piper once wisely wrote: *"Bad theology dishonours God and hurts people. Churches that sever the root of truth may flourish for a season, but they will wither eventually or turn into something besides a Christian church."*

There is a recent ‘theological’ trend known as universalism where peoples such as Steve Chalke, Rob Bell and Brian McLaren amongst others, are suggesting that a loving God wouldn’t judge anyone, nor would he send them to hell. But that is not what Zephaniah teaches, it’s not what the Bible teaches and it’s certainly not what Jesus taught. In fact, Jesus had more to say about hell than anyone else in the NT. What these universalists are really saying is that what God has said in history, and through his word, and Jesus, no longer matters. That he no longer governs the world. People who don’t believe in the God of the Bible and of the Creeds have made god in their own image. Is it any wonder that God allows them to experience the result of their sin. And that is why Zephaniah pronounces these words of judgment. Vs7: *“The day of the Lord is at hand.”*

### **3. The Day Of The Lord**

When God’s people were moving into the promised land, they won battles which, by all calculations, they should never have won. Remember when Joshua ‘fit de battle of Jericho?’ How do you think that happened? Because Joshua was such a great army general? No. Because Israel had such a great army? Hardly. The Bible makes clear that God was the Divine Warrior; he won the battles for them.

Sometimes he fought their battles with thunder, falling stones, earthquakes, or panic. They knew they had not done it themselves. God had won the battle for them. And they began to refer to those events as ‘The Day of the Lord’ because He defeated their enemies. However, when the Israelites began to turn away from God, the prophets turned that expression into a warning. They said that God would turn the warfare He had used against their enemies against them, to punish them for their sin. How terrible that the Lord of Heaven who used to fight for them would now fight against them and see them as the enemy. So, the expression ‘The Day of the Lord’ took on an ominous meaning. While that phrase might not mean much to us, it should. ‘The Day of the Lord’ is a reference to the coming judgment of God. While we find it mentioned a number of times throughout Scripture, Zephaniah is more uniquely focused on it than any other biblical book, he mentions it over 20 times in four chapters.

### **4. No One Will Be Exempt From God's Judgment**

The Israelites were guilty of disobeying God, and because of their disobedience, God was prophesying through Zephaniah that a day of reckoning is coming. The coming judgment would be gruesome and extraordinarily devastating. This is the message that God is conveying to His people. There is no one, regardless of class, status, or birth order, who can avoid God’s judgment. This would have been difficult for Zephaniah’s hearers to understand, as those who were part of God’s chosen people might have assumed some sense of protection from God’s wrath.

Instead, God puts them on notice that no one can escape the coming judgment. The intent of the declaration, as we will see at the end of the book, is not to terrify them into cowering before God. It is not to punish them for what they have done. God is not lashing out in uncontrolled anger or sadistically dispensing judgment. This reminder of the coming day of judgment was intended to provoke them to remember their place as His chosen ones and to repent and return to faithful obedience. He compels them in this manner because He understands that life is lived most fully and completely when one is living in harmony with God.

Of course, the natural response to this will either be rejection and the judgment that follows, or obedience and the pleasure of the presence of God that follows. The Day of the Lord is intended, here, to point them to the coming judgment and to compel them to return to God, but the Day of the Lord should not only be understood as a day of judgment. It should also be understood as a day of joy for those who have died to themselves and found themselves alive in Christ Jesus (Luke 9:23).

So, what are we to do? How can we be renewed so we can escape that dreadful day? Prov. 3:6, *“In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths,”* is a verse that is familiar to many of you. It is not only a nice motto; it holds the secret to spiritual renewal.

## Conclusion

When we first read a passage like this, we can be challenged in our view of God. Is He some ogre who is ready to demolish us at the first sign of disobedience? Is He a judgmental overlord who feels no affection and is easily angered? The obvious answer to these questions, from the narrative of Scripture, is no. God is a God of grace and compassion, slow to anger and rich in love.

In the light of that, then, how are we to understand His anger, especially toward His own people? In his letter to the Romans Paul pointed out, *“Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:1-2). In other words, while Christians may still sin, God’s response to their sin has changed. Specifically, God will not punitively discipline His children.

The Bible is clear that God does discipline His children: *“My son, do not take the Lord’s discipline lightly or faint when you are reprovved by Him, for the Lord disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He receives”* (Hebrews 12:5-6). However, while it is true that God disciplines His children, His discipline is corrective. God disciplines the children He loves to correct their behaviour, not to punish them for bad behaviour. If God were to punish believers for their sin, He would essentially be denying the cross. When Christ died on the cross, He declared, “It is finished” announcing to the world that the defeat of death was done. Since it is finished, you and I do not need to assume punishment. We do, however, occasionally need to have our vision and priorities adjusted so that we can focus on Jesus. It’s the corrective discipline that we need.

In much the same way, God’s children had abandoned Him. They had thrown themselves at the feet of false gods and had rejected God and His grace. Still, in His anger He shows them grace by correctively disciplining them so that they will turn from their worship of idols and return to Him. So, what appears to be terrifying is indeed terrifying because it’s the God of the universe, and He is angry, but it also represents great grace by calling them back to Himself.

In the same way, we need to understand that there will be times when God may correct us to return us to Him. Our response, then, should be recognition of His discipline, repentance toward our sin, and an embrace of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

And finally ... I want to end with a question: How long has it been since you have felt God nudging you to follow him more closely? Is God nudging you towards a closer walk with him? Some of you may have committed your life to Jesus many years ago and you haven’t thought much about it since. Others may be struggling right now with the question of how to respond to God because, whether young or old, you know that he is speaking to you about making a change in your life.

The name Zephaniah literally means ‘whom the Eternal hides.’ Let’s make sure our lives are hidden within God in His way, in His Word, in His will. In Christ alone. And when we do that, we can be sure that we will be part of that ultimate restoration when Jesus returns.

## Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,  
we have fellowship with one another and the blood  
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** Paul suggested in his introduction: “even today, revival is still the prayer of many people in our churches” Is this true? Should it be?

**2.** In Zephaniah, God removes the things that the people love more than Him. Are there things in your life that you would be devastated to lose? Are you guilty of loving those things more than God?

**3.** Why might ‘universalism’, which argues that a loving God wouldn’t judge anyone, nor would He send them to hell, be a dangerous theological position to hold?

**4.** Have you ever thought of the wrath of God as a good thing? How or why can the wrath of God be good?

**5.** In Zephaniah, the Lord's judgement was imminent. In the New Testament we are taught that the Lord's return is imminent. How does this imminence affect the way you approach your life?

**6.** How does an understanding of God's justice influence the way you understand his love? (Perhaps you could sing along to 'Here is love' sung by Robin Mark here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwvhOEw0FKI>)



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## **Looking Inwards** (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## **Looking Outwards** (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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